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Valerie Blass, "To only ever say one thing forever the same thing," Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver, Nov. 21, 2015 to Jan. 9, 2016

by Helena Wadsley
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Valérie Blass, "High-up, dignitary, panjandrum, high muckamuck", 2015



Valérie Blass, "High-up, dignitary, panjandrum, high muckamuck", 2015_2



Valérie Blass, "High-up, dignitary, panjandrum, high muckamuck" (detail), 2015

As if caught in a moment of suspended animation, *High-up, dignitary, panjandrum, high muckamuck*, a mural-sized print, appears to be bursting apart. The image can only be seen whole if the viewer stoops low to the floor. In this awkward position, the two pillowy fragments hovering in front of the print fit into apparent holes in the photograph to their rear, completing the picture. These are not actual holes but black areas, erasures. The scene shows Valerie Blass' sense of humour and absurdity. One man, in the white clothes of a house painter, wears an astronaut's helmet. The second man, kneeling, holds up a round basket as if protecting his head. Blass' interest lies not in the potential of narrative in such a scene, but where the shapes intersect. She is drawn to gradients, transitions and junctions. In conversation, Blass speaks about creating clashes.

Another piece, *I feel funny*, depicts one nude man standing on the shoulders of another. An inkjet print on Sintra, a lightweight synthetic board, this work is simultaneously flat and spatial, pushed out from the wall by a metal shelving unit. The print's pieces are cut and re-attached with Kevlar hinges. The bends created by the hinges do not correspond to the bends of the bodies' joints, thus creating a conflict of form, or visual tension, that intrigues Blass. One couple, a single one is a diptych in which models pose to correspond to geometric forms, their soft organic bodies contrasting against a hard edged 'V'.



Valérie Blass, "I feel funny", 2015



Valérie Blass, "I feel funny", 2015_2



Valérie Blass, "I feel funny", (detail) 2015

To reside elsewhere depicts two men on all fours, one on the back of the other. A textured blue line traces out the major directions within their poses. These trajectories are extracted and reproduced in epoxy dough, like liquorice twists in space. Ominous shadows, they are vertical and autonomous, not the stacked horizontal forms of the figures in the photograph, a likeness but not. Blass intends to maintain visual equality; the photograph crosses the boundaries into sculptural space and vice versa. The figures, with tattoos, hairy legs and leopard-skin leotards are personal yet not. Their acrobatic feats approach narrative but the extension into space disrupts the potential.



Valérie Blass, "To reside elsewhere", 2015"



Valérie Blass, "To reside elsewhere", 2015_2



Valérie Blass, "To reside elsewhere" (detail), 2015

As with The fatality of shape, a print, created by projecting a found image of a bas-relief sculpture onto a wall and having two models pose with it, Blass is interested in the idea of the avant-garde image that prioritizes the intellect over emotion. The result is an image that captures a transitional moment between photographic representation and stylized, constructed form. While this piece is two-dimensional, it sums up the rest, essentially the synthesis of photography and sculpture; in each work, Blass has one slip seamlessly into the other.



Image courtesy of Catriona Jeffries, Vancouver Photo: SITE Photography

Valérie Blass, "The fatality of shape", 2015, inkjet print on wooden frame, 23.3" x 13.5" x 2"