

Big Shoe Diaries

Monday, April 4, 2016

Artist Interview: Tad Beck



TB: I am honored to hear that Colby thinks of me in that light. It's the first time I am hearing that. I think my best mentor was Mike Kelley, who was an exceptional listener. He took whatever was coming out of my mouth seriously and gave it time and thought. He was exceptionally generous with his time and his mind. I felt like I had his undivided attention even in a crowded room. While we had many great conversations while I studied with him, I think his life and his work were the true inspirations. I am very lucky to have his voice in the back of my head while I am working in my studio.

Tad Beck (b. 1968, Exeter, New Hampshire) received a B.F.A. in Photography from the School of Visual Arts, New York, in 1991, and an M.F.A. in Fine Art from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California, in 2003. He lives and works in New York City and Maine. We asked Tad for a brief interview in advance of his showing at Volume in Los Angeles that opens this Thursday evening. Some of the works presented feature Colby as a model.

BSD: I think many people know that Colby looks to you as a mentor in the art world. What, to you, are the most important roles a mentor can play to an aspiring artist?





Colby 8, 2014, 26.5 x 40"

BSD: Rephotography (making photographs of photographs) is something we see commonly employed in social media posts, amateur family photography and "then and now" architecture photos. What does your process look like for staging your photo shoots with models?

TB: I'm an artist who has always been interested in what photography does, what it documents, and what it transforms. Rephotography has given me a way to exaggerate the transformations created by the camera. Photography has grown into something new in the age of mobile device cameras and social media. It is infinitely more accessible and more detailed, and our lives are more saturated with photographic imagery than ever before. I have subjects reenact earlier images primarily because it puts heavy importance on context and location. Context changes in these works, but the subjects and their body positions usually do not. Proust wrote about reading the same text in different locations at different times, and how it took on different meanings as a result. Context changes everything.

For example, for the series "Bicycle Crash," I provided the dancer Connor Voss with images of crashes from the European racing circuit to use as sources for improvised movement. He performed atop a greatly enlarged photograph of my studio wall, subtly revealed by the paper seam bisecting the composition. The blank studio wall is a place of questions, possibilities, failure, and success. The resulting images combine moments of bodily chaos and control. I am particularly interested in how the deliberate repetition of accidental, improvised, or spontaneous movement allows it to generate new meanings.



Bicycle Crash 4, 2015, 16.5 x 40"

BSD: Specifically, what did this look like in working with Colby? What were the images based on?

TB: After working with choreographers for my series "Double Document," I became interested in the body as medium, of movement as a kind of language. After getting to know Colby, I thought that expanding my definition of the performative body would be really interesting. I was initially concerned that some of the choreographers I'd worked with might be concerned that I was equating dance and sex work, but none were. Dancers fully appreciate the way the body sometimes becomes a commodity in performance. To start the project, I

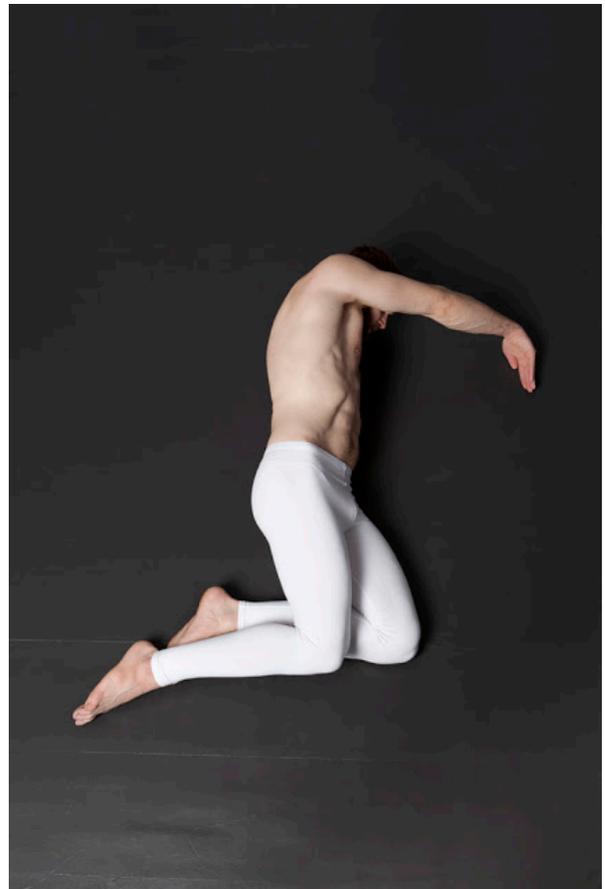
went through a number of Colby's recent videos looking for body positions that seemed to convey something beyond their original erotic intention. Pulling the screen grabs for the series with Colby was interesting because I understand he never watches his own films. In order for there to be an image for him to reenact, I had to digitally paint over the images from his films so that the location and other actor were entirely blocked out. We tried to match the poses as carefully as we could to the original screen grabs with Colby on the floor by himself. I initially toyed with the idea of having Colby nude in the photographs, but found that photographing him in dance tights de-eroticized the work and made the connection between sex and choreography a bit more explicit.



Double Document Rashaun Mitchell and Silas Riener 2
2013, 49 x 42"

TB: I started shooting the body as an undergrad in college. It's always been of interest to me. Even in classical museum collections, I find myself gravitating to works that include the human form. I've been working with the human body for so long that everything else has almost become like a secondary language for me. That said, I have always tried to use the body as a way of getting at broader ideas and themes.

For years now, I have attempted works that do not include the body. These works have mostly been frustrations and have never been exhibited. However, this past year I started working with hand tools that I did not recognize. After almost a year of difficult experimentation I finally found results that I am happy with. These works, entitled "Blind Spot," will be included in the exhibition with VOLUME at South of Sunset with the Colby works. Every good Yankee boy has a certain "do-it-yourself" proficiency with tools; it's a bit embarrassing to not know how to use a tool, and as such the objects I selected were even more interesting to me. However, although the works are my first that do not involve the human figure in a long time, I think there is still a connection to the body. Hand tools function as an extension of the body, as something the body "uses" in a way that is not that dissimilar from the way the camera "uses" bodies in my other work.



Colby 1, 2014, 26.5 x 40"

BSD: Can you tell us a little bit about what it's like to be an artist in the context of living between New York City and a small town in Maine? What do you notice about your practice in each of these places?

TB: Both places are on islands that are about the same size, but the island in Maine has a year-round population of only about a thousand. Both islands tend to attract artists that do not fit in elsewhere. Marsden Hartley and Robert Indiana are two queer artists that have worked in both places. I'm not sure why this fishing town has attracted queer artists, but I do have a number of theories that might be too long winded at the moment. It certainly isn't

Provincetown, though. I personally find that the energy of Manhattan keeps me going. The city keeps me informed on what my peers are up to and also gives me the opportunity to have people visit the studio which leads to some great conversations. Maine gives me the freedom to experiment and the space to think. I also have wonderful conversation partners there, although their work is very different from my own; those friendships and conversations might not have happened, or have taken on the same intensity, in a place like New York where it is easier to isolate yourself with people whose work and interests are closer to your own.



Blind Spot 31, 2016, 24.66 x 20.53"

Tad Beck's work, including works featuring Colby, will be on view in Los Angeles at an event presented by VOLUME at South of Sunset this Thursday evening.

Posted by Karl Marxxx