



Sharp, Distance, 2010

LaDuke starts with an image taken from Stanley Kubrick's film of *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), a scene where a young woman is being attacked by a group of thugs. It is overpainted with a tableau set in his studio where a sculpted deer, with glass eyes, is set on a mirror. The final layer has painted fragments from Rembrandt's masterpiece *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632). In this work, LaDuke is interested in the relationship between looking and seeing, and the place from which seeing occurs.

Born in Holyoke Massachusetts, Tom LaDuke received a BFA in 1991 from California State University, Fullerton, and an MFA in 1994 from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work has been on view in many exhibitions and his work is held in a number of museum collections, including the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York City and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. LaDuke lives and works in Los Angeles and teaches at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena.

The exhibition is presented in collaboration with the Weatherspoon Art Museum at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro. Leading support is provided by the William Penn Foundation.



Tom LaDuke: run generator

October 23, 2010 - March 6, 2011

INTRODUCTION

About five years ago Tom LaDuke had one of those “Aha!” moments, when he realized that while watching a video in his studio he continually had to shift his viewing position to cancel the interference of exterior light reflecting on the surface of the monitor screen. He became interested in the potential of this play of projected and reflected light and began to develop a series of paintings that combined movie stills and images of his studio, using photographs of the TV monitor screen as his visual sources. The resulting works combine these studio and movie images in ambiguous and atmospheric paintings where subtly colored imagery touches on the edge of perception.

More recently LaDuke has been working on a series of paintings where this idea of combining studio and film shots is augmented by a third layer of imagery, this time drawn from art history books. In these newer works, the collision of photo-realistically painted images—created with the same technique of airbrush and acrylic that characterizes the earlier series—is overpainted in sections with impastoed oil paint. Contrasting starkly with the smooth surface of the acrylic, these brushy marks partly obscure the first layers of imagery with a gestural quality that is reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism.

On a recent visit to LaDuke's studio I discussed the paintings that are presented here in the exhibition *run generator*. The following notes were taken on that visit and, while they are not intended to fully explain the paintings, they provide some information about the processes he has employed to make these works. Pointing to the sources of his imagery and giving clues about his thoughts, these commentaries provide the viewer with some background about the paintings, as well as providing insight into how LaDuke's own sensibility and perceptions play into his work.

– Julien Robson, Curator of Contemporary Art

PART 1

In these first three works LaDuke's process begins with the reflection of his studio in the monitor screen, which he photographs and scales up as a blueprint to the dimensions of his canvas. He then copies this image to the canvas with airbrush and acrylic paint. The second layer is derived from a photograph of a movie on the television screen, stilled at a moment he finds particularly poignant. This time the scaled up mask is actually placed over the painting and gradually, as he peels away sections of this template, LaDuke copies the image to the canvas using airbrush and a more translucent paint. This process allows him to hide the first image from view as he works on small sections of the overpainting. Finally, after taking a photograph of the “finished” work, he incorporates accidents that appear in this photograph, such as the flare of the flash or the cast of a shadow, as final touches to the painting.



Creaking Oars, 2007

The film image in this work is taken from the Cohen Brothers' movie *Miller's Crossing* (1990). At this moment in the film, the central character Tom Reagan is being escorted across the woods to be executed (potentially) by mobsters. The camera, pointed directly upwards, pans the tree canopy while the soundtrack simply records the cracking of the twigs underfoot and the creaking of the tall conifers. LaDuke talks about this film in terms of the timeless sound of the trees blowing in the wind and our sense of “knowing what is going to happen,” as if this is an image signifying the passage between life and death.



Murmur, 2007

LaDuke employs an image from David Lynch's film *The Elephant Man* (1980). It is a scene where the central character, John Merrick, makes objects from memory and places them on the window of his room at the London Hospital. LaDuke says that when he saw the film he was also making objects from memory in his studio.

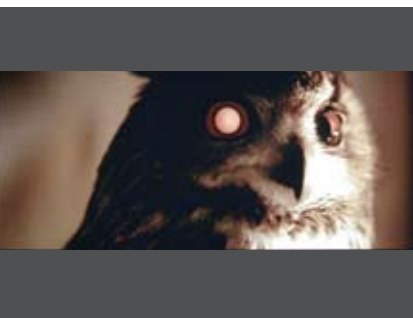


Innocent X, 2008

LaDuke speaks of the face of Pope Innocent X in the painting of the same name by Diego Velasquez (1599-1660), with its quality of wisdom and kindness; an image that was interpreted in 1953 by the British artist Francis Bacon (1909-1992) as a screaming *Study After Velasquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. Taking his film still from *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), LaDuke comments how the doll's face, which has been pressed inward, seems to be "folding from ugly to pretty."

PART 2

While the studio reflection used in LaDuke's earlier series of paintings was very much unplanned and disinterested, in his most recent works his approach has involved a more conscious staging of his surroundings in response to the chosen film still. While employing the same process, this time he starts by painting the photo of the film still and subsequently overpainting this layer with the image from a movie. He then proceeds to a final layer created using oil paint. Employing Photoshop to stretch a reproduction of an Old Master painting to the proportions of his own canvas, he again creates a mask that is laid over the painting. Here he alters his process, leaving the mask in place and cutting away parts of it with a knife, removing areas in the Old Master image that resonate conceptually with the previous images. As if reconstituting the missing parts of the Old Master painting, he then forces oil paint through these apertures onto the canvas, the thick smears and gestures mimicking, the imagery that is missing from the historic work. He then removes the mask to reveal the finished painting.



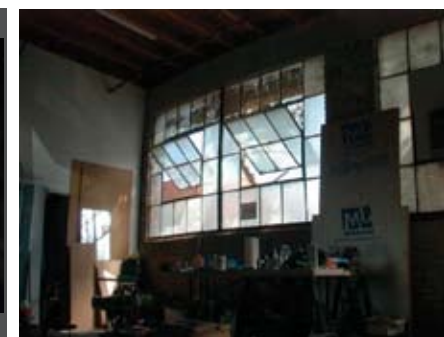
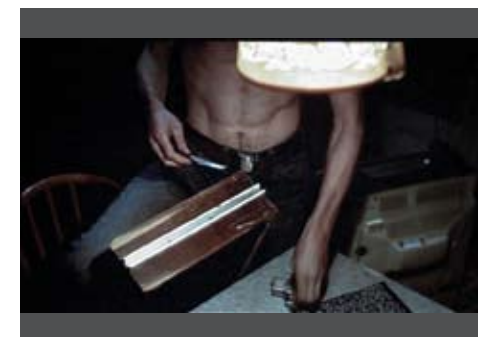
A Gothic Plot, 2009

In this work LaDuke overpaints an image of an owl—from director Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982)—with Kaspar David Friedrich's painting *The Chalk Cliffs on Rugen* (1818). The Friedrich painting is elastically stretched, horizontally to match the proportions of the canvas. The studio image between the two is a tableau where a boulder and branches, behind a ladder, are reflected in a small mirror. LaDuke is interested in the reflection of light and the doubling that this implies. He points out that the Friedrich painting was made the same year that Mary Shelley wrote the novel *Frankenstein*, making an oblique reference to the "replicants" in *Blade Runner*.



Auto Destruct, 2009

The film still here is taken from director Michael Radford's film of George Orwell's novel *1984* (1984). Describing the moment when Julia and Winston begin an illicit affair that will put them in danger, LaDuke comments "A look comes over her face as she disrobes—they are doing something illegal." It is like a moment of mutually assured destruction. The studio tableau depicts the painting after LaDuke has finished the first stage, folding the painting into itself. The masterpiece that LaDuke employs here is Peter Aertsen's *Butcher Stall* (1568), whose image of plenty, by displaying flesh turned inside out, ironically foregrounds the inevitability of death.



Here Is, 2009

There is a scene in the movie *Taxi Driver* (1976) where Robert De Niro's character, Travis Bickle, is inventing a mechanism that will allow him to draw a gun quickly from his sleeve. Taking an image from this scene of "creativity," LaDuke echoes the nuts and bolts quality of Bickle's "studio" with an image of his own, where pots of paint are laid out, matter-of-factly, on a table against the window. Overpainting it with fragments from Édouard Manet's *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* (1868), LaDuke talks of the relationship of casualness found in both the film scene and the execution picture. He points out that the words "Here is..." are written by Travis Bickle in his journal.



The Nobodies, 2010

The first layer of this work is an image of Darth Vader from the film *Star Wars* (1977). The second layer is a tableau of plastic figures and model kits. The top layer is taken from *Vase with Flowers* (1618) by Ambrosius Bosschaert. LaDuke talks of how he was taken to his first movie, *Star Wars* by his brother. The tableau is a recollection of popular culture figures from his childhood that he sees as replacements or stand-ins for ourselves. While the film image and Bosschaert's painting seem to be very direct images, they both have deeply coded meanings, although the complexity of the Dutch masterpiece is something that is missing from our contemporary understanding.