

TAD BECK

PALIMPSEST

VERMÄHLICHUNG

DEDICATED TO GRANT WAHLQUIST

Special thanks belong to the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute for their support of this project. Studio visits by Ilene Fort, Bill Arning, Noëllie Roussel, Brian Allen, Michael Ned Holte, Austen Bailly, Erika Vogt, Shannon Ebner, Sherin Guirguis, Kelly Barrie, Robbert Flick, Jeff Cain, Lisa Ann Auerbach, Jennifer Locke, Diana Cherbuliez, Carter Mull, Elana Mann, Claudia Bucher and Robert Crouch provided critical insight and advice in the creation of the works. My colleagues and students at the USC Roski School of Fine Arts provided much needed support.

Without the enthusiasm of my friends, Tristan Jackson and Oakley Jackson, these works could never have happened.

Hardcover Limited Edition of Fifty

TAD BECK: PALIMPSEST
Tad Beck
Published by Snippershins Press

TAD BECK: PALIMPSEST is copyright © 2010
Tad Beck, all rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced without the written permission of the artist or publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-935489-05-4

Available through the artist
www.tadbeck.com
Printed in Los Angeles by A&I

TAD BECK

PALIMPSEST

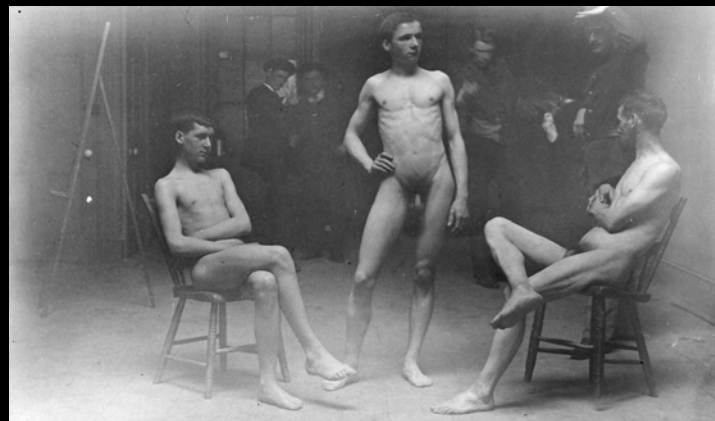
PREFACE

I first met the artist Tad Beck in 2004, shortly before I became director of the Addison Gallery of American Art. Tad was working on a four channel video depicting nude young men trying to keep their balance on a floating, bobbing log in a Maine quarry. I thought it was a marvelous, modern take on Muybridge's locomotion studies of people and animals. Yet on a personal level, that encounter with Tad served as a link between my "old world" as a curator at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute and my "new world" as a museum director. From that meeting with Tad, in some small way the "Palimpsest" series was born.

When I was a curator at the Clark, the museum purchased a photography album of significant importance. The album, hardly known, belonged to the family of Charles Grafly, the American sculptor and educator who was a student of Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in the mid to late 1880s. Probably assembled by Grafly, the album has the feel of a portfolio. The photographs are of uniform size, each one glued to a page. The processing and lighting are uniform. The figures we are able to identify were students of Eakins, and many of the photographs are consistent in style with many photographs Eakins was taking in the 1880s. Figures posing in one photograph sometimes pose in two or three others. The most remarkable thing about the album is that many of the figures depicted are nude men. In light of Tad's work, we chatted about the album. I thought he would enjoy knowing more about it, so when I returned to the Addison I called the Clark's curator of prints, drawings, and photographs, who kindly sent a copy of it to Tad. The album since became the basis for the "Palimpsest" series.

The Grafly album features twenty one photographs. Some are straightforward poses—a string of three nude men seeming to strike the poses we see in thousands of drawings of male nudes by advanced art students. Others are frankly absurd. One depicts a nude man posed on a bicycle and another a nude hanging upside down from a rung of a ladder supported on each side by another nude. Nude and clothed figures sometimes pose together to create a mood of incongruity. One group photograph is inscrutable, suggesting as it does the reenactment of a popular contemporary melodrama unknown to us.

Indeed, the album offers multiple levels of mystery. Over and over, in looking through the album, the viewer feels the sense of having stumbled on a lost, secret, and very private world. I think in part this comes from the our views of male nudity, which historically has not nearly as great a part of visual culture as female nudity and thus leads us to read the scenes as furtive, as if we are looking at something that should not be seen. The place of the male nude in the art of Eakins's time was especially nuanced. On the one hand, the male nude had been a fixture in teaching draftsmanship in art schools throughout Europe and, to a lesser extent, in the United States. Men posed nude in a way that made them useful to artists. The male nude was firmly fixed in the vocabulary of classicism, whether in sculpture or in architecture. On the other, nudity of any kind, male or female, was a far more difficult subject in the realm of the other arts. Muybridge's locomotion series of photographs, which included male nudes, was not published until 1887. Except for this body of work, there is very little precedent in nineteenth century American art for Eakins's male nudes or the nudes in the Grafly album. Not until the early twentieth century and the emergence of body builder photography did the male nude or anything approaching it began even to penetrate the fringe of widely available art.



Circle of Thomas Eakins (American, 1844-1916)
*Three Male Nudes: Two Seated, One Standing
with Spectators in Background, 1886*

from "The Grafly Album" (folio 3 verso)

Albumen print, mounted in album

© Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown,
Massachusetts, 2001.4.6 (Photo by Michael Agee)

A further, larger mystery is the role of Eakins. Was he there when the photographs were staged or taken? Did he choreograph them? One of Tad's discoveries in reenacting the poses in the Grafly album is the complexity and difficulty of many of them. To me, this suggests a disciplined organizer dwelling not at the fringes but at the center of the Grafly photographs, a mind with a specific and well developed vision of what they should be. Personally, I think the attribution should be changed to Eakins himself.

The "Palimpsest" series starts with the mysteries the Grafly album offers us. We know some but not all of the figures. We do not know why Grafly collected these particular works, who staged them, and what many of them mean. So much has been lost to time, partially erased, that they invite another take reflecting our times. Recovering and cherishing lost times is at the heart Tad's project.

Tad's engagement with the work of Eakins hardly started with the Grafly album. Tad discovered Eakins via the Addison's great prize fighting painting, *Salutat* (1898), one of Eakins's many explorations of the male nude. Eakins loved depicting the nude, normally via photography, not for any political reason - Tad aptly observes in his interview that a gay artist's take on the male nude in our day almost has to have some political dimension - but largely through the same fascination with structure that led him to go to autopsies. An element of hedonism creeps into some of Eakins's nudes, especially the Arcadian nudes, but the Grafly models, tautly muscular but extraordinarily thin, seem to invite not fantasies of paradise but close looking at every bone and every crevice in the body.

In thinking about Tad's approach to structure in his work, particularly the work in this series, I prefer the word "structuring" as more precise given the technical difficulties of reenacting the poses of the Grafly album with contemporary models and then digitally inserting them into the original Grafly album photographs. Subtly but clearly we understand that select men in the "Palimpsest" series have haircuts and adornments like tattoos and bracelets that did not exist in the 1880s, and this is part of Tad's achievement. I would even offer that the body types of

the two different eras, ours and Grafly's, are different based on our different diets and exposure to physical activity. For a moment the mysteries of the Grafly album seem subverted as the world of 2009 has inserted itself in the world of Eakins through technology, imagination, and the physical ability of the living models to recreate the album's poses. The recreated poses, digital acrobatics, framing, and setting in a black backdrop suggest a formidable process of construction leading ultimately to a reconstruction of the past.

Tad takes the theme of captivity further by surrounding the recreated photographs in ornate and intrusive late nineteenth-century style frames. At the same time the new photographs seem set in a jewel box, precious but confined within set boundaries. The frames complement the photographs in that both frames and Tad's recreated poses – incongruous at time and at times cryptic or baffling – seem to evoke a Victorianism run amok. Taken together, the silver Repoussé frames, the dark interiors, and the mysterious, sometimes contorted poses suggest something to be admired and puzzled over in private, taking us back to the taboo of the male nude in Eakins's time. Of course, photographing the male nude today is a thriving proposition, but Tad reminds us through the "Palimpsest" series that this was hardly always the case.

Brian T. Allen

The Mary Stripp & R. Crosby Kemper Director
Addison Gallery of American Art

HAUNTING THOMAS EAKINS: TAD BECK AND MICHAEL NED HOLTE IN CONVERSATION

MICHAEL NED HOLTE: I was planning to start by asking you about the first work by Thomas Eakins you remember seeing. And then you mentioned it.

TAD BECK: Yes, it was *Salutat* (1898). I remember being lectured to on the painting as part of my first high school art class but also feeling a little embarrassed to look at it because it had prominently featured a male ass. And as a 15-year-old male who didn't know what homosexual desire was about, it made me really uncomfortable.

But I was also fascinated that it was a really important painting that looked like somebody with a wedgie, which did make funny sense to a 15-year-old who was recently introduced to wedgies.

MNH: Were you seeing it in reproduction?

TB: No, I was really lucky to see it person. We were at the Addison Gallery of American Art—it's one of the highlights of their collection. The wedgie is just about at eye level.

MNH: You said that you weren't immediately aware that the figure in the painting is a boxer.

TB: I actually only recently learned that it's a boxer. At first, I thought it was a track runner celebrating his victory, which had something to do with the clothing, which looked more like something somebody would run in. I think it was a little bit effeminate for boxing. It was butch like Mark Spitz, or butch like Bruce Jenner, but not like Mohammed Ali. I think the athlete will always be a track star to me in a way. Teenage truths are hard to let go of.

MNH: So, perhaps it's not a surprise that Eakins plays such a prominent role in your current "Palimpsest" series. In fact, you even said that in some ways Eakins has haunted your studio. At what point did you become aware of Eakins emerging in your work as some kind of specter?

TB: I was working on the video installation *Roll* (2003) and had a studio visit with Jack Goldstein. He said that I should really take a look at Eakins' painting *The Swimming Hole* (1884-85), because my location was stunningly similar to his.

At first, I was passionately disinterested in that con-

nection. I didn't understand how a 120-year-old painting could possibly be pertinent to a video installation. But when I looked at an image of the painting I did see a strong visual connection between my location and Eakins'.

MNH: Are you familiar with the location depicted in *The Swimming Hole*?

TB: Yes. It's a river outside of Philadelphia. And mine was a granite quarry. So they weren't actually very similar locations, but in two dimensions they very much look like the same location.

But, that's just the initial visual connection. It became kind of spooky when I realized that the figure treading water in *The Swimming Hole* was Eakins, because I was also treading water to shoot the footage for my video piece. There was even a similar gaze and power dynamic between the artist and models.

MNH: Is the two-channel video *Stroke* (2005-6) the next thing you did after *Roll*?

TB: There was *Bipod* (2004) in between, but *Stroke* was really the next big move forward.

MNH: And were you thinking about Eakins more consciously when it came to *Stroke*? Eakins, of course, had also done rowing paintings.

TB: I was interested in a connection to Eakins but not such a direct connection. I thought I was actually kind of safe because I didn't give my rowers any oars. But then I discovered an Eakins painting, *Wrestlers* (1899), where there is an almost-naked man on an indoor rower in the background.

MNH: Were you exploring anachronism by having them use a rowing machine rower instead of a set of oars?

TB: I was really interested in varieties of quality of experience. And simulation. What does it mean to see my work as a video as opposed to being there in person? How do you compare rowing with oars in a big fishing dory with working out on an indoor rower? I really started to question whether my work is performance art rather than video

or photography. Time is a bit more abstract, especially in Maine where history and the current day coexist all the time.

MNH: Is it performance art?

TB: That's a tricky question. It depends on whose definition of performance art you are using. Being a bit of a purist, I would say my work is not performance art. But I do think my work reacts quite a bit to the documentation of performance art that we often end up seeing. There are artists who have been canonized as performance artists whom I consider to be photographers. I love the photographs of Dennis Oppenheim.

MNH: What is your relationship to the athletic male body? Do you think it's the same as it is for Eakins?

TB: Well, I would say I'm clear about my relationship to the athletic male body, whereas Eakins' seems more ambiguous to me personally. You know, I don't even know if people were acknowledged as homosexual in Eakins' era, certainly not in the way we do now. There is a quote of his, something along the lines of, "The only thing I can imagine more beautiful than a naked woman's body is a naked man's body." And I would say that yeah, I would probably fall right in line with that.

MNH: Well, he didn't have to imagine it. He got to see plenty of them.

TB: That's the truth. I think that his relationship to physicality is a little bit more scientific than mine. He was so obsessed with knowing how the human body worked that surgery became a major aspect of his subject matter. Seeing the insides of a human body was similar to taking a photograph of a naked body, in some sense, because it would instruct him on how things are supposed to look when he put his brush to canvas.

For me, there is a spectacle of sport that I'm interested in capturing. And I'm really interested in the politics of the naked male body, which I think is something that Eakins was not into. I actually don't think he ever understood that some of the decisions he made—having his students pose nude, for example—would be scandalous. I don't think he intentionally lost his job in Philadelphia. I think he was kind of surprised that people were so shocked by the male nude. I don't think he was in touch with the

American puritanical repression of what a naked male body looks like. He was sort of a hippie, a Victorian hippie.

MNH: When it comes to thinking about your own work, there is an erotic that's present and sort of impossible to put to the side. Nudity can be innocent, but we can't really look at your images naively or innocently, and maybe the best way of getting at it would be to ask about your use of models and your relationship to them.

TB: In some ways, it's hard for me to talk about eroticism and about my models in the same sentence, even though it's clearly something that exists. My models are very close friends of mine that I've known since they were little kids. So, I have a long-standing, nonsexual relationship with the models. I've started thinking my models are almost like my dance troupe, and I'm a bit like a choreographer.

My models all live in Maine and they're very enthusiastic. You know, they'll bring ideas to me of something that they would like to do, even if they might not always be fully aware of what I'm doing with my work. But I feel like their enthusiasm and their friendship is a very important aspect to the work, unlike anonymous models that one might find on Craigslist and pay \$100. There is at least a partial collaboration, a participation in the work.

MNH: But, you are interested in eroticism, right?

TB: Yes, of course. The first read of my work is usually erotic. But in many ways I feel like it's a surface issue, and it's a surface issue that's almost opaque for a lot of viewers and I understand that. It's a very important surface issue. But I'm really interested in the power of the erotic. I'm invested in employing that power to get at something beyond that. The erotic as an end unto itself doesn't interest me.

The video pieces play with repetition. I see the rhythm and repetition in my video works almost like chanting a mantra, but chanting a dirty joke over and over again until the erotic turns into something else. But in the still works, particularly with "Palimpsest," eroticism plays an obvious role. Eakins' images are erotic, and I wanted to explore the politics of that eroticism. I had a fantasy of creating this fictional history where these homoerotic images could have been set out on somebody's desk, rather than hidden away in an album.

In many ways, I think that this repression still exists today. I think that these works sort of poke at you in that way, whatever your relationship to homoerotic imagery is. Is there something about these that makes you want to turn away, or makes you want to look a little bit too closely, or with too prolonged of a gaze?

I do create erotic images, but I use that eroticism to different ends in different pieces. They all start with the naked male body, but they go in different directions.

MNH: So, how did the “Palimpsest” series begin? It’s explicitly reliant on Eakins.

TB: I met with Brian Allen of the Addison, and he made me aware of the Grafly album—a private album of 21 photos in the collection of Charles Grafly, who was a sculptor and student of Eakins. And becoming aware of them was important to me because I thought they evoked many of the problems people find in Eakins’ work. But, they are complete, so figuring out what to do with them took a couple of years.

As much as I felt like Eakins had been haunting my studio, I decided that this would actually be a great opportunity for me to haunt Eakins by putting my models into his studio. It was also a way for me to be completely in control of my relationship to Eakins. He wouldn’t be able to sneak in because he was already there.

MNH: It was a direct confrontation.

TB: Right. In order to help me understand my connection to Eakins in a way that would also promote growth and movement beyond that connection.

MNH: Did you use every image in the Grafly album?

TB: I shot all but one image in the Grafly album because, in one case, it was physically impossible for my two models to reenact the pose.

MNH: It’s not really necessary for me—or any viewer—to understand all of the technical wizardry you used to insert the models into the images, but I am curious to know your decision making process in transposing your models into a historical space.

TB: The skylight in my studio in Maine supplies natural light. I was able to duplicate the lighting situations within

Eakins’ studio. Then it was basically a matter of directing my models into the poses of Eakins’ models. That proved a lot more challenging than I expected because his poses look very casual and just comfortable, but I discovered that a lot of these poses were anything but natural and comfortable.

That was really shocking. It actually changed how I understood the photographs, that they were obviously very strongly directed in the photographs. These weren’t casual in any way, shape, or form. Models were being told to do something and to hold it. Getting someone to shift weight onto the hip to match the composition of the original photograph actually required a bit of contortion.

So, I had my models reenact these poses and then digitally inserted them into the original photographs. I played with different amounts of reveal in these works—allowing the seams to show—but really, for these works to function the way I want them to, you have to really be able to see them as a photographic reality. I had to push the Photoshop to the point of complete believability. The seam is not technological, but rather a haircut or a friendship bracelet or a tattoo that just didn’t exist in 1890.

MNH: Do you think the body types are different today?

TB: Subtly. Not to the point that I’m convinced that one is a 2009 body and one is a 1900 body. Other people have noted that more than I do. I think that because of who my models are and where they live, I think their bodies probably experience a lot of the same activities. My models chop wood. Eakins’ models probably chopped wood. None of my models belong to a gym or trim their body hair. If that were the case, then you might see a real serious separation of body types.

I want somebody natural looking, somebody that doesn’t look like a porn actor or doesn’t look like another sort of pop reference. A few people have said, “Well, aren’t they a little bit Abercrombie and Fitch?” And I really don’t think that they are. I don’t think that they’re groomed or built up enough to really be Abercrombie models. I think they’re fairly unaffected, albeit good-looking models.

MNH: From a specific region.

TB: Very much from a specific region.

MNH: And from a specific lifestyle. It’s intriguing to me that you always go to Maine to shoot your work, though

you are living and working in California.

TB: The “ethnic” aspect of my work is something that I’ve been pondering quite a bit recently, because certainly in California a Maine lifestyle is an ethnically-specific lifestyle. Maine is the second whitest state in the country. Some things that seem natural for one state on the ocean are completely, ethnically strange for another state on the ocean. It’s an interesting tension.

MNH: Is that tension driving your decision to continue shooting in Maine?

TB: Not in the past, but maybe more in the future. That tension is becoming more interesting to me. So far it’s really been about the enthusiasm of my models in Maine.

Generally speaking, the models in Los Angeles are much more concerned about how they look naked. And they’re concerned about what these photographs might be used for. You know, the guys in Maine just want to help their friend Tad out. They’re not self-conscious. It’s not that they’re naïve. They’re on the internet, they have degrees, they understand contemporary culture, but I guess they’re just not concerned about it.

MNH: I suspect the notion of modeling in Maine is quite different than it is in Los Angeles. It’s an industry town.

TB: People have a very unique relationship to being photographed in Los Angeles. I think that the industry has been great for the post-production aspects of my work. But it completely got in the way of the actual shooting. I have shot work in Los Angeles, but it’s easier for me to fly to Maine than it’s been to make a shoot work here.

MNH: I think that geographical distance is so compelling because it also marks a rigid separation between production and post-production.

TB: Yeah. That’s a big aspect of how I work. Sometimes what happens in front of the camera is very directly connected to what you see on the wall, and other times there are a couple of years of anxiety and hard work between what happened in front of the camera and what ends up on the wall.

MNH: The “Palimpsest” series seems very intentionally mediated. The models are brought into the pictorial space

of a historical photograph, and then that photograph is placed in a frame and re-photographed against a black backdrop. At least this is what appears to have happened.

TB: It was a really difficult post-production process. There was a lot of making, changing my mind, and re-making. So, I’m glad if the series looks intentional because it was kind of anything but natural.

MNH: I first saw them as small photographs in the Victorian frames, as rather precious-looking objects in a domestic setting—not as big prints, which is how they are going out into the world.

TB: Not very many people are ever going to see them that way because they didn’t exactly represent the right thing as a fictional and historical object. After I got my models into Eakins’ studio, I started being fascinated by the fact that the Grafly album had been hidden away for a very long time. In many ways, it was kind of treated like somebody’s erotica collection. Yet it was a beautiful album. It was something that Charles Grafly really loved. And I fantasized, “Well, what if he had been able to love these images in a less secretive way?”

MNH: So, the frames normalize or domesticate these secret images.

TB: Yeah. I started looking for Victorian frames, and I thought silver would be good because it relates to the photographic process. And I came across a silver Repoussé frame that was a bit psychotic looking. It almost looked cancerous, and it also looked like fingers trying to touch the photograph.

It worked perfectly for me—suggesting an era—and it functioned with the photographs. Sometimes a bend in the silver will actually almost look like another human body next to the black and white photograph. So, I started collecting more Victorian Repoussé frames, and in the past three years I have probably bid on every silver Repoussé frame that came up in an online auction.

MNH: The size of the final prints is constant, but the scale of the frames within each print fluctuates a little bit, right?

TB: Right. I didn’t really think that a three-inch-tall frame needed to be precious and three inches tall anymore. I was more interested in the strange quality of the frames

than maintaining truth of scale. And so I made all the frames have the same maximum dimension. There are different pictorial levels of the picture that need to be almost of equal balance. In the end, the frame becomes an equal player with the contents of the photograph.

MNH: And, of course, there is all that black space around the frame.

TB: The black rectangle is important, especially in relation to the title “Palimpsest,” which is about one scroll with multiple histories. I was very interested in creating a sort of fictionalized history of a Victorian dandy with pictures of naked boys on his desk. But, I was simultaneously interested in a contemporary reading, which is a result of a contemporary gay artist being haunted by Thomas Eakins. These Victorian and contemporary layers coexist throughout the whole series, I hope.

There are Victorian models and contemporary models with friendship bracelets. Likewise, there is an ornamented Victorian frame inside of a contemporary black square. You can read them independently, but they’re layered on top of one another. That’s why I think the title “Palimpsest” is kind of perfect. It wasn’t a title that I came up with, but it fits perfectly.

MNH: There’s also a layered history of photography.

TB: What do you mean by that?

MNH: Digital and mechanical technologies are both present. And, of course, you incorporate the now-historical act of re-photographing a photograph. It’s historical and contemporary at the same time.

I was also thinking about the way in which you point to the wide range of uses for photography in history from domestic or personal to scientific or documentary functions—not that these categories are necessarily fixed or stable.

TB: The works actually evoke quite a number of moments from the history of photography. But yes, I think there’s some relation to scientific photography. I also like the weird shift when a personal photo album is put on display in a museum’s vitrine. Similarly, I like the fact that the Victorian frames within the “Palimpsest” photos are not frames that you would ever see in a museum. You don’t see a lot of heart-shaped frames in a contemporary

art museum.

MNH: I think it’s important to acknowledge that photography sometimes exists as an image and sometimes as an object, usually as both, but context pushes it one direction versus another. I think your series successfully exploits a certain tension between the tactility of a photograph as an object versus a photograph as sort of a distant image. The frame within a frame structure mediates that tension, and keeps those two possibilities operational.

TB: Right. In many ways, the frames feel more “real” than the figures inside of the frames. This tension seems to create a bit of a dynamic flicker for the eye. One instant the eye sees the frame and the contained image separately and then in the next instant the eye can see them as having a sameness. I think that as educated viewers of photography, most people still have a passion for finding the real even if we are too smart to really believe in a real. As a series, “Palimpsest” plays with this passion, offering multiple realities at the same time.

MNH: In each of the “Cliff Jump” photographs, the series that followed the “Palimpsest” photos, a model is positioned in your studio on a plywood floor. We see each of them from behind, and their poses seem to evoke the title of the series because they look like they’re jumping or falling. How did that series come to be?

TB: My models came to me last summer and told me that they found this really great cliff and wanted me to shoot them jumping off of the cliff because it would make “really cool art.” And I was thrilled by their enthusiasm and less thrilled by what I thought images of them jumping off of a cliff would end up being about.

So, I did shoot my models going off of the cliff. It was a horrifyingly tall cliff. You had to run and jump because if you didn’t run hard enough, you would have hit the rocks at the bottom. And I got some spectacularly beautiful shots, but kind of unimportant shots. They’re thrilling, but not that interesting.

MNH: They were too obvious?

TB: They were, but let me answer this in a rather round-about way—by mentioning Proust. I didn’t succeed at reading much Proust. But I do remember there was a point where his nanny forced the main character to go outside,

and he just took his book outside with him. It completely changed how he understood the text. And there is also a point where he brings the book with him to the toilet, and that also seemed to change the way he understood the text. This got me thinking about context in relationship to the cliff jumping photos.

So, almost as an inversion of the Proust anecdote, I had the models reenact those captured cliff jumping poses back in my studio.

MNH: What changed when you brought the models into the studio?

TB: Almost everything changed, except that we all had a photographically inspired memory of the original jump. I guess what I have really become thrilled about in these works is their relationship to the photographic moment. There is the moment of these guys in my studio posing for the camera, but there is also the moment of them flying through the air. So, in many ways, these images are referring to a moment that you don't get to see, but they force you to imagine.

It might be a little photographically geeky to mention this, but the length of exposure in the studio is much longer than the length of exposure in the sun. Outside they might have been filmed at a 500th of a second when they're jumping through the air; they're at more like a 30th of a second in the studio. So they really had to hold still. I couldn't have them jump off of a table in my studio because they would have been a blurred mess. So this longer moment is portraying a very, very brief moment.

MNH: And for the models I imagine it's a long moment that's as highly constructed and thoughtful as the actual cliff jump was spontaneous and decidedly unposed.

TB: Well, it's a very intimate, almost vulnerable moment, portraying a very heroic moment. These works are not nearly as technically complicated as a lot of my works, and they didn't take a year of agony in the studio to figure out, but I'm excited about the weird dualities of what we're looking at and what we're thinking about in these images.

MNH: The images create a really strange sense of space too. Your heightened relationship, or rather, the camera's relationship to the subjects is quite emphatic.

TB: It's a weirdly elevated point of view. It's too tall for a

normal ceiling but it simulates my point of view of standing on the edge of a cliff while the models were jumping.

MNH: Right. Maybe that brings us full circle to something I was thinking about earlier when we talking about Eakins and his appearances in his paintings. I was just wondering about your position in the work. You never really make yourself visibly present in your work in the same way that Eakins does, but I do think your presence is still felt though your absence in your photographs.

TB: In "Cliff Jump" my presence is really via my studio. In the photos you can see evidence of white walls and the table that has little splatters of paint on it—you know, just slivers of information. The plywood floor has been worked on, slightly distressed. This is not a basketball court; this is not a dining room with the furniture cleared away. I think it's pretty clearly an artist's studio, and I think that I am represented in the work through it being my space. This is not the model's bedroom. The models are in my space. In other works, including *Stroke* and the "Palimpsest" series, the editing is where I might show the hand of the artist. In *Roll* I am treading water with the camera and the camera housing gets splashed.

MNH: So, you have no interest in inserting your head between someone's legs in the same way that Eakins did in *Taking the Count* (1898)?

TB: No, I'm just not that interested in being photographed or using another photographer. I am interested in the artist's point of view. It's hard to say how Eakins intended his work to be read 100 years ago, but I would guess that many people still don't know that Eakins appears in his own paintings. I do find it interesting that Eakins' depicted point of view is not the same as the art viewer's.

In earlier photographs, I revealed the presence of the camera by allowing it to be splashed and leaving a water drop on the housing, and my voice is on the audio track in my videos. In a 360-degree world, only half of that is in the frame of the photograph. But I want you to be aware of the other 180 that aren't there. In many ways, I feel like I'm actually more obvious in my work than Eakins is in his, even though you can't look at my work and see my face. I imagine you think about my presence more.

Michael Ned Holte is a critic and curator based in Los Angeles.



























TAD BECK

EDUCATION

Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, 1986

School of Visual Arts, New York, New York, BFA in Photography, 1991

Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California, MFA in Fine Art, 2003

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Tad Beck: Palimpsest	Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA , July-October 2010
Roll	Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California, April 2003
Blow	Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, California, February 2002
The Seven Deadly Saints	Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, Maine, August 1998
Cruciphoenix	Gleason Fine Art, Portland, Maine, August 1993
Theodore Beck	Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, New York, April-May 1992
The Star of Hope Sequence	Marisa Del Re Gallery, New York, New York, December 1990
The Star of Hope Cycle	Haven Gallery, Vinalhaven, Maine, September 1989
(Not) Portraiture	Spectrum Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts, December 1989

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Its Own Nothingness	Krowwork Gallery, San Francisco, CA, July-August 2010
Capture	Maine Museum of Photographic Arts, Falmouth, Maine, April-May 2010
I Like Winners: Subjectivity and Sport	Shepard Gallery, University of Nevada, Reno, Jan 2009
Is Pain Your Pleasure	Apex Art, New York, New York, June 2008
Folk Music	Monte Vista Projects, Los Angeles, California, March 2008
New Additions to the Permanent Collection	Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine, Jan 2008
Biennial	Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine, April-June 2005
Adjunct	Lindhurst Gallery, USC, Los Angeles, California, February 2005
Photography in Maine	Center for Maine Contemporary Arts, Rockport, Maine, Summer 2000
Bowie	Rupert Goldsworthy Gallery, New York, New York, November 1998
Group Show	Rupert Goldsworthy Gallery, New York, New York, June 1998
Digital Art	Maine Coast Artists, Rockport, Maine, January 1998
Vary Large Array	Debs & Co., New York, New York, September 1997
SVA Alumni	Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York, New York, September 1997
Vinalhaven	Between the Muse Gallery, Rockland, Maine, August 1996
Bailey House Benefit	Castelli Gallery, New York, New York, January 1996
Body Parts	Ambrosino Gallery, Miami, Florida, January-February 1996
Semaphore	Bill Bace & Art Initiatives, New York, New York, May 1995
Me	Dru Arstark, New York, New York, April 1995
Granite, Lobsters & Art	Maine Coast Artists, July 1994
Summer Group Show	Dru Arstark, New York, New York, Summer 1994
The Process	The Fog Gallery, Vinalhaven, Maine, June 1994
Inaugural Exhibition	Gleason Fine Art, Portland, Maine, May 1993
The Next Generation	Addison Gallery of Art, Andover, Massachusetts, Spring 1993

Curated by Bill Maynes
Body Parts
Printmaking
Women and the American Dream Machine
The Star of Hope Cycle
Printers of the Press
Printmaking
Diversities

Old Chatam, New York, New York, Winter 1993
Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, New York, March 1992
The Visual Arts Gallery, New York, New York, April 1991
CSI, New York, New York, February 1991
Vinalhaven Press, New York, New York, December 1990
The Fog Gallery, Vinalhaven, Maine, August 1990
The Visual Arts Gallery, New York, New York, 1990
Baxter Gallery, Maine College of Art, Portland, Maine, Summer 1989

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts
Fisher Landau Center for Art, Long Island City, New York
Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, New Jersey
Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tad Beck
I Like Winners: Sport & Selfhood
Light Box
Best of Portland: Editors Choice
2005 Biennial
Home Videos
Exhibit Boasts Bodies of Work
PMA Biennial
2005 Biennial
One Really Big Show
Bowie
Body Parts
Me
Dynamic Display
The Island
The Artists of Vinalhaven
Back to Back
Cruciphoenix
Tad Beck
Cruciphoenix
... Tried and True Medicine
Beck's Bad Boy
Passing out Praise
Diversities
Contemporary Classics
Scoffing at Portraiture Tradition

Aspect: The Chronicle of New Media Art, Spring 2010
Exhibition Catalogue, January 2009
Dwell Magazine, November 2007
Portland Phoenix, November 2005
Art New England, October-November 2005
Portland Phoenix, April 7, 2005
Bowdoin Orient, 2005
Courier Gazette, April 7, 2005
Exhibition Catalogue, April, 2005
Maine Times, August 17, 2000
Time Out New York, December 10, 1998
Arts Miami, February 1996
New York Times, April 28, 1995
Maine Sun Telegram, July 17, 1994
Maine Times, July 14, 1994
Maine Sun Telegram, July 10, 1994
Next Magazine, May 2, 1994
Exhibition Catalogue, August 1993
Old Port Guide, August 1993
Art New England, December 1993
Maine Times, May 21, 1993
New York Post, April 22, 1992
Boston Sunday Globe, December 24, 1989
Art New England, October 28, 1989
Maine Sun Telegram, July 23, 1989
Boston Globe, January 4, 1989

ORDER OF WORKS ILLUSTRATED

PALIMPSEST TWO, 2009

PALIMPSEST ELEVEN, 2009

PALIMPSEST FOUR, 2009

PALIMPSEST TWELVE, 2009

PALIMPSEST ONE, 2009

PALIMPSEST SEVEN, 2009

PALIMPSEST THREE, 2009

PALIMPSEST SIXTEEN, 2009

PALIMPSEST FIVE, 2009

PALIMPSEST EIGHT, 2009

PALIMPSEST FOURTEEN, 2009

PALIMPSEST NINE, 2009

PALIMPSEST TEN, 2009

ALL WORKS © TAD BECK 2009