

3 Books Blaise Larmee



Blaise Larmee



INTRODUCTION

Life meets us between what we meant and what we'll mean. The practice of Blaise Larmee wavers between two poles: the harried preoccupations of a sociopoliticized movement towards plurality in ["alternative"] comics on the one hand, and the sensitive tonalities of poetic imagery on the other. Between a vanished past and hidden future, Larmee arrives.

CHILDREN & PRETEENS

"An object is capable of creating the place in which it is shown."
— Roni Horn

Larmee's works tend to reconstitute their contexts to such a degree that their contexts seem to be generated by them. This has, I feel, to do with the objects of Larmee's aesthetic and ideational interests. Children and preteens have persisted in Larmee's work. They disclose many of his central themes, such as the desire to live in a vitalized world and the processes of cultural transformation. With children and preteens, Larmee dons varied masks, manifests as varied avatars, and inhabits varied façades, all of which imply both possibility and constraint. Children and preteens seem to be a comfortable subject for Larmee, but reveal the nuances of life's unease. They signify a state of hesitance and tension. He seems (at times) to want to efface himself somewhat; to become semi-anonymous in order to escape the congestion of expectations pinning him into fixity. Blaise Larmee's preteens embody an alternately harsh and ethereal border between otherness and selfhood, between the self and the world. Preteens tilt. Their social

diagonality is blatant. Life has been consistently misrepresented as a movement—back and forth—from verticality to horizontality. The obvious diagonal nature of experience is hidden, spoken of in hushed tones of reticence, in spite of the fact that awake and aware cultural critics have recommended these modes of ideational and experiential diagonality since eras immemorial.

"ALTERNATIVE" COMICS

So-called bohemian and countercultural movements are too often marred by the most basic misjudgments (excessive and unprotected sex, adherence to rigid ideological stances, lack of playfulness) and "enjoy" the kind of hedonism that trades passionate, holistic pleasure for hollow kicks and entertainments. Epicureanism seems, in other words, prone to disintegrate from a rewarding investment of attention to pleasure into orgasmic, Dionysian emptiness. Final answers w/r/t the conundrum posed by the mercurial nature of Larmee and his aesthetic descendants might be ridiculous keys to search for, but w/r/t this enterprise I'm uncharacteristically optimistic because—in the breath-lit minutes since its inception—the movement in "comics" that Larmee helped to instigate is the re-emergence of a repressed necessity: in the neo-post-structural cartoonists' works, a new world of immense inclusion and relentless depth reaches the alive-but-in-its-death-throes old world of death, division, and insignificance; holding it with murderous love, splitting it open, and, in lacerating it, unleashing its millennia-worth of entrails as a fresh frontier. Each "fascism"-battered brain faces this new place, which is (seems to me) in a relaxed seated position in the middle of absolute plurality's headquarters: an old-dance-

A—B 3 Books, 2015
2 color offset
6 × 9 in

C—D Gallery View 1—2, 2014
digital image
3000 × 2000 px

3 Books

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blaiselarmee.com

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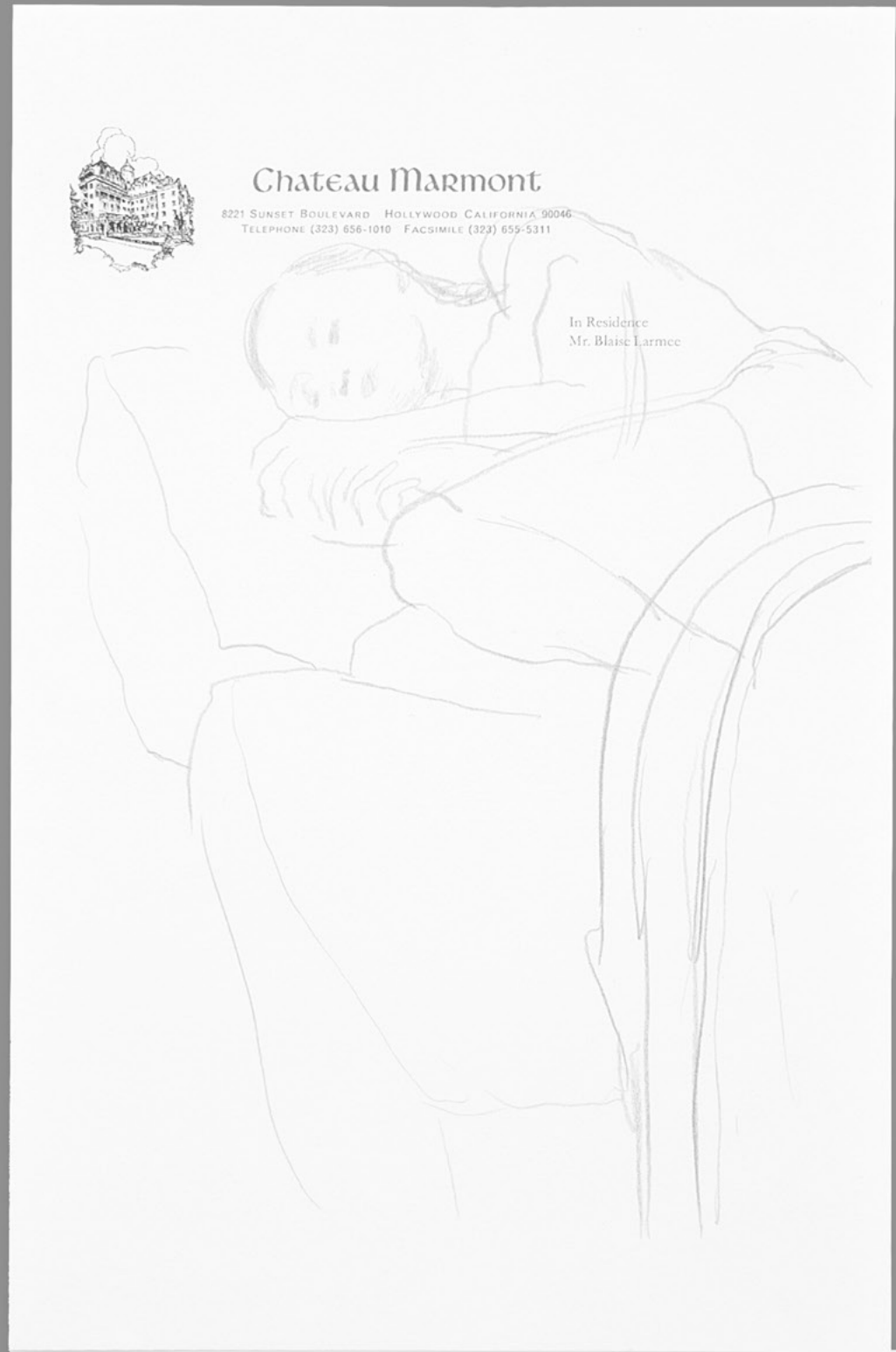
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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E



E Chateau Marmont 1, 2015
2 color offset print
6 × 9 in

F Untitled, 2015
ebook (unpublished)
6 × 9 in

G Gallery View 3, 2014
digital image
3000 × 2000 px

F



H



J—K



G



I

H—I Nudes, 2014
1 color risograph
6 × 9 in

J—K Gallery View 5—6, 2014
digital image
2500 × 1667 px

studio-like “church” of aesthetic rebirth. In this context, Larmée’s recent work demarcates a pivotal point in the semi-collective semi-subconscious of the U.S. where many hidden harmonies split wide a battle hymn of wounded interactions. Larmée’s preteens embody the harmony that rests moments ahead of comprehension, and the world of “comics” is made to reckon with a coded-but-ultimately-public power. In Larmée’s practice (which revolves as much around interviews, statements about art, talks, and so on) ideas are not allowed to calcify into sources of potential idol worship—and neither is his work. Instead, art pulls us toward itself, so that, while we’re aware of particular pieces, there is also always a kind of fuzzy background awareness of art as that which undergirds: something greater than the sum of its parts (because its parts are parts precisely because of the ways in which they relate to each other and to art as that set of innumerable acts in, with, and under life. It is not that works of art are hierophanies. This would imply that art is a “spiritual” “force” synonymous with life and/or a “cosmic” “source” of avatar-like manifestations of itself. Rather, art for Larmée seems to me to be the product (even the summation) of material forces as well as those material forces’ sources: Möbius strip teases well worth dedicating one’s life to.

A BEAUTIFUL HORIZON

As Joseph Timko writes in “The Geometry of the Beautiful Horizon,” the “Fabric of the World stretched smoothly across its Frame plays evenly against the Air [and] were we somehow to make our Way past the Edge of all this and to look back from the Outside, all the myriad Coherences would dissolve and disappear from View; for this Path ushers us to the other Sense of Without.” Art, for Larmée, seems to be conceived of as an inter-/active horizon against which particular works of art arise and relate. Art works are art’s work, then, more than their artists’ works. The artist, as much as the artist’s utensils, acts as an apparatus of art

itself, and should therefore be free of ego. The artist does what s/he must because it needs to be done for Art’s sake, not the sake of the artist’s “moral” “worth” or sense of self. The artist’s mastermindful naivety doesn’t preclude rumination. New truths reveal themselves and are absorbed into the arena of art—perfect in its eternal incompleteness. As with science, there is no (and can be no) creed, because there is no end in sight, and because the present and the future (and the insights and epiphanies that arise out of each) are never seen as the mere effects or results or workings-out of a more “sacred” past. In a strange way, cancel themselves not OUT but IN: into the non-all system of Art’s own evolution-via-revolution. Devotion is undertaken in actual time and material space, in actual and material inter-/actions. By refusing to let normativity (the lackluster shadow cast by the collective consciousness’s saturation in outmoded ideological systems) interfere with the ways in which one assists Art in the ongoing revelation of itself can the artist seize upon the delightful horizon: such seizures maintain a nearness to as well as a distance from Art.

AN AESTHETIC REPRESENTATIVE

In his role as an aesthetic representative of the new world of immense inclusion and relentless depth, Larmée wears masks that make him more himself than ever: less a particular self than an ultimate, unrealized one. (A “Self” we all share, we all are, perhaps? Rendered in a quintessentially present—if “mass” mediated—way?) In this role, Larmée reshapes the negative space of shared legacies of pain into a place of awake sacred relations: a Promised Land-like realm of plurality-consciousness that contains massive laughter as well as vast sadness. In this sense, at least, he has intersected horizontally, from well within the conventions of (“alternative”) “comics”. I suspect that the phallus paintings of the “divine madman” Drukpa Kunley were (at least at first) as inappropriate in his era and area as Jonathan Meese’s swastikas have been in t/his, in

ours. It was an enlightenment that allowed for openness to taboos in Kunley’s case. The unmoored, fear-haunted secularism that now runs the show sorely lacks that. Despite (and due to) his provocations, Drukpa Kunley was a teacher whose advice was heeded in his time and a sage esteemed to this day. We no longer heed the advice of those who are smart enough to break through the shit systems of oppression that lacerate the imagination and imprison the mind. Is it anything more than our collective sense of ennui and world-weariness that has allowed an artist like Jonathan Meese his success? If so, why hasn’t his contribution to contemporary thought been taken as seriously as it should be? Authentic devotion to Art is marked by a resolute orientation towards the materiality of our corporeal condition. While ideological conceptions (and thus presentations) of oneself are sentimental and pathetic—as people try to think themselves into or out of morality or greatness with the minds of others—devotional conceptions (and thus presentations) of oneself are mastermindful (and naïve in the best sense).

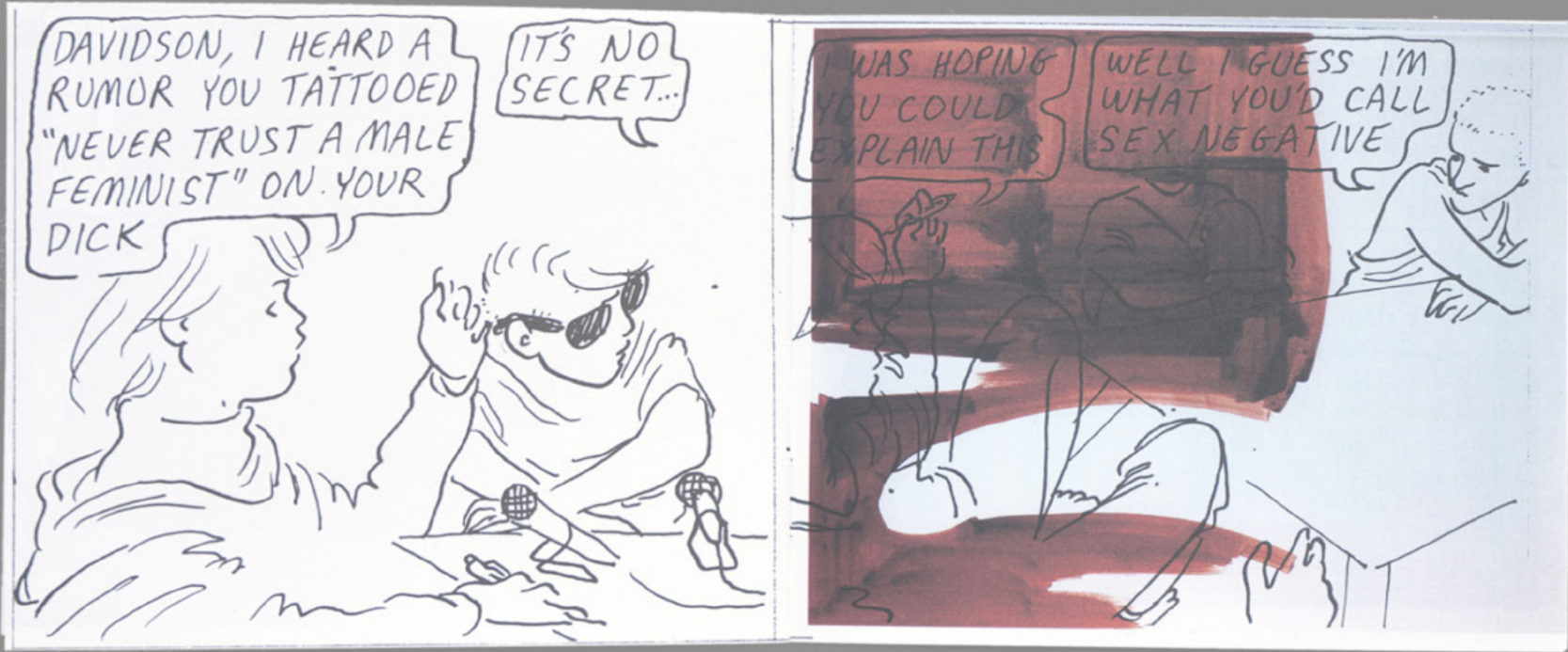
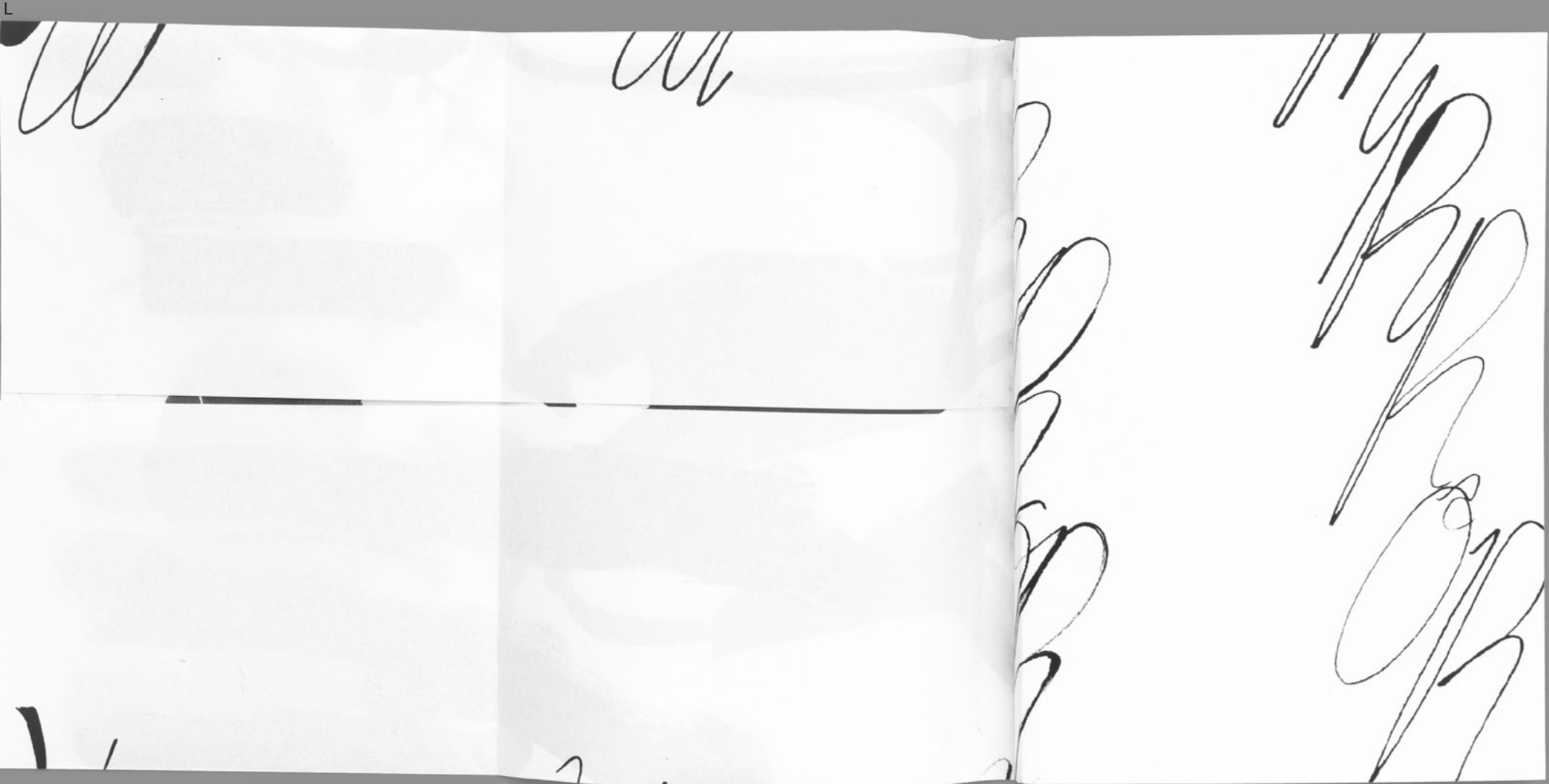
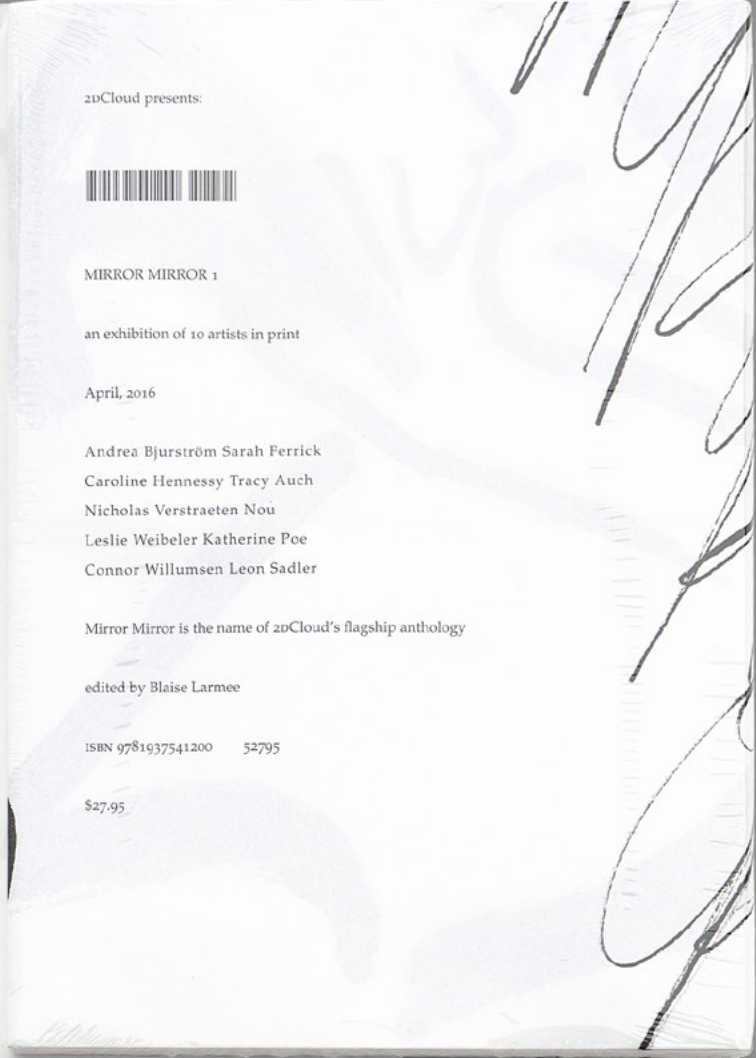
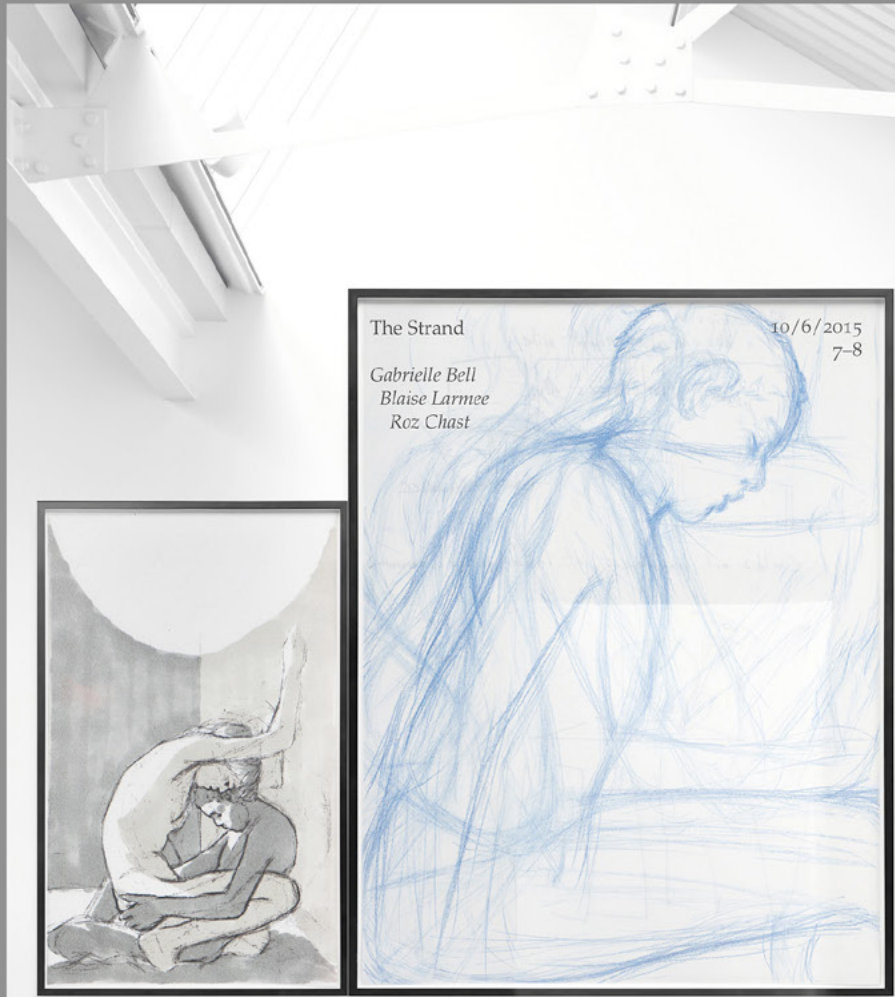
“INTERMISSION” / “RELATED CONTENT”
— Hauntological Manifestations of Repressed Public Trauma in Personal Expressions of Civic Experiences: an Assessment of the Recent Past as a Kind of Gentle Percolation of Ghosts (in the Derridean Sense) in the Aesthetics of the Non-Rhetorized Fashions of Jeopardized Essence

“The man who consciously pays no heed to fashion accepts its form just as much as the dandy does, only he embodies it in another category, the former in that of exaggeration, the latter in that of negation. Indeed, it occasionally happens that it becomes fashionable in whole bodies of a large class to depart altogether from the standards set by fashion.”

— Georg Simmel

“Minimalism has become the unofficial language of contemporary commemoration.”
— Erika Doss

If all the fashions of the semi-apocalyptic present moment were to be combined into some odd but bland aesthetic “item” (as denim was the pre-semi-apocalyptic item-of-items) and the location of immense phenomenological potential—as a parameter pounded into the material with the chisel of participation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HG8tqEUTlvs>), what would our item of items be? It may not be possible to know, but it is impossible for me even to guess, for the aesthetic blessing of this moment in cultural history—since the linearity of history has everything to do with the civic experience of a present “moment” or series of moments—is the passionate semi-embrace of the radical (albeit safe) “other” in forms that seem (at first) somewhat bizarre, but are, in fact, not inventive but merely innovative, not fresh or new but a trick in which old aesthetics and ideals are made into new-seeming but ultimately unhelpful assemblages of staleness. This passionate semi-embrace is incomplete because—and one can feel this if one’s antennae are healthy and honed—there is a deeper terror on the inside of the ostensibly “new” “tolerance”—by the masses—of the quirky, the weird, the bizarre, and the rebellious in fashion, music, art, and so on. It is not as radical an embrace as it could/should be, and has never been. If, say, massive images of fleas were to be plastered in eerie, photo-realistic detail on t-shirts across these United States, this ennui-ridden latest phase in the maturation of history—this feeling of being at/in the “end” of history—would have its cluster of nameless mascots. Out culture’s interests are not new. Underlying statements about future fashions is the possibility of vast plurality and a pouring out of repressed “insanities”: headspaces that—compared to our more common neuroses, which hide and deny those inherent “insanities” behind “real” “life”—would shine with an unparalleled loveliness. The haunted fashions of this moment both highlight repressed public trauma and put it into perspective repressed public traumas’ impact: the odd, auratic nature of dark but numinous incidents, post-rhetoriza-



BLAISE LARMÉE

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O—Q Comets Comets, 2014
4 color offset
5 x 4 in

R Gallery View 9, 2015
digital image
3000 x 2000 px

M

L Gallery View 7, 2015
digital image
5744 x 3829 px

M—N Mirror Mirror, 2015
offset
176 x 250 mm

R

N

tion—perforations in the makeup of material realities. An understanding of presentation as a paramount horizon upon which sits the possibility of inclusive communion in the seismic impishness of heartaches and blisses immense and perspectives rooted in grief both belong and do not belong to the half-hidden signifiers who light the inside of what was impossible before it was strewn into the newness of a real space’s particularities. These horizons are representatives of an unknown “beyond”. In today’s modes of self-presentation, there can be heard very little in the way of meaningful innovation. We have borrowed overmuch from the past. Fashion—the most recognizable extension and expression of how we are now situated between aesthetic and ideological horizons (the “west/sunset” and “east/sunrise” of phenomenological possibility)—is made to contend with its seemingly irreconcilable roles. Some adopt “their” fashion as a kind of shorthand for authenticity, hoping to convey both truths and lies about themselves to shape (as best they can) how others read them, as texts. The more extreme the statement, the more controlled the reading, so that most of us opt for less extreme statements that are thus more open-ended. (Most of us do not rely on fashion in anything like an exclusive way communicatively, but tailor others’ perceptions of us via conversational and action-based methods as well, of course.) Fashion also allows for acting, however, and not merely on some ghettoized stage (as an obvious performance) but in daily life. It can do as much—if not more—to hide those who wish to conceal themselves as to reveal those who wish to express their “authentic” public personalities. In the aesthetic realities of traumatized sites and symbols—in which some kind of persecution has been internalized—we witness, over and over, a present moment that, enduring abuse, performs a kind of self-emptying in which bits of histories (distressing and/or welcome) are invited in, and manifest as modes that not infrequently celebrate marginalized, repressed, and persecuted existential possibilities and positions: awed silence before scarred perfec-

tion. Over and over, we meet the open arms of a panenangelic personal experience and refuse, for the pettiest of reasons, such a boundless embrace. Because of this (and, of course, other reasons) loveliness tends to point, in the realm of nuanced and non-rhetoricized immediacy, not to itself, but to the more recognizable public traumas that a culture (as a personalized whole) undergoes. In so-called renaissance after so-called renaissance, humankind has tended to trade vertical for horizontal modes of motion w/r/t the ideals of production and the production of ideals, and thus the perception of realities—and possibilities. Passionate dances enter, permeate, and exit the mind, but the laceration of the possible (i.e. the human psyche as an arena, or an origin, of endless potential interactions between endless and able-to-be-realized potentials) is an immense laceration, in length and in depth. This incision stretches from horizon to horizon. The cut (v.) occurs in one traumatic moment and then the cut (n.) oozes traumas from the past into our minds. These traumas enter and permeate, as passions do, but must be kicked out. Ideological phantoms, specters, etc. are more alive now than ever before. Now—between the past and the revolution that will be brought about by advents in neuroscience—is a time more haunted by ideological phantoms than ever before. The advents in neuroscience will alter our understanding of what it means to be human, and likely eliminate some, if not most, of the hauntological pathogens of pathos that infect the present with memories of the past, ideologies from the past, and ideas (all incomplete if not incorrect) about the future. It will be more marvelous and more extreme than most of us will be prepared for. How do we revitalize the present? For starters, by living in it. Many have perfected the art of presentness psychologically, and have touched lives. The effect has yet to reach beyond the realm of the psychological and (at most) interpersonal into the realm of the social and impersonally political in a major way. Politics is far too tied to all that is elsewhere in time, haunted by the ideologies and traumatic ca-

lamities of the past and haunted by the suspicion that the same kinds of traumatic calamities will happen in the future if not curbed by the same kinds of tired and outdated ideologies: literally a self-defeating system in which the same note is played o’er n’ o’er. Presentness is generally thought of (as I’ve thought of it thus far) in terms of time, but spatial concerns are no less important. It would seem we’re as situated in space as in time, but our spatial situation is actually just as incalculably nuanced, if not more nuanced. It has, I feel, to do with how connected we are, as parts, to the whole of life. A human with a canine sense of smell would be nowhere locked alone in a room with nothing smell. Most of us would prefer a less intense sense of smell that in a world of aromas to a perfect—but useless—olfactory sense in a context in which it has no use. This calls attention to how we are, for all intents and purposes, “one with” so much. Each bleeds into more bleeds into much bleeds back, funnel-like, into some and—once more—one. Not only are we connected to each other and “nature” in the pastoral, pre-Industrial Revolution sense, but to nature as that vast whole made up of toxic waste, nuclear weapons, plastic, disease, and technological innovation just as much as animals, vegetables, minerals, and other “natural” facets of nature. In a speech titled “Powers of the Hoard: Artistry and Agency in a World of Vibrant Matter”, Jane Bennett says, “In *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illness*, Ian Hacking makes a persuasive argument that some forms of mental illness arise “only at certain times and places,” and are semantically located between a virtue celebrated in the culture and its accompanying vice. Hacking examines the strange epidemic of fugueurs (compulsive walkers) in 1887 in France and shows how it arose in the space between the culture’s celebration of traveling abroad and its pathologization of vagrancy. What this particular virtue-vice pair expressed was the thematization of physical mobility as an area of ethical and political concern. If the fugueur was the madman for his time and place, as

hysteria has been called the prototypical psychopathology of Victorian England, then perhaps hoarding is the madness appropriate to a political economy devoted to over-consumption, planned obsolescence [...] and vast mountains of disavowed waste.” Bennett asked, “What counts as the material of vital materialism? Is it only human labor and the socio-economic entities made by men using raw materials? Or is materiality more potent than that? How can political theory do a better job of recognizing the active participation of nonhuman forces in every event and every stabilization? Is there a form of theory that can acknowledge a certain ‘thing-power,’ that is, the irreducibility of objects to the human meanings or agendas they also embody?” and in her talk said the hoarders on the TV show *HOARDERS* recognized a taboo against animistic thinking. So if history exists in space as well as time (as it does) and if a certain amount of existential horror is the father of fashion (as it is) and if repressed public trauma bleeds out of us, Gethsemane-sweat-like, into private and (ultimately) public life (as it must) how much does humiliation (or the fear of it) factor into the trauma-haunted minimalism that percolates (a “ghost”) at the heart of contemporary mainstream fashion. If human bodies (and faces) are non-blank non-slates (as, of course, they are) the impact of this fact on fashion—and therefore self-expression in nonverbal and inactive ways; ways that rely on ostensibly “chosen” signifiers—is immense, and leads to a certain inevitable, market-driven dearth of expressive potentials. In painting, an artist can count on the blankness of her canvas. Fashion has no such reliable sameness as a starting point, and is, therefore, inevitably imbued with a certain amount of what might be called “compositional cynicism” from the get go; which could, I hereby hypothesize, have negative interpersonal (and even sociopolitical) effects. The lackluster state of contemporary fashion (and the culture of carelessness that has arisen around this famine of flamboyance) should garner more attention than it does.

V Nudes, 2014
risograph
8.5 x 11 in

W Untitled
pencil on paper
9 x 5 in

X Sonatine, 2013
4 color offset
8.5 x 11 in

"Nudes"
Blaise Larmee

Published by Studio Operative
studio-operative.co.uk

© Blaise Larmee & Studio Operative, 2014

W



X



S Gallery View 10, 2015
digital image
1280 x 1920 px

T Untitled
ink, iodine-based ink on paper
12 x 12 in

U Chateau Marmont 2, 2015
digital image
4139 x 5518 px

U



S

2001

The screen becomes a luminous canvas that buzzes like a bumblebee; rain-bathed not infrequently in small gods’ tears, eroticized proximity feels itself to be a violence creative: explosive motions’ encounters with slick surfaces. This piece, passed to the public in the relay race of aestheticized ideation, pitches another visual hymn of post-industrial passion into astral orbit—violet bulbs of adolescence that bloom like karate wounds. As David Foster Wallace wrote: “the sad way the street smelled at twilight, when all of the houses became the same color and all of their porch lights came on like bulwarks against something without name. His eyes when he turned from the door didn’t scare me, but the feeling was somehow related to being scared.”

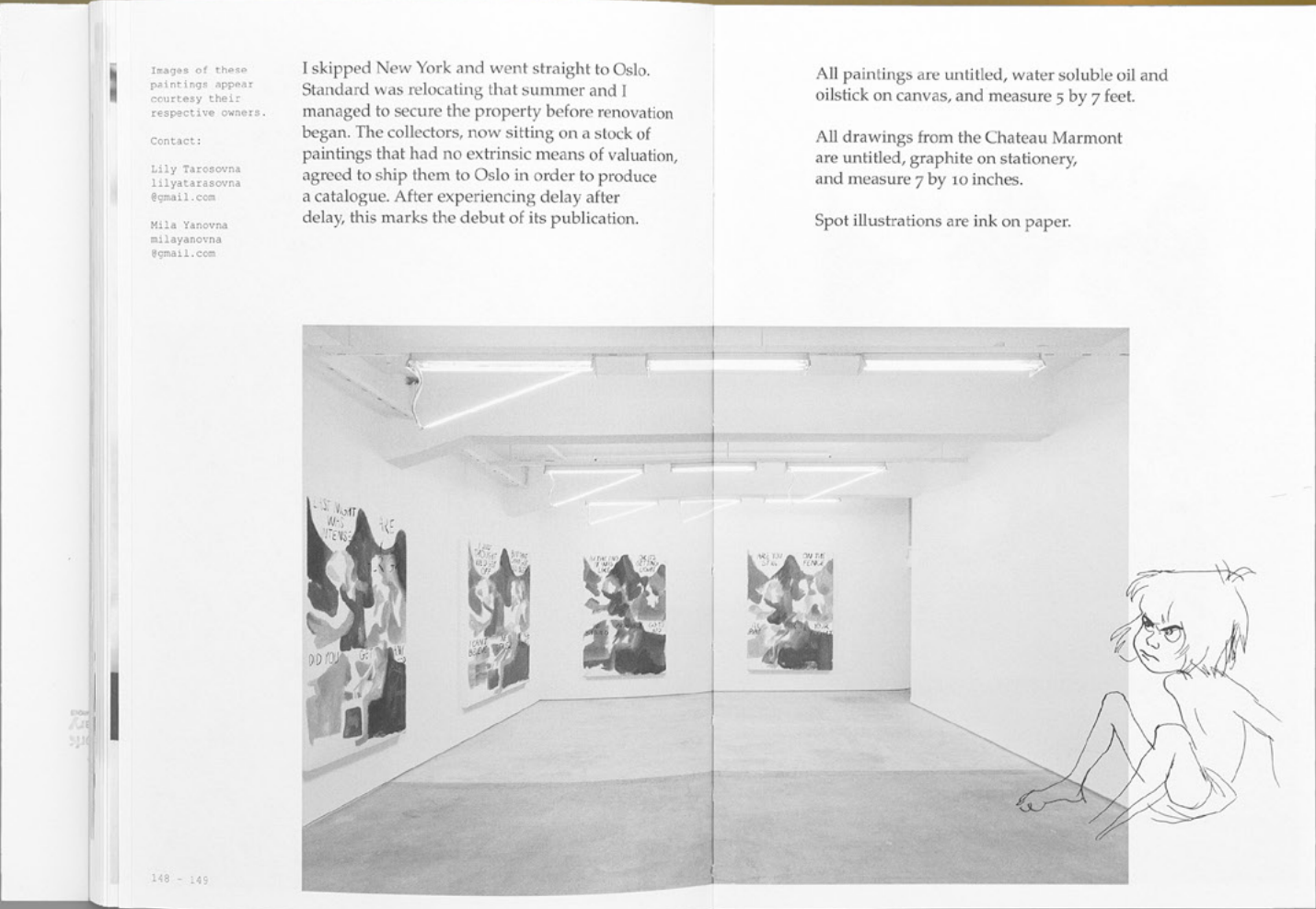
3 BOOKS / CONCLUSION

In 3 Books, Larmee analyzes with dazzling scrupulosity the voluminous, inevitable melancholia of aesthetics-in-time. Filled with secret hopes and fears, full of the dance of vibrant matter, instilled with both the felicities of nuanced expression and the bombast of comics’ avant-garde, 3 Books erupts as a set of auratic eruptions of psychic dissonance into the yet-to-be arbitrated context of the contemporary condition. If the work as a whole forms a fever dream, the divisions between each third marks a moment for us to weep ourselves awake. And if passion lattices the laughter that rises as loaves of cozy bread between dull dreams, snow-capped summits of rushed recitations rise like steeples in the breeze of Larmee’s incalculable influence.

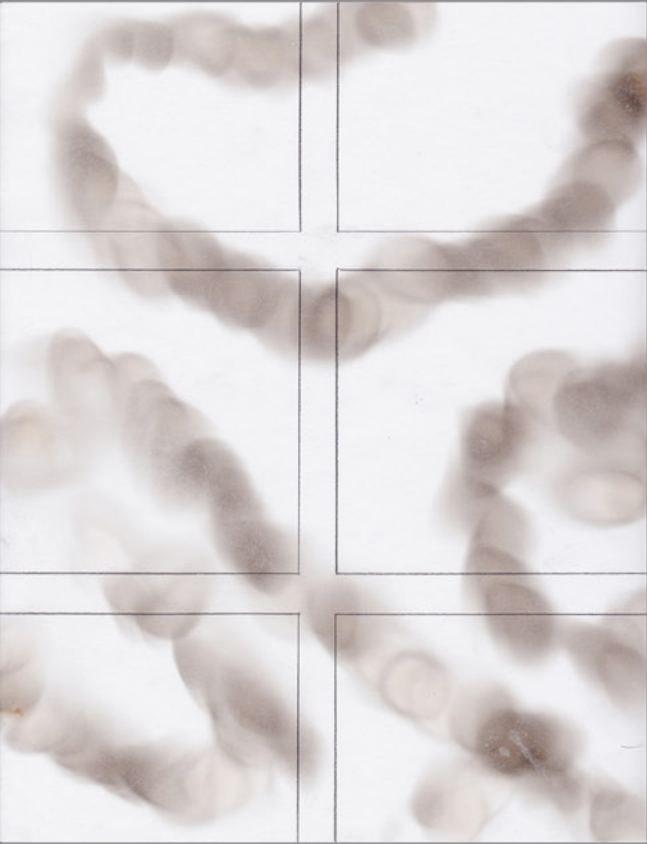
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- Ø Untitled, 2013
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Y



Z



Ø