



Editor's Pick

Tad Beck: Palimpsest

“In honor of acquiring the presciently — and probably unintentionally — homoerotic 1899 masterpiece *Wrestlers* by Victorian painter Thomas Eakins, LACMA has organized *Manly Pursuits*, an exhibition examining the recurrence of sports imagery in Eakins' work, as well as his little-known connections with LA history. In conjunction with this special exhibition, LACMA also presents *Palimpsest*, a series of photography-based works by LA artist Tad Beck, whose examinations of queer culture and the male-on-male gaze are heavily influenced by conventions of classical art history in general, and the enigmatic, sexually charged work of Thomas Eakins in particular. For the *Palimpsest* series, and related limited-edition book, Beck restages images from Eakins' *Grafly Album* with thoroughly modern, smart, and sexy twists, both embracing and subverting assumptions about how the human body is represented in art.”

Shana Nys Dambrot, Flavorpill

Note:

LACMA Art Catalogues Bookstore hosts a book release reception on Monday, August 16 (Free, 5-7pm) featuring Tad Beck in conversation with Robbert Flick.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art says...

Tad Beck (b. 1968) is a Los Angeles-based artist working in photography and video installation. He is fascinated by the male body, artist-model dynamics, and queer history. One of his strongest influences has been the art of Thomas Eakins. This installation features photographs from Beck's most recent series, *Palimpsest*—a response to Eakins's *Grafly Album*, which will be on view in [Manly Pursuits](#), loaned from the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. Eakins' original photographs are of his students, nearly all nude and posed singly and in groups in various

arrangements. They suggest choreographed productions. Beck restaged Eakins' scenes, using models from his own social circle and photographed them and inserted the new figures into the original photographic settings, often leaving in anachronistic elements such as wristbands and hairstyles to subtly highlight his digital manipulation of the originals.

He then surrounded the new photographs in silver repoussé frames to create a fictional history in which the images were affectionately displayed. The frames encroach on the scenes' images and sometimes crop limbs and heads. Beck then indexically photographed each image with its frame against a monochromatic black field. Enlarging and printing the works in 42-inch squares, Beck juxtaposes the aesthetics and mores of the Victorian era with the era of conceptual photography and minimalist aesthetics. He foregrounds the Victorian era's aesthetics of softness and ornamentation against the stark, flat, and modern background, creating a dense web of meaning and historical layering that comprises a twenty-first century palimpsest.



Tad Beck, *Palimpsest One*, 2009