

I  
am  
not  
a  
bad  
man  
but  
I  
am  
not  
good.

“DOUBLE SENSE DELUDED”:

Ghosting Language, Love, and Lies

*“The question is the story itself, and whether or not it means something is not for the story to tell.”*

—Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy*

The story of Craig Le Blanc’s *She Loves Me. He Loves Me Not.*, evolves in circumlocution, not simply by walking around the gallery space, but in dodging, traversing and eliding the shards of his fragmented mirroring as he takes viewers through the slippages in language—through the reflective, refractive, distorted iterations of self in the 16 works that comprise the show. Stories, Le Blanc reminds us, the ones we create, re-write and mis-remember about ourselves in the continuous construction of subjectivity, are contingent on the inherent variability and multiplicity of language—its Miltonic “double sense deluding.”<sup>i</sup>

Extending the direction of his earlier work, which probes masculine subjectivity, particularly its socially constructed archetypes, this new material prioritizes the linguistic in a Lacanian entanglement with the mirror and the utterance. Central to Le Blanc’s semiotic query is the tragic biographical revelation that he was an identical twin and that his brother was stillborn, his umbilical cord having been compressed. Although the disclosure is made obliquely (though most prominently

Opposite: Craig Le Blanc, *Bad Man* (detail), 30 x 39 ½ x 1¼ in.  
Previous: Craig Le Blanc, *Runaway Train* (detail), 30” x 54¾ x 1¼ in.

in *I've Been Waiting for You, But You're Not Coming.*), that it is as much confession as a traumatic incident endured, is explicit in each of the works emphasizing guilt, shame and self-loathing. At its core, however, *She Loves Me. He Loves Me Not.* underscores a universal longing for witness, for validation and approval and, more primordially, for proof of existence.

Le Blanc's text-based works in glass, upholstery and steel, assert the psychoanalytic insistence that romantic love is rooted in mistaken identity and that twining further problematizes the transference, projection and confusion of relationality. The dyad of primary care-giver and baby becomes fractured by necessity in the case of twins both pre- and post-natally, thus the show's title offers a circuitous play on the rerouting of desire from the maternal to the fraternal to the (in this case) heteronormative romantic. The artist's twin is present in the show as an absent companion whose portentous end is projected, re-imagined and embodied as a kind of phantom limb.

What this psychic and emotional projection reveals, however, is the need in all of us for an imagined potentiality. What is life, after all, but a continuous navigation between what is and what could be? Yet, the perpetuity of possibility is an endless deferral. This powerful duality is at the centre of *She Loves Me. He Loves Me Not.* In winning you lose. In surviving, you kill your twin. These are the myths of guilt and fear that become the latticework of identity Le Blanc reveals as iterations of self slip through the porous shield of his and the viewers' various defenses.

Indeed, shields of armour and masculinity have long been paired and, as a brother in arms, the artist's 10 steel and vinyl shields disclose that from which they seek to protect. Each one offers a précis of the tenuous construction of subjectivity. The escutcheons invert their typical connotations insisting instead on their antithesis—fragility, vulnerability, and shame. Take, for example, the upholstered companion pieces, the matte black, *My Lies Hurt More than My Secrets* and the ballet pink, *My Hurt Seeks More than My Lies*. The raised text on both is subtle, not being offset in a different colour, not, as it were, inscribed as much as swelling to the surface from the inside as if ready to burst. Surface tension is another anchor to the show, recalling Andy Warhol's famous quip, "I am a deeply superficial person." While the lines of text on vinyl emerge more like an apparition than a proclamation, the depth of the past reveals its constancy.

Like the ghosts of our pasts, language is itself shape-shifting and phantasmic. A confrontation of the word is like a confrontation with the mirror: what it means depends on the intersubjective<sup>ii</sup> connotations we bring to it. Despite the size, weight and meticulousness of the shields, they conjure the saccharine flippancy of the iconic Valentine's Day candy hearts—those Sweetheart Candies known as "conversation hearts"—mass produced messages of endearment inscribed on each one such as "Luv U" or "Kiss Me."

Although more chocolatey-wafer than candy heart, but just as deceptive in its sweetness, is the deep brown upholstered shield, *I am not a bad man but I am not good*. Materially, the text appears understated, yet its right-



justification underscores the artist's message—as if confession engenders permissibility. There is no remorse, per se, in the ghosted script, simply a statement of fact. Yet the joke is on the viewer, who might expect to see or apprehend something of an apology with those words—but doesn't.

To be sure, humour accompanies tragedy throughout the show. Consider *Wounded*, a beige escutcheon, its vinyl “skin” cut down the middle revealing an inner pink layer (the epidermis?) and then a red background. *Wounded* is both a personification (the medium becomes the artist) and a play on textual inscription. Duality is furthered by the obvious vaginal implications of the piece and the trauma of birth it suggests. The black stitching also functions doubly—is the wound being sutured or the stitches ripping further apart? Yet the materials are anything but foreboding, they are instead clean, shiny, and light and the effect of this gap is deeply funny. The shield *I am a Runway Train*, could decorate a nursery with its baby blue cuteness (a delicate cloud of white smoke trailing behind the “i” of “train” like Thomas the Tank Engine), and yet the text chugs the weight of the artist (and connotations of excess and addiction) into the horizon.

But language is also performative, its meaning contingent on the varying contexts of insistence, tone and voice (whether visual, acoustic or tactile). The performative aspect of the utterance is examined in the mixed media installation *It Won't Always Hurt*. This dynamic, synaesthetic work consists of 25 industrial lights piled languidly, despairingly, in a heap. The lights are linked electronically to a sound recording which is triggered when viewers approach, sounding a loop of recorded cries. The resulting mournful

Opposite: Craig Le Blanc, *It Won't Always Hurt* (detail), multimedia installation. Size Variable, 25 industrial lights (each 12 x 24 in.)

Previous: Craig Le Blanc, *Lies* (detail), 30" x 54 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ " in.



echo whimpers as the lights do themselves, fading through various levels of brightness. Just as overblown as the sweetheart candy, *It Won't Always Hurt* reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously—the despair in the recorded cries at once haunting and humorous—humorous because it is so canned. Here, the non-semantic utterance has cracked the looking glass and like Humpty Dumpty, it can't be put back together again.

Another work which depends on illumination, is the hanging steel text piece, *This Is Not Who I am, But It Is Who I Was*. At almost 100 inches in length, the piece suggests a rolled out scroll (if a drooping one, rife, like the whimpering lights, with the implication of impotence) the contents of which becomes clear paradoxically, in shadow. By shining light on the excised text, Le Blanc inverts normative reading practices. Lit from above, the shadow of the sagging text straightens out on the floor beneath it. The inscription is itself a fascinating inversion. What does it mean, after all, to renounce or defer in time, an aspect of self? Is subjectivity not a continuum? Here again we are confronted with potentiality—the script of becoming other in order to become oneself, the continuous slippage between erasure and emergence.

As referred to above, the linchpin in the show is the glass paneled visual novella *I've Been Waiting for You, But You're Not Coming*. Continuing the play with surface and depth, reflection and refraction of perception and ontology, the piece consists of five glass panes inserted in a wooden base like a layered flap book (think illustrated anatomy book mimicking human dissection). Each layer displays a digital print revealing

Opposite: Craig Le Blanc, *I've Been Waiting For You, But You're Not Coming*, wood, glass, digital print, 11" x 18" x 17"



progressively more of the artist's origin, contextualized with the first layer on which is inscribed, in block text, the lyrics of Damian Rice's song, "My Favourite Faded Fantasy." Included here as both a love song and ordinary hymn, lines such as "You could have been my favourite fantasy/ I've hung my happiness upon what it all could be" are *doubly-deluded*.

A layer of lattice design such as found on confessionals, separates the song and the components of a digitized photograph of the artist as a baby. Each subsequent layer inserts a player in the ghosted family portrait: first the artist as a one year old, contemplating a not uncomplicated flight of stairs on the family's front porch. Gleeful at his undertaking the child is blissfully unaware of the phantasmic replica of his bodily outline—the twin as absent presence looming behind him in the penultimate pane. The final pane features the original black and white photograph in which there is no twin brother, just the artist and his mother, her arm outstretched, guiding him to the stairs. Once again, what could have been fills the page, is in effect the story's last words and reverberates with Rice's lines from page one, "You could hold the secrets that save/ Me from myself...You could be my poison, my cross/My razor blade/ I could love you more than life/If I wasn't so afraid/ Of what it all could be."

As a linguistic twin, a substantive palindrome unites the component parts of the show. Acting as a literal and figurative hinge to the body of work, the silkscreened mirror and glass depiction of the Finnish word "Autiotua," mounted on a corner of the gallery wall effects the intermingling of language, image, perception and subjectivity. Yet

Opposite: Craig Le Blanc, *I've Been Waiting For You, But You're Not Coming* (detail), wood, glass, digital print, 11" x 18" x 17"

Previous: Craig Le Blanc, *I've Been Waiting For You, But You're Not Coming* (detail), photograph



the sculptor's polished precision here highlights the symmetry of companionship explored through its absence elsewhere in the show, just as it accentuates the materiality of language—its non-lexical, non-linguistic characteristics. Although the word appears to suggest the autonomy of self, the Finnish word means “to become deserted.” With only half the word silkscreened on the glass pane, it becomes completed in mirroring. Furthermore, its definition magnifies as the reader/viewer comes to “populate” the deserted space—confronting the phantasm (of self?) as it were, and so concretizes it. In short, the viewer of the palindrome comes to embody the refractive power of language and the mirror.

I have long maintained that despite working primarily in sculpture, often industrial in size and materials, Le Blanc's practice is a fascinating and progressive form of body art. Like *Wounded*, or the interplay of personification and synaesthesia encouraged in a piece like the sound-light show of *It Won't Always Hurt*, the artist relies on somaticization—his own and his viewers'. The work, even when it whimpers, fades, or slumps, insists on a life force—one he both articulates and exploits. By processing the organic through the inorganic, Freudian Eros alongside its death-drive counterpart of Thanatos, Le Blanc's work epitomizes tension at the surface, its seeming simplicity reverberating with the tremors of a tidal wave.

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Opposite: Craig Le Blanc, *Autioitua*, mirror, glass, silkscreen, 96 x 15 x ¼ in.



## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> In Book One of Milton's *Paradise Regained*, Satan's ability to obscure meaning is described by the Son as "double sense deluding":

That has been thy craft,  
By mixing somewhat true to vent more lies,  
But what have been thy answers, what but dark  
Ambiguous and with double sense deluding,  
Which they who asked have seldom understood,  
And not well understood as good not know?

<sup>ii</sup> In *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, psychoanalytic scholar Jessica Benjamin defines the "intersubjective":

"From the study of the self who suffers the lack of recognition, as well as the new perception of the active, social infant who can respond to and differentiate others, emerges what I call the intersubjective view. The intersubjective view maintains that the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects. Most important, this perspective observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right. It assumes that we are able and need to recognize that the other subject as different and yet alike, as an other who is capable of sharing similar mental experience." (19-20)