

Gopnik, Blake. "Frank Heath's Conceptual Alchemy", *The Daily Pic*, *Artnet News*, 10/3/14



THE DAILY PIC: Copper yesterday, copper today—is there some kind of Copper Moment happening in the art world, or at least in the Daily Pic? Today's example of Cuprous Conceptualism—I should trademark that term before it goes viral—comes thanks to Frank Heath, now showing at Simone Subal Gallery in New York. His piece is titled *Live-Help Backup Plaque (Pioneer TX9100 Schematic JPEG)*, and the title more-or-less, or maybe less than more, describes what Heath's piece is about. (Click on my image to see it enlarged.) Its left panel presents the schematic drawing for the electronics inside a 1973 Pioneer TX-9100 audio receiver, such as many nerdsters owned back then. If the schematic isn't recognizable as such, that's because what Heath gives us is the hexadecimal coding for the JPEG image of the technical drawing, rather than the visible drawing itself. In theory, at least, some computer of the future could read and understand the coding, then use the schematic itself to reconstruct the old hi-fi component.

Heath's right-hand plaque tells the story of the making of the etched-copper schematic, as birthed through an online chat the artist had with "David," a customer-service agent for a metal engraving company. The plaque's text begins with Heath talking to David about some of the challenges of etching the two panels that he wants—including the one where we're reading their conversation—as some kind of long-lasting "analog backup" for the digital file of the JPEG, and therefore for the analog receiver itself. Then the chat session moves on to Heath's attempt to get David to go off-script, and comment on such things as the lives of Indian scavengers who recycle dead electronics for their raw materials, including the copper that Heath wants David to use to record their conversation about a plaque whose aim is to revive old electronics.

Heath's piece is obviously about the tension in our culture between the human and the mechanical. It's also about communication, its successes and breakdowns: The coding is a perfect, but illegible, record of Pioneer's communication device; the chat session works to get Heath the plaque he wants, but it also ends with David hanging up on his annoying client.

Mostly, however Heath's piece is an example of the kind of glorious, absurdist circularity that I'm always a sucker for in art. I dare anyone to read Heath's text and not smile. (Courtesy the artist and Simone Subal Gallery; photo by Joerg Lohse.)