

Re- Makes



THE SMOKER, 2014
ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT
27.5 X 22 INCHES

much, much more than meets the eye...
words by Nick Byrne

The website for the photographer Lucas Blalock features few words. But loads of images. Which in turn speak volumes. So, fair exchange is no robbery. And I'd rather have some great pics than mediocre words. But the thing is when you interview him, he's all about words. Wonderful words which flow freely like fountains, bubbling brooks, and lucid streams of consciousness. They take you on a journey over hills and dales, through the nooks and crannies of his artistic imagination. All delivered with energy, wit and humour, and interspersed with enough pauses and moments of doubt that make the journey interesting. It's a mind that looks, observes and absorbs - well, he is an artist - but he processes all of this to present the viewers with images that make enough sense to settle you, but with enough twists that ultimately unsettle. Not in a nasty way, his work is not about nastiness, but it makes you look twice. Or thrice. And occasionally with a shudder. Or a smile. Or both - actually, I think that's what he would prefer.

with

His still-life photography relies heavily on the use of photoshop. But this trickery is laid bare not hidden. The viewer is in on the joke, but still has to play along. Whether we choose only to see and experience this perceived reality is one thing, but by making the unreal seem real, even when it blatantly isn't, then I suppose all our own houses of cards can collapse. In any case dream realities are disturbing, and our lives are multi-layered, ambiguous and not easy to navigate.

There are some key events in his life that have informed his art, but do not define his essence to the exclusion of other experiences. There's a fascination for film, for theatre, for literature. Brecht, Godard and Fassbinder in particular. There's a flow between different artistic media that keeps his creative channels open for further discourse. And his books are worth a good look and a good read.

Internet interviews can sometimes be soulless, but the interview with Lucas had a comic brightness which in no way diminishes the seriousness of his work. In fact for me his humor underlined a sense of poignancy and melancholy. If I wanted to go all Brechtian, I'd say it was the perfect "Verfremdungseffekt" - something done in a way that make the normal seem abnormal, the real unreal, and the mundane monstrous.

I started by asking Lucas about the importance of revisiting the past as a way of creating the future.

Lucas

Blalock

LB: Oh, I think it's something I do all the time. I mean, there are, as you've mentioned, kinds of perpetual nods to earlier art in my work. So there are references to the past there. And then, you know, the thing that comes to mind, is that my most recent show in Zürich is utilizing older frameworks. And basically the frameworks are behind glass, and then there are new works that are being applied to the top of the glass. So the old work is preserved behind the glass. And the new work is kind of like crowding it out. And this tension between the old and the new, the new picture that "remembers" the old picture, is something that I'm super interested in. It's like that Neil Young song, you know, "I was old enough to repaint, but young enough to start it", or whatever, he says.

NB: I think you're the first person I know who's ever quoted a Neil Young song in an interview...

LB: I think I did it badly though. We'll have to look up what the quote actually is.

NB: Keeping on with this theme of reflection, do you feel that that when you're looking back or embracing your past, it's actually the way that you move on most effectively? It's a paradox, I suppose, but forever searching for something new is not necessarily the most effective way of moving forward.

LB: I mean, that sounds right to me. I haven't thought about it so much in those terms, but yes, I think that's true. I think we inevitably carry our past with us. We just more often do it behind the scenes than we do in public. And I feel part of the energy of this Zürich show is to kind of foreground these relationships that are inevitable, that are part of being an artist, that are part of being a person. I don't know. There's a kind of mythology, a packaging or something at this moment that's kind of refutes that. But it feels, it felt very natural to me and, funnily enough, I also like doing it as a bit of a counter to the kind of optimism that feels a bit toxic I think.

NB: I like that idea of "toxic optimism"!

LB: Well I'm kind of borrowing from a writer named Lauren Berlant who wrote this great book about the American Dream. And it's called "Cruel Optimism". And it was really excellent.

NB: You're quite private about your past. Your bio is quite condensed. I was trying to find out if you studied German literature, your interest in Brecht crops up a lot.

LB: I think it's quite, in fact, it's a very interesting that you mention this. I've actually just published a book inspired by Brecht, it's called, "Why must the mounted messenger be mounted?" and it's a book that tells a much a much longer story. It starts earlier. But I also did a show. My last show in New York was in 2021. It took up the theme of an accident I had when I was ten years old. I was in Disney World and I was on the Pirates of the Caribbean Ride, and there was an accident, and my thumb was cut off and there was a subsequent surgery where they took my toe off of my right foot and put it on my skin. So, this kind of story, or telling you I'm from the South, I feel like that comes into play in certain ways. Like certain of the problems in my work I think are very much linked to my childhood. And this story, I think, is very central to my whole life. I don't know. It's sometimes, whenever I tell it, people often say, "Oh, it so makes sense that you create the work that you do". I mean, part of the reason I didn't want to tell that story for so long is that I really didn't want it to be the origin story. You know, like, I am super interested in it as a point of origin, but I was kind of worried about it swallowing up everything I do. So it felt like the right time. But it's been a kind of open secret up until that point.

NB: There are many references to dramatists and film makers, these I guess, have contributed to the narrative feel of your work.

LB: I mean I got to break through Godard's movies, and I really loved them when I was young. And I read Brecht because he's spoken about him so much. And so, you know, at the time when I was reading around, I was in a situation where I was living with some roommates in New York and working a full-time job. And so I was shooting in the apartment. But every evening, it's like I'm shooting the living room. So I would come

home and set up a collapsable table and paint a little backdrop on the wall. And it was like I was making this tiny mouse theatre every day. So there was a way in which reading Brecht in that moment, and going through that activity just became a very easy borrow, like a very easy thing to think across. And so I started to think about what it would mean to show my labour as a photographer. And that was a real kind of, you know, a lightbulb moment for me.

NB: ...and Fassbinder?

LB: You know, Fassbinder's movies are massively important to me, and I still watch them all the time.





NB: ...and the importance of humour?

LB: Look, I don't think we get to choose which artist we are, nor the art we make. I think humour is part of who I am, and part of my way of processing things. So it's there. But yeah, I think that there was a period of time a couple of years ago where I made a show or two shows that were flatter and darker. It was kind of a flat, dark moment, like a post-Trump moment for me. It was really super complicated. And I think that the work lost a great deal of its humour. But I think it's a really connective energy and something which is important to me. Humour. It's part of the warmth of the work, you know. You

know, I'm kind of entertaining myself first. So I think I think that's where it comes from. More than anything else, it feels less audience driven, but it is, you know, part of the reason, part of the way I stay in the studio, and part of the way that I keep making the work is because that energy, that reflected humour is funny. It's weird, I don't know, it's almost a cranky kind of energy at times. And it's just been important for me to keep going. So I think that's kind of where it comes from.

NB: You're quite a wordsmith, aren't you? You like the feel of words...

LB: Yes, I do. I started off my life as a photographer really wanting to be a writer. So I saw that as a big transition when I was young. And I think I still participate a bit like a writer, like I read a lot. I feel like there's a lot of language is really centred in my life, and so, when there are opportunities to use it, I relish them, and the titles are part of that. I thought early on in this project which I call my kind of archive, which I felt I was building at the time, which I guess I still am, although not in any kind of formal way. You know, sort of a "techniques in marriage", it was like I felt part of the problem that I was facing as an artist was how to stay with something for years and years and years and years without getting sick of it, or throwing up, you know, throwing it out or or running away from it. And so I've always had this thought in my head. So far, I mean, it's I think, like I said before, I'm not sure how much choice I really have. I have become, kind of, stuck being me. So, obviously, I can start over as a painter or start over as a musician, and so the work would in some ways be different. But at the same time, I think that the things that get me kind of out of bed in the morning, and the kinds of ideas that are going to rise to the surface, are things that I think would be relatively consistent, no matter what I did. I mean so much of the art I love is not photography, you know, like so many of my favourite artists make work in a way I don't at all. So there's plenty of envy of other means, but, you know, for at least so far, I feel like photography has remained kind of an interesting threshold and container and language for my work. And so it's been, even though at times frustrating, it's been interesting for me to stick with it.

NB: I really like the installations you've done, but for me the problem with installations is that they're

also kind of frustrating. It's look but don't touch. And yet they're begging to be touched!

LB: You know, photography wants to be quiet and homogenous. And I think for me, I've always felt like I was kind of trying to smuggle all sorts of other stuff into it, you know, including the body in an unflattering light, the feeling of wanting to touch and then wanting to explore things that way. And so it's that that's been one of the central tensions for me in the work, has been thinking about photography as a kind of limit and just seeing what I can stuff into it.

NB: I suppose that's the wonder of photography. Particularly your big-scale works which I'd love to see "live". They really do reach out and speak directly.

LB: Yeah, I think that one of the great things about working in photography, is that it is a common language, like it's an everyday language that everyone speaks and everyone works in. And I think that's been a really kind of exciting prospect, you know. It's like writing poetry in English, right? You try to have an everyday language that you're then able to kind of form into new shapes, or ask it to hold things or contain things. One of the reasons to stay in this field, I guess, is this approachability.

NB: Did you ever want to illustrate a work of literature?

LB: Yes, of course. Many works, but that's a hard one to answer off the top of my head. I mean, I made a show a few years ago. I did that. I used the titles of works. And the press release was about this novel that was written in the thirties, but it was published in the sixties by an Irish writer named Flan O'Brien, "The Third Policeman". And I think that was because I felt a certain sympathy to what was going on in that novel.

NB: What are you working on now? What are you working on next?

LB: I'm working on some pictures. I don't quite know how to put it into language yet. Right now in the studio there. I mean, as always with me, I feel like I'm picking up on some themes that I've played with before, but moving them into a space that feels new. I really like the Potemkin Village show, the one with the pictures



on top of pictures. I felt that it was quite new. And I like to think I'm going to stick with it for a bit, and there'll be a bigger body of work. So it's always funny that little ebb, you know, just after the show. But but yeah, there's lots of new stuff going on. I'm also working on a work of fiction, this first book, the Mounted Messenger book, that works almost like an artist's talk. It's like a conversation about my relationship to photography, but it's got a kind of companion book, which is a more a piece of auto-fiction. And so that's something I'm doing in the background as well.

NB: And does this happen naturally that you leave one medium for another medium, so you use it as a palate cleanser or to relax, or is it like more to do with strategy?

LB: I would love to say it was it is extensive strategy, but it's I think it's really just looking for opportunities. You know, it's like where does the water run downhill, and trying to make something of that that energy.

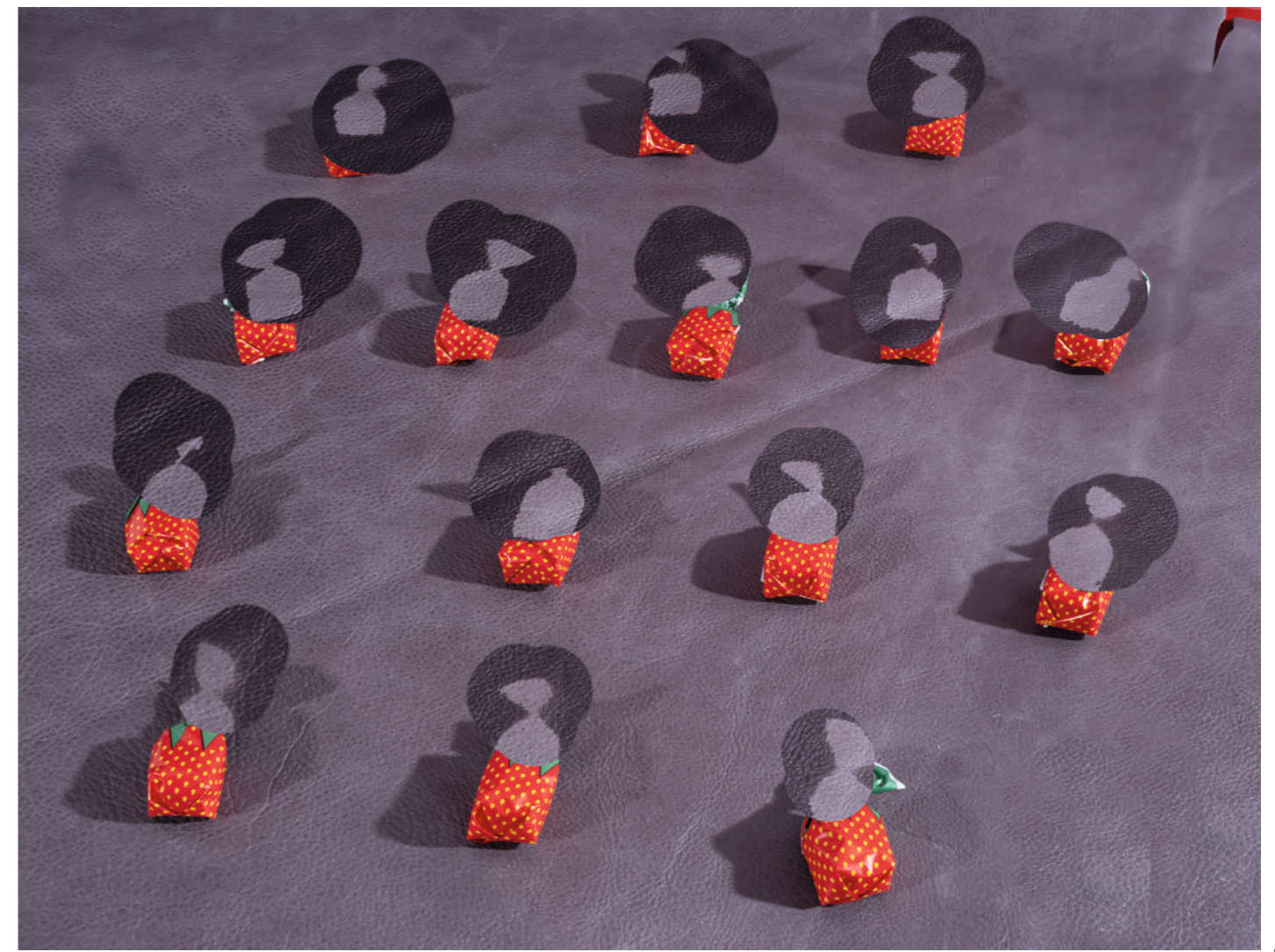
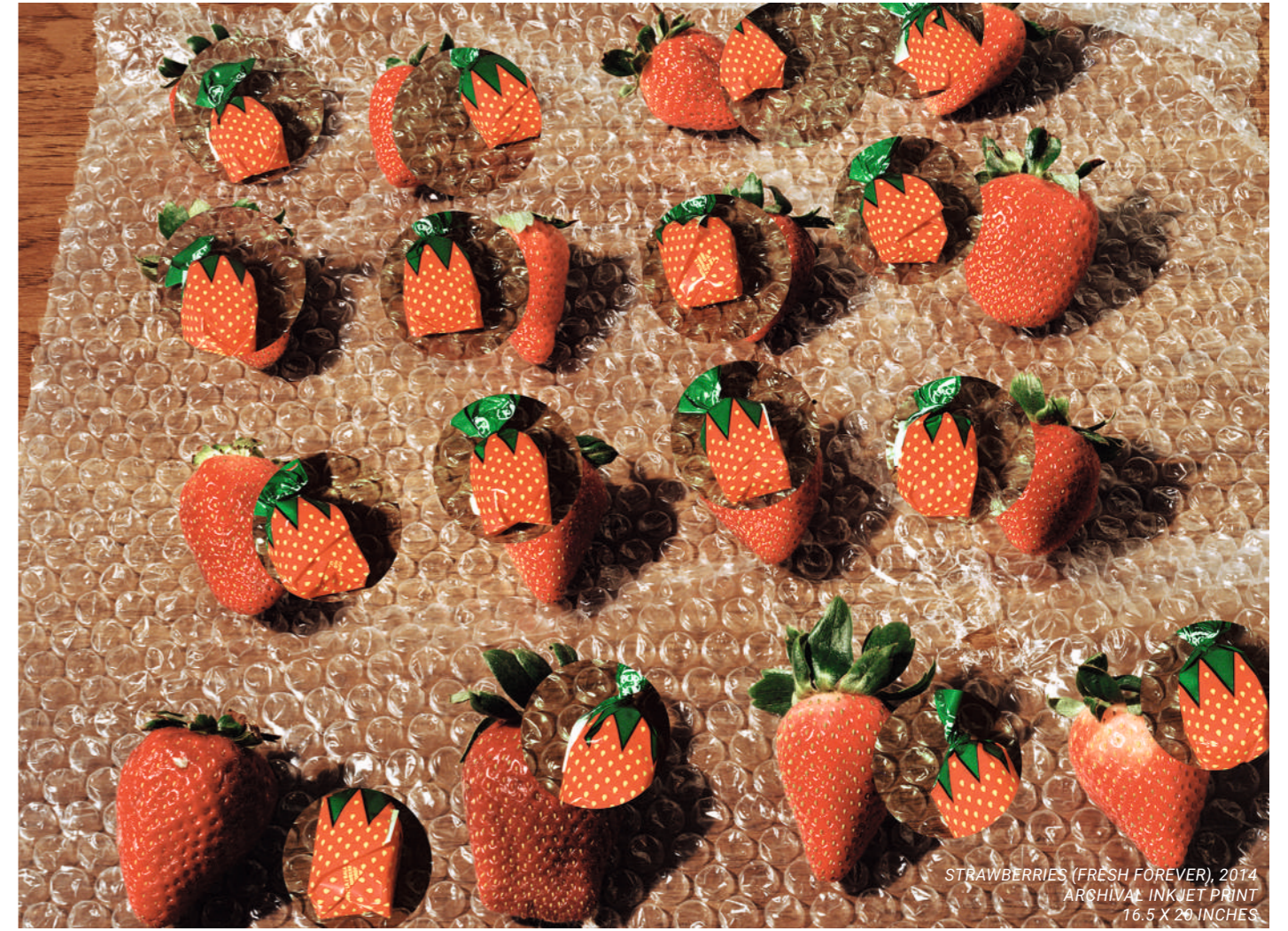


DUCKS, 2015
ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT
19 1/2 X 24 1/2 IN FRAMED (49.5 X 62.2 CM)



LOVER, 2016
ARCHIVAL INKJET PRINT
31 1/8 X 25 1/8 IN (79 X 64 CM)







BLEP, 2020
DYE SUBLIMATION PRINT ON
ALUMINUM
25.5 X 18.795 INCHES



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