

Art in America

REVIEWS JAN. 17, 2012

Lucas Blalock

NEW YORK,
at Ramiken Crucible

by Anne Doran



The past five years have seen the emergence of a new generation of American photographers, who, though their aims and methods vary, have in common a freewheeling approach to their chosen discipline. Mixing and matching photographic techniques, tropes and genres and blurring the line between photography and other mediums, they are rapidly expanding what it means to take, or make, a photograph.

One of the youngest members of this group is Lucas Blalock (b. 1978), whose wonderfully mysterious pictures have been standouts in a number of recent group shows. Like many of his peers, Blalock operates at the intersection of documentary image and constructed photograph, illusionistic space and flat surface, analog and digital.

Blalock fully exploits the formal and evocative potential of these gray areas, using as his primary tools an old-fashioned 4x5 camera and a computer. Each piece starts with a picture shot on film—often a tabletop arrangement of low-end, mass-produced objects. The photos are then digitally altered in Photoshop, a program that Blalock wields with deliberate obviousness. The final results range from seemingly straightforward representations to near-abstractions in which proliferating copies of the same fragment swamp the original image.

Blalock's first one-person show in New York consisted of 20 medium- or large-scale prints (all 2010 or '11), some of which were presented as solitary pieces, others in pairs or groups of three or five. Many of the photographs conjure libidinal energies and phantasmagoric presences. In *Pink Moon*, a pink shower cap stretched over a curved armature collapses distinctions between male and female, appearing as both rigid phallic shape and frilled, vaginal opening. In another work, a ghostly scattering of peanuts and shrimp on a checkered

tablecloth is as insubstantial as a memory.

Elsewhere, Blalock's manipulations merely direct the viewer's attention to visual events in everyday life. In a photograph of a loaded dish rack, the tumblers balanced on top have been enhanced with crudely cut overlays of transparent gray. Heightened in this way, they suddenly seem to exist apart from the surrounding plates and bowls, one plane of existence running through another like a dark river.

Blalock's flat-footed approach is deceptive. Black-and-white works—such as a set of three bold compositions made by cutting and splicing together photographs of tires and resembling constructions by Rodchenko—showcase Blalock's considerable gifts as an arranger of forms. But as other works in the show attest, he is also adept at coaxing beauty from the shapes, textures, patterns and colors of such hardware and dollar-store items as a stack of ergonomically shaped yellow sponges, a length of shiny red cloth and an ocher plastic carry bag.

Blalock's images are weird, inventive and ultimately persuasive. In them, situations and objects hover on the edge of familiarity while remaining strange, and sometimes even wondrous.

Photo: Lucas Blalock: Our Man Weschler, 2010, chromogenic print, 32 1/4 by 23 1/4 inches; at Ramiken Crucible.