

Lulled into Believing

by John Paul Pryor
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Esther Teichmann and
Henrietta Simson explore
the nature of belief and the
space that exists between
fiction and reality

Lulled Into Believing at Man&Eve is an interesting proposition dreamed up by two very different artists, both of whom challenge the way in which we perceive the medium of photography. Esther Teichmann has a penchant for creating haunting meditations on mortality by placing relatives and loved ones in carefully constructed fantastical landscapes, while Henrietta Simson's practice strips the central narrative out of, in the case of this exhibition, early Renaissance works, allowing the viewer to rediscover the space without having to take on the prerequisite religious dogma.

As Henrietta notes – “Both practices play with a removal and replacement of time and space, grappling with relationships between the indexical and reality, between the imaginary and emotional. We both work with removing, replacing and creating narratives; narratives between the source material and work, narratives within the works and now within this collaboration, narratives sitting between the works in juxtaposition to one another.” In a sense, it is precisely this dialogue that exists in between the works that exposes the fundamental nature of belief, encouraging the viewer to evaluate the melding of fiction with autobiography, the absence of narrative with placement, and the slippage between fantasy and desire.

Here, we speak to Esther Teichmann about a few of the inspirations, beliefs and desires that led to the collaboration...

Dazed Digital Why have you chosen to show your work together?

Esther Teichmann We are both looking at the relationship between photography and painting and the idea of the original and copy – the way that painting is an ‘original’ whereas photography can be mass-produced and is not unique in that way. Henrietta works from early Renaissance images and sort of strips out the religious narrative so that they become backdrops you can almost place your own narrative into, whereas I am placing figures within landscapes and layering images.

Dazed Digital So you are creating a

narrative while Henrietta is creating a void?

Esther Teichmann I've been turning real landscapes into fictional fantasy backdrops, placing family members and friends within them. My relationship to the photographic has always been about staging or creating something that isn't always the truth, or indexical. Even in images where I'm not intervening with the image with paint, I'm always using studio set-ups and film lights to create a fictional space into which I place intimate subjects.

Dazed Digital What's the significance of placing people like your mother and father within these scenarios? Is there a sense of containing them in an eternity?

Esther Teichmann Absolutely. I think that's why I am so drawn to the photographic, because all my work is kind of about the fear of losing those people, and that's why it has to be those people that are my subjects – it makes sense that it's the bodies that I most desire but that also seem the most fragile; the most impermanent. My earlier body of work was very much about that realisation of your parents' mortality, and the way that your relationship to them is transient. In that work I was almost fragmenting the body so that you would be able to see this incredible detail of the skin and so on, but not see the body as a whole. Here, all the bodies are whole, but they are within these fantasy-like spaces and are often turned away from me, so it's kind of about the fantasy that they are turning toward – you can't tell if they are looking into the space or if their eyes are closed, but I often imagine that their eyes are closed. I used a plate camera to create this work, so the process itself is very slow, it can take a whole day just to make one image; there's that sense that they almost sink into the situation I have placed them in.

Dazed Digital Does death seem to you very much like finality?

Esther Teichmann I'm not sure... a lot of the work is very autobiographical, my first partner died in a car crash and that was a really strange experience, in that it was the first intensely sexual relationship I had ever had, and I could

find no real way to deal with that sudden, violent separation. I spent some time with his body before the autopsy and there was very much this kind of fascination of the surface of the body sort of hardening and becoming image, if you like, and then becoming soft again as the body decayed, and sort of becoming abject as well – you can't stop time, you can't stop decay in that way; the person is no longer there and yet there's still this thing and it's sort of between states. In the early work, I was almost dealing with the trauma by repetition, almost lighting my mother and father and partner as though they were already dead.

Dazed Digital But these images contain a melancholic beauty; they seem to be placing the figures within an ideal, there is almost a fairytale aesthetic...

Esther Teichmann There is that holding of them as image and as kind of an ideal. Photography can hold static and you can create something that you can physically possess. I've sort of been thinking a lot about whether if you can possess something as an image and a living person at the same time, whether it oscillates. I've been looking at Blanchot's ideas of desire and fascination; in a way when you are in the darkness under the camera, you as a body no longer exist, only that which you desire exists.

Read the original interview at www.dazeddigital.com.