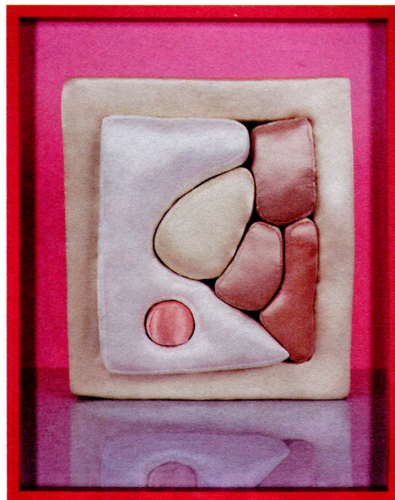


NEW YORK
 LUHRING AUGUSTINE

Elad Lassry

Right

ELAD LASSRY
Pillow
 2010
 C-print with painted frame,
 36.8 x 29.2 x 3.8 cm.
 Courtesy the artist and
 Luhring Augustine, New York.



Elad Lassry's past year included solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis and the Kunsthalle Zurich, a place in the annual "New Photography" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and nomination for the 2011 Deutsche Börse Photography Prize. It has been as impressive a run as any 33-year-old contemporary artist could hope for. Lassry's one-person commercial debut in New York—24 photographs and a five-minute 35mm film projection, all made in 2010—crowned the year, offering a fine opportunity to reflect on the vogue for the Israeli artist's work.

Lassry can be considered a conceptual photographer, in that he uses the photographic medium as a means of processing ideas as much as images. Never resembling anything so hands-on and personal as point-and-click photographic practice, his mysterious prints relish their woozy origins in appropriation, stock imagery, anonymous commercial work or digital manipulation. *Woman, Man* (all works 2010), a close-cropped shot of an attractive couple kissing in front of a cascade of water, suggests a *Blue Lagoon*-like softcore film's promotional still—indeed, the piece employs the 8-by-10-inch format of that particular dead medium. The satiny pink and cream forms squished together like organs in *Pillow* form a peculiar object—caught between Pierre Cardin mod fantasy furniture and a sculptural realization of an Elizabeth Murray painting—that appears both brand new and salvaged from the 1960s. *Sea Lion* resembles a glamorous publicity photo for a performing animal, posing sweetly by the edge of a pool. In each instance the photograph reveals nothing of either author or subject: *Woman, Man* may simply be an

existing promotional still, and somebody, perhaps the artist, made the *Pillow*, and the diva *Sea Lion* had a life and a purpose somewhere, but in Lassry's ruthlessly liminal space one must abandon hopes of knowing anything for sure. One of photography's signature assets is provenance, a history that can be traced back to the shutterclick, and these photos have been wiped clean of any such DNA.

Thus emancipated from a known narrative, Lassry's photos twinkle with formal effects as well as inferences drawn freely from the history of the medium. *Cherries, Raspberries, Blackberries (White)* is essentially a study in the palette of blood colors shot for seductive effect by Guy Bourdin in the 1970s. *Cherries, Raspberries, Blackberries (Marbled)* plays the same glossy bruise colors against a smeared red. *Geoff*, with the deep hues of hand-tinted negatives, is midcentury beefcake photography. *Woman (Painting)* apes the stiltedness of mail-order catalog photography. The green line of *Heirloom Tomatoes* is gently blurred, perhaps digitally, as if a double exposure. One must decide what has been lost by this manipulation.

It should be noted that Lassry is not the only high-profile young artist using photography to create images that reference history while appearing to operate, spookily, outside of it—Cypriot Haris Epaminonda and Australian David Noonan share this territory—and the ambiguous isolation of found media is a strategy that has origins, with Haim Steinbach and Christopher Williams, in the 1980s. Indeed, Lassry's *Two Elephants*, in which objects are positioned on pedestals, could readily pass as straight documentation of a Steinbach work.

But there is a particular reason why Lassry's art is critically and commercially current: it flows and abides. Beyond the colored frames that act as the artist's signature, there is no linking element between one image and the next. There is no seriality. One has the sense that his photos could be configured and reconfigured in any order, sent for new lives and new curations on museum and collector walls, and that they would readily adapt. Speaking about the photographic medium in a November 2010 interview, Lassry explained that he is "dealing with a language that's so exhausted and so opened up, so deceased in a way"—a statement that forces both artist and viewer to wonder, at a moment when imagery has been exploited past the point of saturation, where photography belongs. Lassry's solution seems to be the creation of small, strange things that one may enjoy at any emotional register, and in any context. It is a humble, generous contemporary enterprise.

WILLIAM PYM

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