

In a Garden of Odd Fruits: Interview with Lucas Blalock on A Grocer's Orgy

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A GROCER'S ORGY



Lucas Blalock

A Grocer's Orgy by Lucas Blalock. Primary Information, 2018.
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While artmaking is often cited as a system of creative problem solving, a search for pathways to convey an idea alternatively to the conventional, Lucas Blalock's work creates problems. His pictures are often anti-resolutions, disembodied and boiling in predicament. One could say that the humor that is found in Blalock's work — through visual semantics like pareidolia and the re-governing of conventional art subject-signs — seems more like a nervous laughter, the type that helps to hold calm in the face of uncertainties and anxieties. In our time, now, there is no shortage of these.

Of course, comedy is just one of the many games that Blalock plays. His pictures are pulled from a blender of intellectual curiosities — often arcane, always unobvious — drawn from literature, theatre, film, photographic theory and the history of pictorialism. In Blalock's overall practice, it is often his spoken and written rationalizations in artist talks and interviews that open the doors into his pictures. And when viewers gain the invitation to enter we can begin to untangle the visual tombs of, what seems after surveying his work as a whole, a personal photographic occult.

Few photographic artists in recent memory have produced work as prolifically as Blalock, whose practice grows, picture after picture, like an abundant garden of odd fruits and vegetables. His newest monograph, *A Grocer's Orgy*, the artist presents all his produce in a single basket. The title is a compilation of 161 photographs that nearly spill off the pages, piled atop one another, knotted and entangled into a critical mass of the artist's oeuvre to date.

This interview began in person in early August and continued via email during the following weeks.

Gregory Eddi Jones: You've done a lot of interviews, and I actually haven't heard you talk about what you do outside of your art practice. I don't know if it's hobbies or travel or...

Lucas Blalock: Sure. That's an interesting question. What do I do outside? I've been fortunate to get to travel a bunch in the last couple of years, which has been great. I spend a lot of time going to see shows and those kinds of things. I like to watch movies and read. I also do some teaching.

GJ: Do you think your teaching has informed your practice at all?

LB: It's definitely made me really consider the categories that I'm using, and I have had to really think about the way I am sharing those categories and their usefulness.. So I think it has informed things but in a very deep, under the surface kind of way.

GJ: By categories, do you mean genres of artmaking?



a physical feeling, 2014. © Lucas Blalock.

LB: Yeah, genre of artmaking but also, I have had to work out what it means at this point to teach photography? Are you teaching students how they might use photography as a tool to make contemporary art? Are you teaching them how they might relate to the world through making a photograph? What is the superstructure? I've got all of these students and they make phone pictures every day. Do these pictures count? What are the boundaries? And on and on... I think that stuff has made me be just a lot more explicit about where photography starts and stops, what might be an interesting thing to draw into it... What are we sharing, what are we doing? What part of learning it is really just visual literacy?

GJ: I think the notion of visual literacy is something that's not really talked about often enough because so much of our world is consumed and defined by pictures, and looking at pictures, specifically, that have politics that maybe ordinary viewers don't take account of.

LB: Definitely. One of the coolest things about working with photographs as an artist is that everyone can "read" them on some level. On a superficial level, it's something we all get, you know? It's really available. But on other levels, there's a lot that can be packed into a picture, and getting students to really try to think about that; to think about the layers of meaning and why a picture might look the way it does, and how a photographer came to make the decisions they came to make — feels like a lot of what is there to share, or is usable for them in thinking about making their own pictures.



GJ: I've also been thinking of visual literacy in terms of—we belong to a community that is very visually literate. We kind of read and decode pictures in a way that most people really don't. And I think, me personally, I've been wondering about the responsibilities as an artist insofar as to make their own work and express themselves or to share knowledge or teach something to a more general audience that might be new to them or might open up new ways of thinking.

LB: I'm not sure I fall on either pole of that. I think about photography as a sort of shared conventional language, where you can make a work in photography— like the way you might write a sentence, or a poem, in English. And I think that there are a lot of things that you can do within that to make the language feel flexible or, uncanny, or alive. You can make a picture of whatever you want—everything is available. So how do you think a weird thought with the camera? How do you get it to act in a way or to be surprising or to be off or on?

GJ: Or how do you avoid saying common things or using common phrases in a visual way...

LB: Totally, and I think in that way the problem with photography particularly, is that the photographic picture has a kind of common sense definition—that the thing in the photograph was in front of the camera, that it happened—this kind of notion of the window. And I think

that that common sense-ness is very much a part of what you're playing with when you take up photography as an artist. Getting to toy with that reality (that a photograph proposes) and make it feel a little unstable seems to be... what we get to do. And I feel like, in his own way, Garry Winogrand (the most archetypical photographer artist I can think of) did this, you know? I don't think it's something that's a question of the digital.

GJ: To circle back, you mentioned you originally wanted to be a writer. And I wonder if you had maintained that course, or maybe if you had entered into a different path of painting or maybe sculpture, what in your current work would carry over—what in the thinking or the curiosities...?

LB: It's hard to say, exactly. I think there are certain things like this idea of playfulness with language, or the getting to take something apart a little bit and stretch it out would have stayed no matter what it was. A lot of the central questions in my work, the way I see it at this point, are tied up in my problems and preoccupations as a person, so probably a lot of them would remain. I'm interested in objects, humor, the body, color, and technology. I can't imagine these things wouldn't have played a role if I'd taken on another project.



ball and chain music, 2012. © Lucas Blalock.

GJ: That question kind of plays off of something that came up in my conversation with Charlotte Cotton, where I mentioned that I like to try to find a sort of artist impulse or try to

read a photograph independent from its position in the media itself or outside of the tradition of the materials, to seek what the artist uniquely brings into it. And I know your work is very much tied into and wrapped around notions of what the media is and aware of its conventions.

LB: Of course. I don't know, I am skeptical about speaking about work through personal anecdote because, I don't know, a biographical reading has other kinds of limits. But I think that there are certain experiences in my life that have really structured some of these preoccupations. For one, when I was 10 years old, I was in an accident and my thumb on my right hand was amputated. They weren't able to recover the thumb so there was a suggestion to perform this pretty new surgery at the time and take my toe off of my right foot and put it on my hand. It seemed like the best of the options, and so I ended up with a toe on my right hand.

[laughter]

LB: And so coming back to the present this story can feel like a kind of over-obvious metaphor or psychoanalytic root where I've been borrowing parts from things and using them to replace other things...

GJ: It's Frankenstein!

LB: Yeah, exactly [laughs]—it's Frankenstein. Frankenstein is actually a story I feel very close to – one about technology and morbid ambition. Just a few months ago I read an article about Mary Shelly on the occasion of Frankenstein's 200th anniversary that connected the novel to Shelly's harrowing experience having had a miscarriage the previous year, but also to her abolitionist politics. I really liked the suggestion that it was both of these things and more—Shelly wrote that the monster came to her in a dream—that became the idea or the germ of the book. And to return to my own progress for a second with Shelly in mind, I am sure my experiences did indeed set the stage for later layers of investigation that have brought me here.

GJ: Can we pivot on this idea of layers? your process of image-making involves a lot of layers of decision-making. It's almost impossible to kind of prevent the subconscious from coming through and informing what you do or how you respond to certain things.

LB: Totally. Even when I was starting out and making very different pictures photography already felt like a set of limits that I was pushing against, that I wanted it to do more, that I wanted more decisions to be apparent, more intention to be evident. At the time I was thinking about this through narrative and wanting to make pictures that acted like very short movies but as time has gone on and my tools have changed and all these things have moved, that impulse to push against the limit started to become about layers which makes for this sort of denser object.



Arts and Crafts, 2015. © Lucas Blalock.

GJ: So just to go back in time a little bit... Do you remember the moment when you decided to commit yourself to photography? I tend to think that a lot of artists have kind of an origin story, like a superhero, or a kind of great awakening of a realization of a creative power, or a realization of a direction of morality or something.

LB: I made this cartoonish picture as part of a project in school of myself popping out of a trashcan and photographing a woman who was sitting on the lawn. I was looking for someone to sit for this picture, and I couldn't find anyone to do it. And so I took a dress out of my roommate's room and had a wig and photographed myself as both figures in the image. I was the guy popping out of the trashcan and I was also the woman sitting on the lawn, and I just taped the two prints together. For whatever reason, there was real energy in it. It had been really fun to make and my peers really responded to it. I think in that picture I kind of found a footing.

GJ: The picture idea sounds like such a cinematic one. It's kind of a situation where there's a beginning, a middle, and an end. Did cinema inform a lot of your work early on as well, in addition to reading?

LB: Yeah, definitely movies were super important. Alfred Hitchcock and David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino all come to mind from that time in my life. Before the internet, if you lived

outside of the metropolis, that distance was real, and it was a slow drip of access to new things. Movies traveled faster than a lot of other culture and they were super important for me and all my friends. Actually, when I got around to making photographs later, I first thought of it as, a way to make really short movies.

GJ: Let's talk about the new book, *A Grocer's Orgy*. Can you talk about the inspiration for the title of the book?

LB: The title comes from Baudelaire's "The Dandy" from *The Painter of Modern Life*. Baudelaire writes of dandies that "these beings have no other calling but to cultivate the idea of beauty in their persons, to satisfy their passions, to feel and to think. They thus possess a vast abundance both of time and money, without which fantasy, reduced to a state of passing reverie, can hardly be translated into action. It is sad but only too true that without the money and the leisure, love is incapable of rising above a grocer's orgy or the accomplishment of a conjugal duty."

I am happy to be on the grocer's side! And I just sort of loved the way the words hung together. I'm interested in Baudelaire and I'm interested in his context, but I'm as interested in the way it can be used for my own purposes. My work has often involved food, so the grocer gets taken care of, and then, more and more over time, it's also really been about physicality and the body and bringing the body into the body-less space of photography... And the book is full of pictures, so maybe this accounts for the orgy. [laughs]



Book Spread from *A Grocer's Orgy*, by Lucas Blalock. Primary Information, 2018.

GJ: Words really seem like an important part of your practice in a way—you use them very

actively. And in a sense, the titles are almost required, in your pictures, to offer a pathway to what is otherwise a very ambiguous kind of image. I feel like titling is almost like an act of picturing in itself, where it lets you define something or point to a certain issue that you want people to think about. And sometimes, too, words can be arbitrary. They can act as another layer of falsehood if the author so chooses. So could you talk a little bit about your approach to titling pictures and exhibitions and books?

LB: I think that is accurate. Sometimes the language is a continuation of sort of a false pointing, and other times it can be very descriptive. I don't know how to talk about it very coherently. I love language and it's really fun to draw it up around the pictures but sometimes it can really get in the way. I try to be sensitive to that and try to understand how much I can shepherd in and how likely a picture is to get overdetermined. I think it's really easy to kill a picture with words, [laughs] so I'm just trying to have fun with it but also to be sensitive to it.

GJ: It's always interesting how words and pictures both inform each other in a way or can be different hierarchies of what's important or subservient, and I was reading about Anselm Kiefer a few days ago and the way he places text right into some of his paintings in a way that the pictures kind of become subservient to the words, kind of visual descriptions of what the text actually says.

LB: Sure. Photography's got so many false positives of that sort. There's this super positivist shorthand for photography where it's a reliably good communicator that brings the world to us and it, in turn, sets up a straw man for all of these games to be played against it. Part of that is the title or the caption—Susan Sontag talks about the captions being as important as the information in the photograph and, returning to the titles, I would say that my captions are the titles.

GJ: Whenever a caption accompanies an image, I think that's almost always where the viewer's attention goes to first out of this innate need to understand what they're seeing. The eyes don't fully trust the picture or they always want to know maybe the story behind it or some larger context.

LB: Well, to turn this another way, I feel like when we look at a photograph, the thing we want to do first is to name the subject. It grounds our relationship. And I think that this impulse to name is something I've never wanted to lose in the pictures. I love photography for this, that it needs to not just be itself. It needs to also be something else. You want to name what's in it, its other, but part of the pleasure of making pictures is in stretching out and complicating, making goofy or impossible, like actually impossible, success in finding that ground.



HELL, 2017. © Lucas Blalock.

GJ: So with the PDF of the book that the publisher sent me, one observation—I think one of my first observations is that the book includes a lot of alternative versions of pictures that you’ve shown in the past, almost like B-sides in a way.

LB: Yeah, totally. An early in-studio title for the book included a reference to B-Sides.

GJ: That was interesting to me because a lot of your work depicts very un-precious things, or kind of tries to deglamorize the object that you’re making a picture of. In a sense, you’re kind of doing that to your own work in that you’re presenting an alternative version that challenges the authenticity of the original picture in a way.

LB: I think one of the things about working with photography is that pictures are kind of haunted by other versions, that they have siblings, or are one of many. Whatever picture I decide to show is inevitably me obscuring another picture. So there is all of this obscured or occluded or left out information that’s sort of hovering around the edge. And this book felt like an opportunity to... I don’t know, to play with the density of that.

GJ: And when just about anyone photographs something, they usually make multiple versions of it. I’ve taken pictures of my dog to share on Instagram and I have like, 18 different versions just with slight variations between them. And in a way the whole thing creates a kind of

conglomerate picture, and you try to process the failures and successes of what you're trying to achieve or the goal that's trying to be attained.

LB: Totally. Well, there's this idea of the parallax—if you see something from one position and you move to one side or the other, you see it anew. You see it again. Your information about it is evolving.

GJ: Right.

LB: I think for me, if what photography is useful for is in trying to relate to the world, I'm trying to relate through the medium of photography, or through the world of photography, out to an analogue for my bodily and psychic experience. I feel like all of this data then, all of these other positions make for a kind of peripheral vision... maybe it takes away the singularity, the optic singularity of the one picture, but to me, that's not exactly what I'm chasing. The relationship is in part to all of these steps, to these layers of opacity, which have been flattened into a photograph. So it feels to me like there's energy in there. The book brings together these pictures that are in one way like preparatory drawings but in another are evidence of a bigger picture.



Blue Bottles, 2013. © Lucas Blalock.

GJ: And that's one thing I like about your practice—you don't really adhere to the conventions of working in a series. You're always trying to test and prod the boundaries and the parameters of your own practice. Your work is very elastic in that it can kind of stretch far beyond the central anchor of the notion of photography without ever becoming untethered to it. But with that kind of openness and that kind of freedom, how do you determine when pictures succeed for you, or when they fail? How large is your scrap pile?

LB: Massive.

[laughter]

LB: It's really quite big. And I shoot with a 4×5 so it could be bigger. There are limits, because of the way I make pictures but there are still quite a few. They wildly outnumber the good ones! And I feel like... that's an interesting question. Some of them just clearly have energy that others don't.

GJ: Does it resonate more of an intuitive response in you?

LB: Yeah, it's pretty intuitive. There are often ideas packed into the pictures but a good idea doesn't necessarily make good works. Torbjørn Rødland has this thing in his "Sentences on Photography"—have you read this thing?

GJ: No, I haven't.

LB: Oh, it's great. It's in Triple Canopy, but he says something like good ideas do not necessarily make good pictures, or good ideas are easily bungled and bad ideas can be performed with a flourish—it's true, you know?

GJ: Yeah.

LB: So I guess I feel like there is certainly a line that I have to work at in feeling out whether a picture is done, or what it need, or how to feed it, or whatever...This is part of the process but by the time one is really finished, it has developed its own center of gravity. For this book, however—the threshold was a bit different, like the book compiles the activity that's gone on a little bit behind the scenes. A lot of these pictures have never been published and a lot of them will live only here. They are the thinking of the project, the guts.

GJ: Yeah. And when I was going through the book, I felt it's just so packed with pictures. It feels like they're going to start to fall off the pages and onto the floor.

LB: Totally. An orgy, right?

[laughter]



Olives and Ham, 2015-2017. © Lucas Blalock.

GJ: So as I was going from one page of the book to the next, I actually felt very destabilized. The image transitions are very abrupt from one page to the next. The sequence feels very nonlinear or ordered in a way that isn't meant to create a smooth transition.

LB: Sure.

GJ: I kind of equate it to being in a room full of people who are all trying to talk over each other, kind of competing for attention but still speaking in a common language.

LB: I've thought a lot about babbling or the condition of "almost language", or about this Deleuze book about Kafka where he says that some of Kafka's greatest qualities come from the disjunction he causes by writing these stories in German. He writes about how he inhabits German and almost ventriloquizes it. To Deleuze German is this high official language of the state and Kafka capitalizes on these formal qualities by forcing it to stutter or become guttural or for otherwise lose its stability by injecting it with the strangenesses. And I feel like I am thinking about photography as a kind of high official language of commerce and history and I am curious about how I might make it wear it weird, how you might get to its minor. And I'm interested in this on the level of the photograph, but also on the level of the book. A book has a certain narrative progressive tendency and it follows kind of...

GJ: It's orderly.

LB: Yeah, and this was an expectation I could play with... though it was really important to me that this book didn't feel like a book of throwaways or a book of everything or the Internet or any of these things. I hope it has some gravity.



Book Spread from *A Grocer's Orgy*, by Lucas Blalock. Primary Information, 2018.

GJ: So I want to talk a little bit about the comedy in your work... But kind of relating back to the book—again, when I was looking through it, there's a kind of wrongness to your work which is a form of humor, it's a irony kind of thing. But when I was looking through the book and looking at your pictures in bulk, it almost started to boil into a condition of crisis where the problems don't resolve themselves or there's no clear solution or resolution anywhere to be found.

LB: I love that description.

GJ: There's sort of a darkness in it too—

LB: Yeah.

GJ: —That kind of created some tension for me.

LB: I appreciate you saying so. The work started off in a place a number of years ago with me using the photo studio as a kind of punching bag, an expectation to play against and make pictures that could come out of that language but that weren't the pictures that were expected.

GJ: Combative, in a way.

LB: Yeah.

GJ: And there is a certain level of destruction and almost violence in the interventions that you make in pictures, too.

LB: I agree. I've been curious about how much emotional weight these adjusted pictures could carry, and there is a sadism at work in all these defacements. Also, the world felt darker as I've gone on. I started this project in the lead up to 2008, which was a moment of hope, and ten years later, we're in an extraordinarily different moment. But it's a hard thing to speak directly to. I am not really sure...

GJ: I think that's part of a certain burden in photography where you have limited access to the sources of things that you hear about in the news or things like that—you can't address large issues or abstract ideas in a direct way. You always have to channel it through some kind of metaphor or vessel—

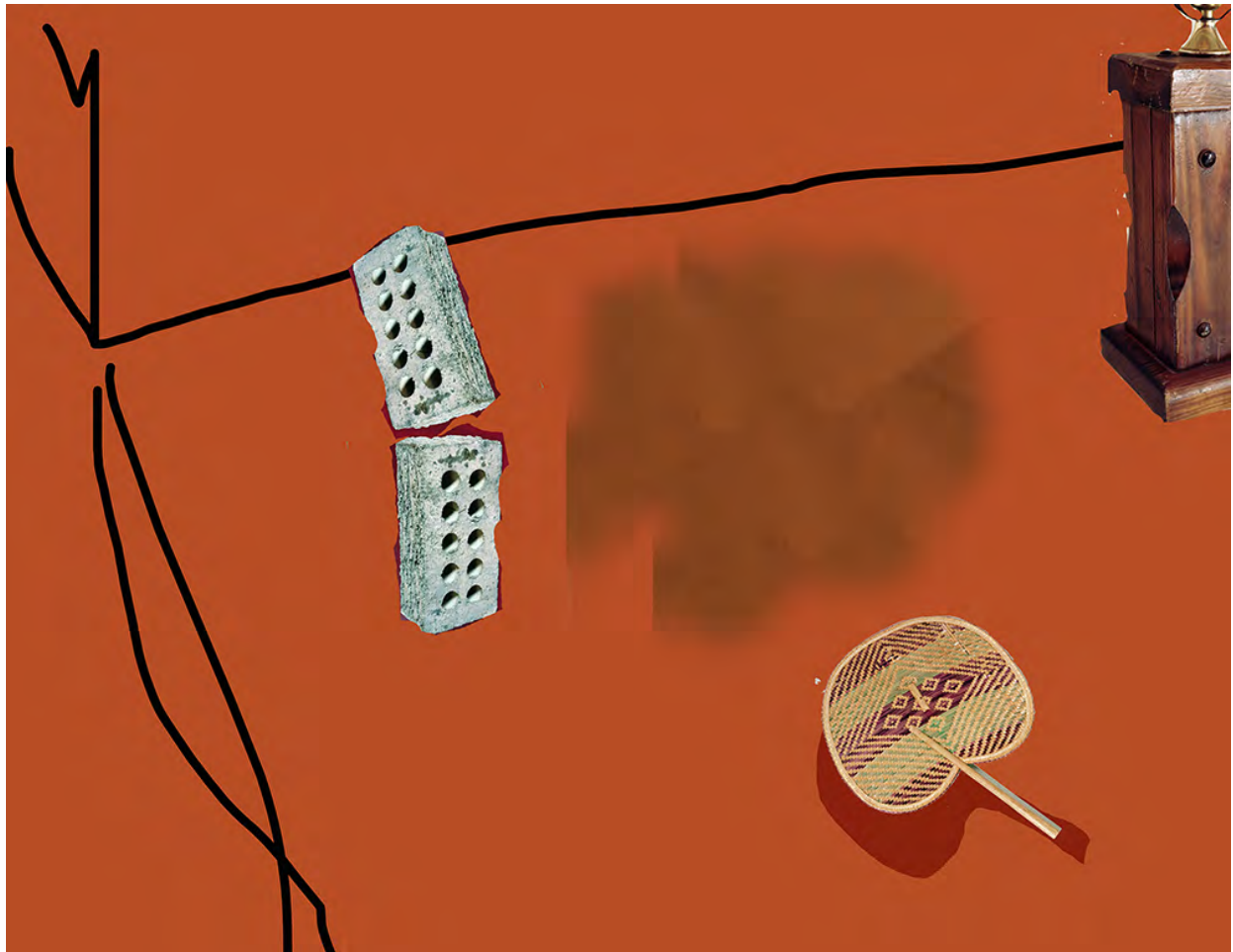
LB: Totally.

GJ: —Yeah, and I think maybe that's why a lot of photographers have been sort of hopping the fence into sculpture or painting or installation, to try to get at ways of problem-solving that the camera alone can't really help to achieve.

LB: I think that is true that picture making has certain limitations that artists can find frustrating. But on the other hand I think the picture is a really amazing venue for imagining space. In physical space, in sculptural space, as much as you are getting a third dimension, you're actually losing a plasticity that is far more available within the world of the picture than it is in the space of the room. Historically photography has had a lot to do with closing down the plasticity of pictorial space but artists working in both photography and painting have kept opening it back up.

GJ: Yeah, it's interesting. You know, I love anything that involves artist effort to achieves some kind of a result of expression and literature, but just in the 2D space, the rectangular form, it's a field of infinite possibility and there is never a lack of problems to solve just within that field. I feel like when photography is incorporated into other kinds of media, the picture itself kind of loses its sense of authority and gives way to other material.

LB: Robert Rauschenberg's silkscreen paintings are kind of the un-picture on the surface, pictures where you are obviously looking at photographic material but it is part of a greater accumulation of signs. It seems like the more objecthood you give a picture, the faster the world presented by the picture is overshadowed by the picture as on a surface. They really don't want to keep that sense, unless they're paintings. And painting is good at having it both ways, but photography really seems to lose its weight as a picture very quickly when it tries to take on objecthood. I'm interested in all of these experiments people are doing but I feel people jumping the ship on pictures fast these days. I think there's way more interesting thinking going on inside that perspectival space than a lot of projects are realizing.



Good Id, 2014. © Lucas Blalock.

GJ: So I guess we're kind of getting into broader issues now—you mentioned in 2008 which seemed like a kind of a special time where there was a kind of hope and we lived in a country that we felt someone responsible was in charge.

LB: Certainly.

GJ: In some sense, we didn't have to really worry about things. And I think that did invite a kind of safeness in artmaking, where in photography specifically, it could really start to look inward at itself, at its own materials and mechanisms. And it doesn't feel like a coincidence that that's about the same time when artists really achieved a kind of maturity in using Photoshop tools. For a long time, there was an evolution of discovery in learning how to use them, especially through the '90s and into the new millennium. And this came up with, again, a conversation with Charlotte—I look at her book, *Photography Is Magic*, as a kind of inflection point where it kind of makes concrete about a decade's worth of work that really did look inward and kind of questioned what the possibilities of photography were, of the materials, where the boundaries were drawn. I guess the question is where does photography go now, as we're experiencing such a harsh schism of our worldview just a year and a half ago? I wonder if maybe—and this is speaking very generally, but if “high photography” needs to pivot back out and face the real world than continuing to look inward.

LB: My feeling about what happened around 2008 I think is very caught up in the reality that for the first time in the medium's history you could make a photograph and distribute it without making an object.

GJ: Right, because that's when Facebook really started to circulate.

LB: Yeah, well, Flickr, Google Image both came online and the native space of photography began to shift into its contemporary condition. And I think that this new situation created a point of insecurity and self-reflection that produced a lot of very object-oriented work. A lot of work from that moment really doubled down on the objecthood of photographs, as if there was a need to really assert their choice to materialize the image. Though the best work from this period did so with a knowing wink. And though it was not the political doom and gloom that we are dealing with now, we had just gone through the crazy Wall Street shit—which was itself a crisis of dematerialized value.

GJ: And we were still in Iraq...

LB: Yeah. But when thinking about where it is going or its responsibilities now... I would say that photography has long been called on to do work it is only relatively well suited to do. The modern world has needed a reliable witness and a guarantor of material quality when commerce has moved beyond the speed of objects. The photograph has played these roles historically, and necessarily. But it isn't a quality of the photograph so much as it is that our industrial, or now post-industrial, culture needed something to do that. Photography was the answer but as we all know it is not an infallible witness, nor the most objective guarantor, nor the most reliable narrator. So that said, I think anyone who can find a way to respond to what's going on right now should do it. I'm all for a responsive art that finds a way to take on to the conditions of the world we're living in. Do I necessarily think that a documentary project is more viable or valuable than another kind of project right now? Not necessarily. I would love to believe in documentary photography more than I do, but I don't. And I think it's not that you can't make an amazing documentary project that can't still churn things up—but I think that there's a false dichotomy between the studio and the outside—this idea that the real only happens in the streets. To me, it seems like a very limited way of thinking about what might happen.

GJ: There's never any one answer...

LB: Yeah. The camera is an interesting tool. It does a lot of things. I don't think we should become doctrinaire about what it should do and shouldn't do, and that goes both ways. I think people had the feeling that documentary projects a few years were kind of dead in the water but then there are artists now like Elle Pérez or LaToya Ruby Frazier who are doing really good work, really important work, that is totally functioning out of those genres. Photography's weird and big and should stay that way.

GJ: That will be the quote on Facebook.

LB: Yeah, totally. [laughter]



The Occupants, 2016. © Lucas Blalock.

GJ: So I interviewed Paul Mpagi Sepuya earlier this year, and I asked him—because all of his portraits of people he knows and he has relationships with, either friendships or intimate—but I asked him if it was important for the viewer to understand the nature of those relationships, because, in a way, he looks at his own work and holds a certain meaning for him that the viewer can't access. It's kind of the artist and the viewer occupying the same house but in different rooms and looking at a wall from different directions. So I wonder if you see the same division of meanings as a part of your work, maybe in the sense that you and a viewer are witnessing two sides to the same coin.

LB: Yeah, I don't know, I've never thought of it quite this way, but photography could be like a game of telephone. You start with a relationship to your subject and at each stage of the picture making that initial motivation shifts before being passed on to the next stage. By the time the viewer is looking at it, I am already holding all of these different versions in my head. I feel like there's a triangulation going on where I'm basically putting something out there that I feel strongly about and saying "I relate this way" and then sort of looking at them and wondering if they can relate that way, you know—it's like an electrical circuit.

GJ: Right, it's a conversation—you speak an idea, and the viewer kind of...

LB: receives it. I'm sure some of them feel very idiosyncratic or esoteric or not interesting, maybe not so much to connect to, and then other ones can feel much more resonant and different people with different ones.

GJ: Yeah, I was going to follow up, actually, because I look at some of your pictures and some of them click immediately. Some of them I feel like I can arrive at the center of after a little bit of thinking, while others remain just totally opaque and I look at it and just... [laughs]

LB: It is kind of obvious to say but I've come to understand using photography as working out of a shared language. I am talking in a language we as a culture are using to relate to the world and I am making a set of propositions within that language. And I feel like, in that, there are thoughts that are more clear. There are thoughts that are caught up in little whirlpools of some direct relationship or other ones that are really open. The way I work, it's loose enough at the beginning. I feel like I am moving from a big space in trying to approach a subject into the tightest space I can get myself into when the picture is finished. And so the work is in this winnowing down, trying to draw into a specific experience.



GJ: It's a game of improvisation almost where you give yourself a prompt or a kind of challenge, and eventually all possibilities kind of collapse into one solution and it's not a right or wrong solution. It's just a solution.

LB: But I think the amazing thing about photography is that we get to begin with a very understandable basis—I've used this metaphor of the jazz standard before. John Coltrane could play whatever notes he wanted when playing "My Favorite Things" because he can count on the idea that the entire audience knew the song, and so no matter how weird he played it, it remained a thing his audience knew. It has this allegiance to its root that wasn't broken no matter how far afield he went.

GJ: So I'm getting towards the end here... one question I've been wanting to ask is about the process of mark-making in your work and the way that it kind of frees you from some of the burdens of conventional photography which is usually purely an analytical kind of process. I feel that in some ways photographers are held more accountable for their work than painters are because audiences can give leeway to a mistake a painter makes or they couldn't recognize a mistake that a painter makes, whereas the composition of a photograph adheres to a very specific set of rules to follow.

LB: I think there's a way that... when I started doing all the Photoshop work, it was in part, a restlessness in me to not be so well-behaved. There's this sense in photography that it all happens in one decision. You press a button, and that's it. That was your act, you know? And as a photographer whether I'm making very straight pictures or not, I know full well that that is not the only decision I made, that I made a hundred other decisions that helped me get closer to this image. And granted, a street photographer makes these decisions way faster and with a much greater element of chance than I do in the studio, but I am not so much acting as a photographer as I am making pictures that can be included in the defacto cultural category 'photographs'. The work has shifted and expanded somewhat as a response to finding new elasticities in this field.



Double Recipe, 2015-2016. © Lucas Blalock.

GJ: So you've got the book coming out soon. What date does it actually publish?

LB: It will come out at the book fair in New York in September.

GJ: So what comes after that? Do you have new work on the horizon?

LB: Yeah, there's some new stuff. I'm doing an exhibition in Los Angeles at the ICA/LA in the winter, and then a project in Germany next summer. Actually, the truth may be that this book is tying up a period of work and the next things are taking up some new problems.

GJ: So last question, I've been thinking about a weird exhibition concept where like, one picture is shown and then underneath it is a bookshelf with all the books that have informed the work. What would be your picture that you would show, and what would be the books that would be on your shelf?

LB: Oh, fuck... that's a good question.

[laughter]

LB: I don't know I feel a debt to so many authors. Some that would have to be there are Brecht as I have spoken about a lot before, Melville, the historian Kristen Ross, Sianne Ngai, Mike

Kelley, A catalogue from the Wexner Center called *As Painting: Division and Displacement*, Duchamp's writings, RH Quaytman's *Allegorical Decoys*, Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, *Frankenstein*, *Ubik*, *The Artwork Caught By the Tail* by George Baker on Picabia, *The Brutality of Fact* (Sylvester/Bacon), Michael Taussig's *Mimesis and Alterity*, Jeff Wall, Kafka, William S. Burroughs, Jen George, early Ben Marcus, Deleuze, Donna Haraway's *Companion Species Manifesto*, Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Erasers* and Philip Guston.

GJ: Thanks for your time, Lucas.



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