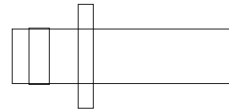


MARIA WALLACE

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NO ONE'S LADY OF TEARS

In the studio, one might say most of what happens is looking, and things that are looked at change. One will recall this mystery from quantum physics. How an object's behavior may be affected by what it has experienced in its lifetime—a correlation the medieval thinker would think obvious. The lachrymose Virgin has been looked at ceaselessly, her tears the ultimate spectacle of female emotionality sanctified through suffering. Wallace halts this reproduction, this being itself again by being repropounded, re-imaged, re-materialized. By doing so, she perhaps makes space for an altogether different type of (ex)change.

Wallace shatters the image of a weeping Virgin across aerated concrete blocks, a material meant to come together for shelter but here allowed as fragmented, self-standing parts. The blocks are divided into sections: one section, including fragments of an eye, the mantle, a lone tear and the outline of her nose and lip, takes center space and attention; the remaining section sits displaced around the darkened areas of the room, its pieces' carveouts alternatively facing the viewer and the walls. The two sections are both parts of the same image. Treating light as a veil, the artist draws from and within a tradition that flirts equally with the mist of theatre and the occult, and a psychoanalytic view of the world as a body landscaped by shadows.

In the adjacent room, three more assemblages emerge hanging from the mostly dark walls. The collages are made up of carefully patchworked photos originally taken by Wallace's partner in the mid 2000s, previous to the start of their relationship. Here, reversely, while images are formed, it is their stories to shatter: the narratives of that one morning or afternoon, of a gesture, of a wave's crash onto shore. Led by a beautifully counterintuitive title, some of us may be reminded of Shirley Jackson's story *Nightmare*. A woman walks through the city to find herself caught in an ad campaign run by some unknown company. The ads appear on street poles, paper handouts, gradually resounding everywhere around her and describing her with increasing accuracy. Both the woman in the story and we as readers slowly realize she's being used in this marketing scheme without her knowledge or permission. She never agreed to be part of it. The layered, spinning photos of this specific collage bring to mind the terrible feeling of being not only lost but in danger, caught in the sharp tragedy of moving on only to find yourself back where you started, over and over again, time ticking you further and further out of life.

This disorientation might be akin to the feeling that finds us looking at a loved one to suddenly realize we have no idea who really is in front of us. The fast-tracked, artificial intimacy of modern life that is procedure, pure procedure, is a military operation. Suddenly the raised shields glimmer on the battlefield, real like a smell, dazzling like a paradox, sunlight dancing off the waves of a storm and we realize we are not equipped, that this might have the best of us. Society operates like a code that suggests things are relatable when, actually, we have no real grasp of what another person may be referencing behind worn signifiers of pleasure or pain, doing good, it's going, meh, great. All we want is what we already decided at a glimpse—a glimpse that keeps changing the world while sadly maintaining us in our sameness.

But what is this action of first conceiving of a breakage, dividing into sections, and then engraving each fragment? This action of collecting, blending, and breaking a narrative open? Like a bracket of time in which one is allowed by a vision to hold things in place that would otherwise collapse, holding them close and equal, here is potential. The line of her face, both broken and continuing, surprisingly, the line of her face, its resilience, is a promise and is resistance. The whirl of a precarious assemblage might read as confusion but also harbors an escape, an alternative route, something else that stays. Before these images could possibly reassemble themselves, through their fractured radiance one is here given the chance to reflect on how a woman's body and perspective is objectified and instrumentalized throughout history, whether through sainthood or madness, consistently relegated, held at the border of subjectivity. And perhaps learn how the immaculate conception—virgin birth, tears without cause, intuition without reason—might simply be the greatest, most gracefully whispered 'Fuck You' of all time.

text by Clemente Ciarrocca