

4

nadia belerique: glance, focus, shift and then repeat.

alana
traficante

are you experienced?



how might we perceive the interior space of a photograph? If we could step inside an image and wander through its components, would figures and objects have depth or might they stand in as flat pictorial screens? Might they become photographs within photographs or images within images, enacting the role of what we see while pointing to that which we cannot? How might vision open new perceptive understandings to bring meaning, or perhaps trick us through its illusions and effects?

Nadia Belerique's installation *I Hate you Don't Leave Me*, 2015, created for the *are you experienced?* exhibition, represents the third iteration in a recent trilogy of artworks, beginning with *The Counselor* and *Have You Seen This Man*, both produced in 2014. Deeply rooted in a photo-based practice, Belerique works through this series to investigate how the photograph can take up the position of the subject and object of viewership, becoming both the observer and the observed. She works upon the flat picture plane to play with the limits of the conventional object-based encounter. Her photographs are illusory in approach, challenging optical perception and experimenting at the site of an indiscernible boundary between figure, ground and reciprocal gaze. In doing so, she stages the gallery space to augment the variability and indeterminate nature inherent to the process of viewing. Enacting the performativity of images, Belerique activates the wall, the floor and all spaces in-between.

Each work is explicitly mysterious, beginning with a question and marked with a trail of clues and traces of bodies unknown. Implementing strategies of illusion and uncertainty, Belerique experiments with the manner in which we process visual information. We can understand *I Hate you Don't Leave Me* as the latest proposition in this series, and as the artist will perform and create some of the work in situ, the task of this essay is to bring forth analysis of her past works in order to set the stage for her experiment. Consisting of photographs, freestanding cutout figures and a carpet runner, this new work operates in the same ways that her recent installations have.

Her previous work *The Counselor* consists of two image-objects which are life-sized and freestanding photographs of cardboard cut-outs in the shape of human bodies, mounted to corrugated plastic board. The first depicts a static and flat representation of a woman's body, a photograph of the surface of a figurative cardboard cut-out. The second object is more challenging to discern. At first, it appears as though the cut-out is positioned in duplicate, but simply turned to expose the cardboard support on its reverse. However, closer viewing reveals that this too is an illusion. Visual cues that at first read as dimensional components begin to reveal themselves as flat photographic representations. This flatness becomes visible after carefully approaching and circling the work—an adjustment of the eye, a processing of space. It is as though the photo stands-in for the stand-in itself. The resulting figures are illusory in effect, challenging the eye to recognize characteristics of the surface opposed with the dimensional object it depicts.

In the second iteration of this series, titled *Have You Seen This Man?*, Belerique begins with the picture plane in order to push at the boundaries of its two-dimensional space. The installation can be read as a single work of three composite parts: the walls hung with a series of high gloss photographs, the floor dressed in carpet, and three-dimensional space articulated by life-sized figurative silhouettes. These three components work in concert with one another to build an essence of mood and construct a mystery by activating the materiality of photographic processes and the viewer's embodied response.

Design thinking script contrast
constraints information. Leading
design heuristic wireframe
aesthetic. Objectified measure
persona. architecture.



Various scanner-bed photographs contain collaged imagery of objects: cut paper, tape, a lump of wax. The gesture of cutting, framing and assembling images by hand references now-obsolete methods of manual photo editing. Objects are carefully reproduced against the black ground of the scanner-bed to create an effect of illusory dimension on the otherwise flat image field. Some photos are entirely void of objects, and stand in as moments of an empty and imageless view. Each photograph contains marks of the artist's hand, with visible fingerprints smudged across the picture plane. The prints are face mounted to Plexiglas, creating a reflective surface that when met in the process of viewing, returns a reciprocal gaze.

The last time it was installed, just a short distance from the wall the floor was dressed with an off-white rug that acted to delineate the depth of space occupied by the installation. The surface of the rug was marked with various footprints, appearing as traces of bodies unknown. These footprints were produced by applying a Liquid Light emulsion to the soles of the artist's shoes. Following her movement across the rug, its fibres were altered (or developed) by exposure to light. Atop the floor, cut steel silhouettes of figures stood in as semi-abstracted representations of the body, and also served to block or cut away sight lines and interrupt fields of visual perception. Each sculptural silhouette, slightly larger than life-size, appeared as an apparition of a body in space. Their steel surfaces rough, unpolished and dappled with smudges of fingerprints. Unlike the fingerprints that appear on the surface of the photographs, these marks may not gesture to the artist's hand, but perhaps toward a mysterious subject or subjects who have seemingly come and gone. There is a suggested relationship between these figures and the ground upon which they stand, as though the mysterious walkers have left not only footprints, but also perhaps shadows in their wake.

The interplay between these objects is revealed through a process of active viewing. Participants must lend not only their sense of visual perception, but also their proprioceptive bodies to the process of coming to know. Proprioception is activated through movement and relative positioning in order to arrive at a sense of knowing one's own body in space. In navigating the spatial construction of the installation, the act of positioning and repositioning the body lends to the variability of shifting visual perception. Alternative vantage points result in differing visual data; steel sculptures may cast figurative elements on the reflective surface of photographs, or may serve to cut away sight lines, to block viewing access and produce redacted images across the visual plane. Also present is an activation of the haptic sense with touch occurring through receptors in the feet rather than the hands. By moving onto and off of the carpeted floor, sensations of the ground will vary, indicating slight shifts in mood and the movement inside and outside of the boundaries of the installation.

The space becomes immersive in its psychological construction, engaging a persistent state of questioning, beginning with *Have You Seen This Man?*, and proceeding to build mystery through a trail of indefinite clues. Each component contributes to the arc of an experiential narrative, which employs a process of circular enquiry but not a definitive conclusion. The space begins to read as a site of investigation, a variable and indefinite enigma, a 'whodunit' of sorts. Activating the body through visual, tactile and proprioceptive clues, Belerique constructs sensations that challenge the certainty of identification and allow for us to linger in the process of asking, seeking and awaiting response.

The manner in which we experience this visual-haptic-spatiality lends to a process of embodied perception—a coming to know (or perhaps not knowing)—while seeking the identity of this mysteriously absent mark-maker. Traces of the body sweep across each material surface and urge us to orient and reorient our gaze; to glance, focus, shift and then repeat. It is in this act of looking that we may be suspended between perception and understanding, simultaneously negotiating physical and psychic space. Belerique invites participants to experiment with multi-sense perception, to alter vision through movement, to navigate, observe and draw connections between composite parts of a whole. She questions: how might this experimentation alter processes of coming to know? How does the photograph work to mediate what we see and what we cannot see, to produce sensations of suspense, anticipating the clarity of knowledge or sitting for just a moment in that flicker in-between? Belerique constructs a site of iterative play across states of knowing and not knowing, an enquiry at the threshold of cognitive perception and embodied sensation. In this space, meaning itself sits rather precariously at the tipping point between certainty and doubt, comprehension and the incomprehensible.

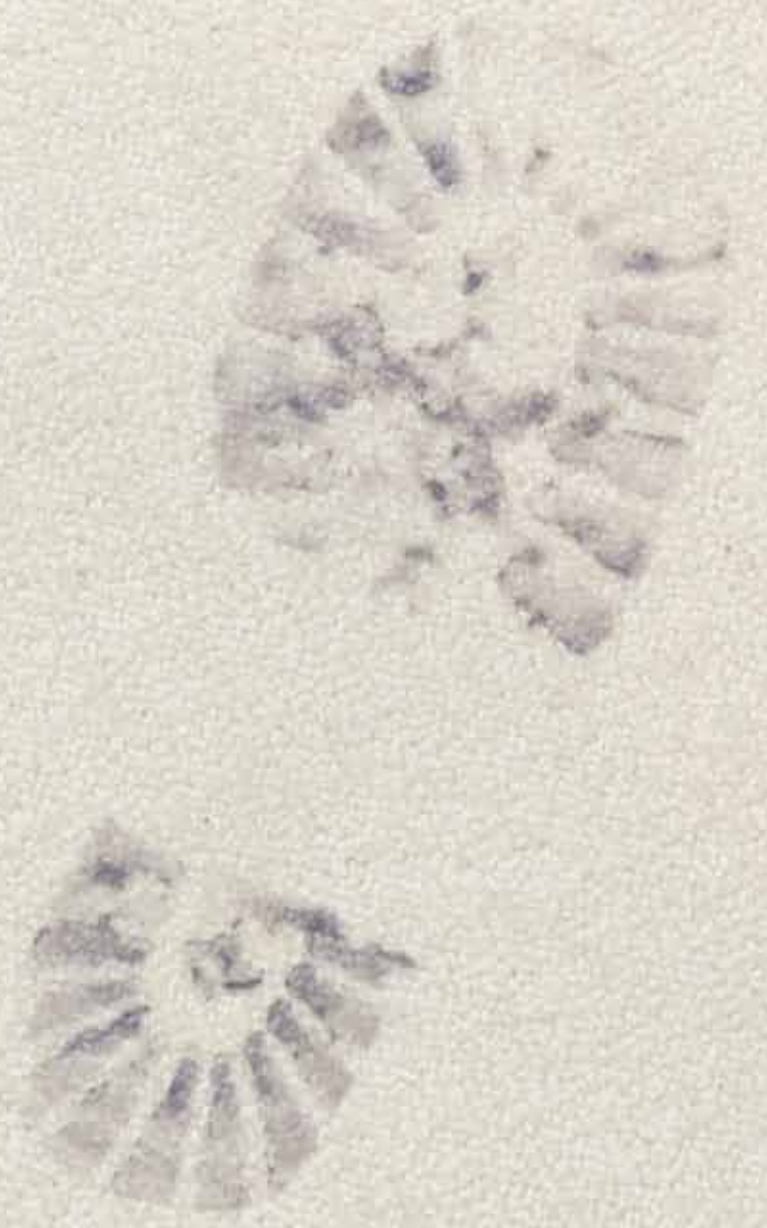
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136-137



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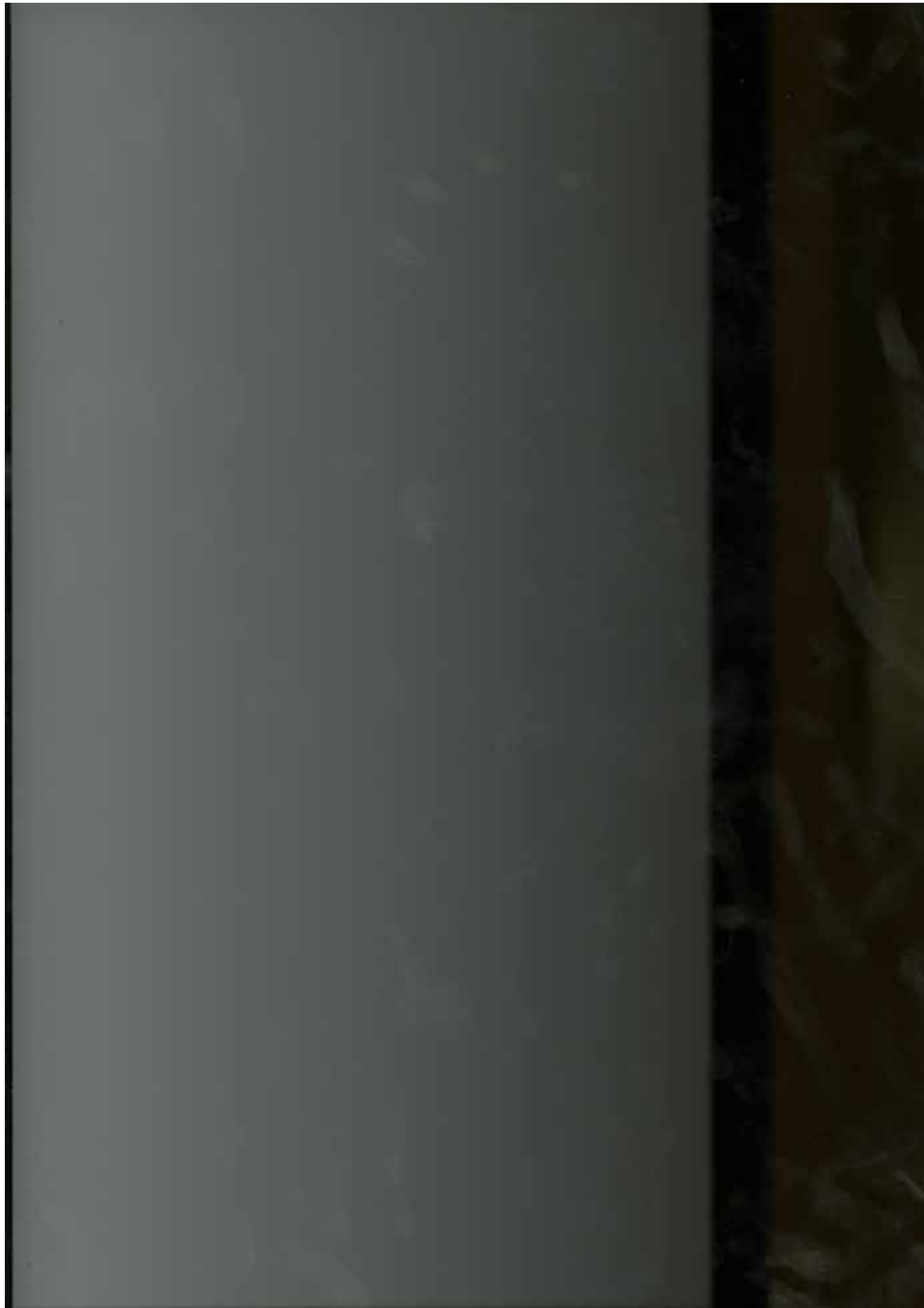
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