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Lucas Blalock *Insoluble Pancakes*

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"It is nearly an insoluble pancake, a conundrum of inscrutable potentialities, a snorter" writes Flan O'Brien in his 1940 experimental novel *The Third Policeman*, which went unpublished until 1967. The novel describes an inter-dimensional journey traversing both time and space where the terms of reality are far more plastic than expected, though they remain folded into the quotidian life of a small Irish hamlet. It is a journey that puts considerable pressure on the novel's subjects, as they try to understand the nature of their condition and its odd flexibilities. A similar strain is put on the reader's imagination. It is a universe where wavering between polarities like thin / fat, slow / fast, namable / unnamable causes shifts in the basic structure of being. This exhibition of new works by Lucas Blalock suggests difficulties along these same axes.

Blalock's photographs, if we can call them such, are all self-portraits. In fact, they each start from the same set of five 4x5 negatives taken within a few moments of each other. These compressed and re-combined slices of time repeat but not wholly – as if the tape of the moment were being played back over and over again to an unexpected variety of effects. There is something a little flat-footed about the staging of this image (or these images) of the artist flailing in a chair – shadow boxing or daemon fighting – but it acts as a kind of scaffolding that supports a bevy of bizarre and baroque interventions. Like an early 20th century Spiritualist photograph of supernatural presence these pictures present a material world haunted by another. With those predecessors in mind, which point to a wide-eyed belief in otherworldly dimensions as much they speak about the way pictures intersected with technology, meaning and experience in the last century, we might ask what exactly Blalock is drawing here. What new relationships is he creating? How might we consider these weird hybrid pictures?

First, one could consider the notion that photography flattens the world into a plane, compressing it into new sets of relationships but depriving it of its volumes. This is a thinness. Blalock responds with virtual fats – 3d elements extruded from the plane with software and inflated into hitherto unconsidered object spaces. Where is this space within the photograph that sits in front of the normally flat picture plane? It is a low relief imagined in non-space which reinvigorates the flattened body and gives it new musculature, like a flagging Popeye in the moment of his vegetal renewal.

Secondly, there is time. The photograph's usual relationships to such questions are being stretched and expanded. This is happening not only through the multiplying action of collage but also through a sculptural cinema suggested by the morphing states of the swinging, punching bodies that seem to vibrate between image and object. Our Swinger – polyamorous pun intended – is promiscuously embracing the polyverse and compiling his purchase on reality. All the while he is coming into and out of view, inflating and deflating, and affording an expanding field of partial views.

So how do we name these things? This is part of Blalock's ruse. Is the zombified, after-flat virtual body a better stand-in for our subject than the pictorial, photographic one? Is realness added or subtracted in such moves? The digital form protrudes into our bodily space, or at least bulges out of the image world and into an uncanny valley. Maybe our fighter is also aware of his too-much-/not-enough-ness and is struggling for more comfortable terms? It is not easy to say for sure.

What is sure is that Blalock's choices are low-fi given the tool kit currently available for such productions. This kind of 3d digital body could certainly be expressed in the seamless glamour of CGI but Blalock's consideration of these forms against the flat, specific anchor of the photographic adds an intriguing conceptual dimension – tying this new technological picture to a previous one, nesting the virtual within the actual, and drawing attention to a material universe already porous with virtual potentials.

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About the artist :

Lucas Blalock was born in 1978 in Ashville, NC USA, and lives and works in New York, NY USA. He recently held his first solo museum exhibition in the US, "An Enormous Oar" at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and his first in Europe, ". . . Or or", at the Museum Kurhaus in Kleve, Germany. Institutional group shows include: "The 2019 Whitney Biennial", Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY USA (2019), "All the Marvelous Surfaces: Photography Since Karl Blossfeldt", deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA USA (2019), "Optical Illusions, Contemporary Still Life", C/O Berlin, Berlin, Germany (2017), "Good Dreams, Bad Dreams - American Mythologies", Aishti Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon (2016), "You are Looking At Something That Never Occurred", Zabudowicz Collection, London, UK (2017), "Ordinary Pictures", Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN USA (2016), "Image Support", Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen, Norway (2016), "Ocean of Images: New Photography 2015, Museum of Modern Art", New York, NY USA (2015), "Perfect Likeness: Photography and Composition", Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA USA (2015), and "Reconstructions: Recent Photographs and Video from the Met Collection", Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY USA (2015). Blalock will also be participating in "NEW VISIONS: The Henie Onstad Triennial for Photography and New Media", Henie Onstad Art Center, Oslo, Norway, which opens in February 2020. This is Blalock's second show at the gallery.