

**LOOK AT WHAT  
I AM THINKING.  
SEE WHAT  
I AM FEELING.**

jake moore on Valérie Blass

Multiple histories of art and philosophy weave through the works of Valérie Blass but are internalized, negotiated, and amplified through *making*.

As if an icon brought forth from its reliquary, the plaster skin of, FOR RÊVEUR, reads like the sculpted drapery of antiquity. A Madonna-blue stain is rent into the folds as though leached from another surface, perhaps like the transfer of a scab to a band-aid or the newspaper ink to the kitchen table once the crossword puzzle has been completed. There is a slippage between the iconic and the everyday here, a physical manifestation of transcendent potential.

This object, erect and closed, is a Madeleine.

A Madeleine, in the Proustian sense in that it triggers memories of other things, but also as it conjures the Madonna, or the Madeleine statue of Lourdes. FOR RÊVEUR, as a discrete form does not describe an actual body; it is at once the garments that clothed her and a seeming cast of the grotto that framed her appearance. It is both the immaculate body and the space that surrounds it, suggesting a vaginal space through phallic form, while signifying the Madonna. It is an apparition made somehow *more* ethereal through its newfound material weight. Its very thingish nature in absence of a fixed identity puts into motion thought and narrative strands. This is of course the historical role of abstraction, but in Blass' work abstraction is only one of the tools both *in play* and *in reference* as it is simultaneously reflexive and quotational. It is her making though, her very physical actions of perfected bricolage and cared for accumulations, that separates her practice from both its historical precedents like Arp, Brancusi, and Rodin, and her contemporaries working with the detritus of commodity culture, like Franz West, Rachel Harrison, and Nick Cave. It is also her making that leads us into further philosophical reading, her poesis, or knowing-through-making, becomes *our* experience of haptic vision, for to look upon

For rêveur  
2008



54

this work is to touch it with your eyes, so full of surface, of stuff, of contour and tactility, is to experience a slippage of the senses.

The ridged seams that circumnavigate FOR RÊVEUR, let us know there is an inside. The white raised surface has been filled and sanded clean so it no longer shows us where the solid was once cracked open. She is both inside and out, the naturally occurring framing device for an apparition now rendered solid. Here royal chroma is but a stain upon the surface. There is no void, no absence, no entry – perfect for a Madonna. But – this enclosure or completion of the form can also suggest there is nothing missing; there is no Freudian lack. By not requiring entry, masculine power has been transferred and her closed form radiates potential.

I know a secret. I know that *For rêveur* began its (her) life as the exterior shell of the cast of another object in this exhibition, UNE FOIS DE TROP. This thought delights me twofold as it furthers my ricocheting narrative and also informs us of the receptive nature of Blass' practice wherein every thing and every moment is the stuff of art. This is how she knows the world and furthers our relationship to it and her. *She* is present in every action. There is no missing author, no absent other. There is an insistence of a person being here, of having been in contact with the things we are walking among. They have not sprung up of their own accord; they have been wrought and put into negotiating experience

UN FOIS DE TROP, or, *one time too many*, reveals a child's legs from under a large string volume equally suggestive of a beehive and a Danish modern lampshade. Either evokes sticky situations, though the embarrassment suggested by the wearing of lampshades is rarely the stuff of children. When we look into the holes of this covering we see a blonde mass has engulfed the face of this child, as though the hair had grown right over it, or, perhaps the child had been swung upside down and her long blonde locks had covered her face for only a moment, but here, they have petrified. Hard and still, this blonde mass is now perhaps just yellow. The child is not a child at all, but a mannequin, its bare pubis reveals only crumbling paint. There is again no entry, or exit, for this body. It cannot be sexualized, but it is not mere object. Once again its material solidity and object nature suggest the temporal and cerebral.

*Things and materials are an intellectual equivalent. Physical actions like making are other kinds of abstractions. They are not in anyway simplistic or grounded / negated to the historical feminine.*

All faces are obscured in the work of Valérie Blass. They are either broken and reassembled, completely overcome by material, or, obscured and wrought animal through fur covering. This hirsute make-over of beings is performed sometimes by mark making, but more often by actual material. L'HOMME PAILLE, as example, perches on an assemblage of cubes with his foot atop an Egyptian grave mask. His body, if there is one, is performed by a ghillie suit, a camouflage rug-like covering, worn by snipers in military operations, that allows the human body to fade into its natural surroundings. Their constructed appearance is a point of pride and authority for those that require such things. Here the clothing literally makes the man. L'HOMME PAILLE, in his thinker-like pose and wooly suit, is evocative of both a literal man of straw and the rhetorical convention of distracting and fallacious arguments known as *the straw man*. Blass offers us the rub between positions being ideological or actual without becoming illustrative. One's readings of the works of Valérie Blass are dependent upon the stories one already knows. As such, I should tell you the complex inter-subjectivities listed above are imagined by me. The works of Valérie Blass are open to such expansion and will seemingly support it, but each new visit might suggest another narrative, for it is the forms - the objects themselves - that mediate. As Susan Buck-Morss reminds us:

1. Buck-Morss, Susan  
"Aesthetics and  
Anaesthetics: Walter  
Benjamin's Artwork Essay  
Reconsidered",  
New Formations, no 20.  
Summer 1993  
pp. 123 - 143

*Aisthitikos is the ancient Greek word for that which is "perceptive by feeling", aisthisis is the sensory experience of perception. The original field of aesthetics is not art but reality - corporeal, material nature.<sup>1</sup>*

You can see what I am thinking.