



Wolf (Blue)

SPLITTING IMAGE By Simon Castets | April 12, 2009

Israeli-born, Los Angeles-based artist Elad Lassry's solo show of film work at the Whitney Museum may be ending today, but those who missed him uptown can view his photographs in the New Museum's new group exhibition, "The Generational: Younger Than Jesus." Not unlike his film works, his assemblages of small-scale photographs explore the process of image construction and blur the boundaries between appropriation and production. Lassry talked to VMAN about his interest in different media and Peter Pan.

Simon Castets: For the works presented at your show at the Whitney, you used 16-millimeter and Super-16-millimeter cameras. Can you explain your choice of film over video, and of the specific type of film?

Elad Lassry: I use film out of an insistent attempt to go back to early questions or "holes" in my understanding of images and their syntax. Although we tend to think of film in relationship to its institutions—be they the cinema or experimental film—it's curious to remember that film is a sequence of pictures. That can also explain my early insistence on shooting on Super-16, a somewhat problematic format. Its ratio was not meant to be finished on film, but broadcast. Therefore it does not reference the almost square format of 16-millimeter, which is easily related to experimental film history. It's somewhere in between the cinematic and the experimental.

You once said that most people believe that they recognize the woman in your film *Zebra and Woman*, even though this is not appropriated footage. How does the image look so familiar?

In *Zebra and Woman* I worked with actress Radha Mitchell. I first saw Radha in *High Art*, a film from 1998, in which she plays the editor of an art magazine who discovers that her neighbor is a fantastic photographer who has stopped working, and that leads to her first lesbian experience. I liked watching it in high school. When I started thinking of my film, a portrait of a zebra and a woman, I was interested in suggesting that the human subject is making a picture of the animal. Her image came to mind and she is the kind of actor that stays away from celebrity culture, and therefore she is familiar, yet not overwhelmingly so. Her image is institutionalized, yet private.

The works shown at the New Museum are based on advertising from the '70s, but there is no blunt cynical conclusion, no in-your-face statement. Can you describe why you were drawn by these particular images and how you reworked them?

I work with a large archive of pictures, not exclusively advertisements. Viewers tend to suggest that, and of course I understand the association. But by no means is the work based on ads. I collect photographs that I find problematic and curious, photographs that I fail to understand. They become an issue in the studio. I will have them hanging for months and try to figure them out. "Why in the world would anyone make this photograph?" is a question that is at the center

many times. The solution, most of the time, is to answer with a picture I make. It's a somewhat personal solution, meaning it is not really one, it's an experience.

Tell me about your project which will be shown at David Kordansky's booth at Art Basel in June.

In Basel I will show a solo presentation with David Kordansky Gallery at the Liste fair. I will be presenting a 16-millimeter color film which I have been working on for the last year. It is based on a series of documents I found of Jerome Robbins rehearsing with Mary Martin—the flying sequence for the 1954 adaptation of Peter Pan for broadcast television. The film is an abstraction of this photograph and the potential interaction between the two of them. The way Mary Martin ended up as Peter Pan is interesting. Casting a boy was not an option due to child-labor rules—kids could not work long hours. They thought a woman would be the best replacement.



Untitled (Red Cabbage 1)



Zebra and Woman