

Moore, Lucy Kumara. "Table Works: A Portfolio by Buck Ellison" *Pop Magazine* February 2016



Table Works
A Portfolio by Buck Ellison

Words *Lucy Kumara Moore*



Ellison, 2011

If Buck Ellison's photographs were a song, they'd be *For Your Pleasure*, Bryan Ferry's tormented ode to a blow-up doll from Roxy Music's second album, *For Your Pleasure*. Oh, Bryan knows it will go nowhere, his 'plain wrapper baby' isn't real, after all. She's 'a lover ungrateful', vacuous and unemotional, a symbol of the loneliness of acquisitive impulses and modern living. But set against that sexy saxophone, we are swept up and beguiled. The song is a hazard-warning against the emptiness of societal aspiration. And yet, it's beautiful...

Ellison was born in San Francisco but moved to New York to study Art and German Literature at Columbia University as an undergraduate, and then to the prestigious Städelschule art school in Frankfurt, where he was taught by Dutch artist Willem de Rooij. He spent time in Berlin and, a year ago, relocated to Los Angeles. His carefully-crafted photographic tableaux entice us with their formal beauty, their allusions to the promises and trappings of wealth. They're replete with luxe surface and tentative eroticism. And yet, they have an undercurrent of disquiet. Ellison's

work – like Bryan Ferry's wonderful Pop song – is a modern-day vanitas painting, warning us, perhaps, against taking desire too far.

LKM: The art scene in LA is evolving quite quickly, do you feel that?

BE: I just moved here a year ago. I have no idea what it was like before, but I was concerned about feeling isolated when I came here and it's the total opposite. I see people all the time. It is crazy, it's such a weird place. I love that.

LKM: Let's talk about the beginnings of your career as an artist. Was photography an early interest?

BE: Yes, from pretty early on. When I was 17 and in high school I started taking pictures. I always liked looking at pictures most, that was what I gravitated towards in museums.

LKM: Who did you look at? Any heroes?

BE: I can remember being really floored by Jeff Wall's work when I was that age. And now I'm a big fan of Manet! Haha. Manet's a no-brainer.



FINDING THEIR WAY

Within the vicinity of Hermès production sites, youngsters are struggling. The Foundation is supporting three multi-year programmes to help them achieve autonomy and secure their future.



Alienation, cultural isolation, poor concentration at school, bad guidance, ignorance of manual trades: in the struggling neighbourhoods of outer Lyon, home to two Hermès production units (the Pierre-Bénite Leather Works and the Holding Textile Hermès silk works), everyone is aware of the problems facing young people. To help improve the situation, the Foundation is supporting two programmes run by the Sport dans la Ville association with local authorities as well as the factories themselves. The first, "L dans la Ville", is designed for young women aged between 12 and 18 who are excluded from mixed activities. The aim is to help build their self-confidence and sense of purpose through a weekly programme of sporting and cultural activities. The second, "Job dans la Ville", aims to help boys and girls between 14 and 18

gain a clearer idea of their future by providing individual mentors to support them in their education or training.

Sport dans la Ville plays a vital role as an intermediary, working with two thousand young people every year in a relationship of familiarity and trust. The two Hermès production units will teach youngsters about the realities of artisan professions, helping them look beyond the stereotypes. This initiative is a first for these factories, and reflects the Foundation's determination to help youngsters gain autonomy over the long term by encouraging them to learn about the manual trades that exist on their doorstep.

What goes for Lyon's suburbs also goes for Pantin, home to the Hermès workshops. There, just north of Paris, a neighbourhood programme has been set up, with an information centre about crafts, and in particular the manual trades practised in the area. It is part of a mission dedicated to helping young people find their way professionally, based at La Lyr community centre. Known as the "Ressourcerie", the 100 square-metre resource centre will offer a rich array of information and provide youngsters with job-search support and organize talks and workshop visits run by specially trained advisers. Opening in September 2012.

NEW

Last November
by the Found

A couple of rope for footh against a verti joining room, out of an office have been per figure wearing phrases ("Tw your body", e trating them, place was the taire de Paris, ographer Fan Ramette wen screwball, dis cranky tablea temporary in This was one edition of the ated by the H with the The

Für die Kinder vorsorgen.

Vorsorge.

Kinder bedeuten Zukunft – und liegen Eltern besonders am Herzen. Bei der Nachlassplanung steht der Nachwuchs daher neben dem Partner meist im Fokus. Denn Kinder möchte man gerade in dieser Zeit gut versorgt wissen und für den Weg durch das Leben finanziell absichern. Hierfür bieten sich neben testamentarischen Regelungen auch Vorsorgelösungen an. Diese Maßnahmen können dazu beitragen, das Vermögen im Erbfall in der Familie zu halten. Es gibt auch gute Gründe, Teile des Vermögens bereits zu Lebzeiten auf Kinder zu übertragen, etwa um ihnen den Start in die Selbstständigkeit zu finanzieren oder den Bau eines eigenen Hauses zu ermöglichen. In diesen Fällen kann eine Schenkung die geeignete Form der Vermögensübertragung sein. Sie ermöglicht es Ihnen mitzuerleben, wie der Vermögensübertrag wertgeschätzt wird.

Schenkungen.

Schenkungen werden immer beliebter, da sie sich unter Umständen an bestimmte Auflagen knüpfen lassen, mit denen der Schenkende die Kontrolle über den Vermögensgegenstand behalten kann. Wenn Eltern beispielsweise eine Immobilie an ihren Sohn übertragen, können sie sich dennoch ein lebenslanges Wohnrecht sichern oder weiterhin die Mieteinkünfte erhalten. Dieses Modell wird als Nießbrauchsrecht bezeichnet und gewährleistet Ihnen bei entsprechender Vereinbarung eine Kontrolle über die künftige Verwendung. Diese bei Immobilien verbreitete Form der Schenkung ist auch bei Kontoguthaben und Depots möglich. Ihr Berater Private Banking zeigt Ihnen gerne auf, worauf zu achten ist, um Vermögenswerte auf diese Weise zu Lebzeiten weiterzugeben.



Steuerliche Gestaltungsspielräume.

Steuern und Freibeträge bei Erbschaften und Schenkungen.

Erbschaft-

Klare Gewinner des am 1.1.2009
reformgesetzes sind
beispielsweise







"THE WAY YOU LIVE EVOLVES ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU BUY—
AND HOW MANY CHILDREN YOU HAVE," FRÉDÉRIC MALLE SAYS.

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Music Humanities
Spring 2008, section 29
Midterm
Tuesday, March 11, 2007

Name: Buck Ellison

Theory (30)

1. (3) What is the difference between the *chromatic* and *diatonic* scales?

chromatic: white keys, earlier, only whole notes
diatonic: later, white/black piano keys, in w/ sharps and flats

2. (3) What is syncopation? *displacement of normal accents to one TWO (unaccented) str*

3. (3) What is a point of imitation? *in imitative polyphony, aspects of the melody that are repeated in other voices - specifically the notes on the penultimate note against the penultimate note*

4. (3) What is the medieval style of polyphony along with a single interval between them?

5. (3) What is the name of the performance technique of extra notes, which is often used in the repeat of a phrase? *Vivacity ornamentation*

6. (6) Give an outline of double exposition form, either textually or diagrammatically.

double exposition: 1st theme, 2nd theme, 1st theme, 2nd theme, 1st theme, 2nd theme
bridge and development: recap, 2nd key, 1st key, 2nd key, 1st key, 2nd key
Where is/are the bridge(s) found in fugue form? Tonic key
one bond between episodes and entries, types are systematically written and types can vary (more w/ typical style, so the number of bridges varies)







Zahnarztsoehne, 2013

LKM: That’s interesting. I was in Paris just recently looking at his painting *The Piper* in the Musée D’Orsay and something struck me – the backdrop is like the ones used in photo shoots – it’s seamless! That seems radical given that it was painted in 1866, so soon after photography was invented (and I’m not even sure they used seamless backdrops back then). Manet is somewhat photographic. Thoughts?

BE: I never noticed the seamless backdrop! That’s great. But I don’t know... Manet’s subject matter has always interested me. There’s that book about him by Beth Archer Brombert, *Rebel in a Frock Coat* where she describes how he managed to be both extremely bourgeois and extremely radical at the same time. He was using set parameters from this classic tradition. His father was a judge. And yet he did really radical things in his work.

LKM: There’s also a tension in Manet’s paintings between beauty and ugliness. Sometimes I’ve looked closely at the faces of his models and thought they verge on the grotesque. They’re very direct. Your work seems intentionally oppositional; it depicts beautiful objects associated with pleasure and wealth,

and yet also things which threaten to decay like orange peel and flowers, for example. The texts depicted within the frame of the images often seem to imply parody, upending the work’s own foundations, in a way. What’s the relationship between perfection and its dismantling in your table top works?

BE: I think that’s something you have to deal with from the get-go with photography. It’s this medium that’s dominated by ideas of perfection – the perfect lighting, or print, or exposure. None of which really exists – they’re all totally subjective. But I guess it’s still, even now, a medium where any deviation from perfection in terms of lighting or colour balance or the way it’s printed, or the sharpness, becomes an aesthetic decision. I’m interested in that. With the table top still lives, there’s a strong sense of ambivalence which is true of all my work. Not that I’m indifferent towards the objects. I’m intensely attracted to and repulsed by the same thing. Which is something I may have in common with Manet. I don’t know...can’t ask him! The still life *Husbands* is made using the prospectus for the Rugby School, which

I pretended I was interested in sending my children to [fictional children!] and so they sent me their brochures. I became obsessed with public schools. I’m interested in these institutions in general, but I loved this picture of these boys in this embrace espially. And then I included sample business cards which I got from a company in Frankfurt. They’re what all these powerful Frankfurt businessman have, with a beautiful script and embossed type. I was thinking about the presentation of self that these cards represent. Wondering who these men were. And the third element was these oranges which they sell in Germany. They come wrapped individually in paper. And the paper advertises the fact that the people picking these oranges wear gloves and then wrap them in paper, so that when you unwrap your orange, you’re the first person ever to touch it! And they are really expensive... All these things are beautiful and I’m excited they exist. But I’m also a little bit disgusted by the processes that are necessary for them to come to be.

LKM: How much of the placement of the

objects is controlled? How much is just chance? Do you just throw stuff down? Is that important?

BE: It is. It’s hard to make things look haphazard but I do try to throw stuff down, because I have very specific intentions for each element within an image, as I’ve just described, so it’s nice that when it comes to shooting, it can become very intuitive and formal, and a lot is just left up to chance. I just threw those oranges down – it’s a nice marriage of intention and intuition. I like unravelling the image whilst making it at the same time.

LKM: Something that just occurred to me was that the late 19th century in France was a time of rapid modernisation, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and the new experience of leisure. Maybe that’s similar to our current ultra-consumerist reality, and some of those connections we’ve made with Manet aren’t so coincidental. Your work has been compared to Golden Age Dutch still life painting, too. And I see a link with Modernism – not just that formally you use colour, composition, line and areas of flat abstraction – but that Modernist painting in the 1950s was all about taste, and your work deals with that too, albeit in a different way. Do you think about the history of painting when making your work?

BE: I do think about painting a lot. I’m very interested in this idea that my decisions are subconsciously impacted by my knowledge of the Western canon of art. For example, there are compositional formats that I use again and again. So I have this subconscious lineage in my head, even though I’m using a different medium. And that’s probably a product of my own upbringing. I was exposed to a lot of painting when I was a kid, which was a privilege. Formal decisions aren’t made in a vacuum. I think Tina Barney discussed this in relation to her work.

LKM: Do you get really into the prop styling? Do you dedicate hours to finding the perfect fennel?

BE: That takes a long time, I get very into it. I had the copy of *Architectural Digest* in my studio for about three years before it ended up in these images [Buck mentions *In A Weak Moment* (2013) and *Slippers Gold, Oysters Cold* (2012)]. The objects are extremely important. The loneliness of the studio allows me to figure out if using them is worthwhile or not. I have a lot of things I collect and it takes me a long time to figure out how to get them into the work.

LKM: What about the Swiss artist Daniel Spoerri? Do you know his work? He made what

he called ‘snare pictures’, fixing the remnants of communal meals to their tables (things like plates, cutlery, peach-coloured roses and half-eaten baguettes). These tables are then mounted on the wall as artworks, documenting and preserving the aftermath of what might be thought of as a performance. Spoerri is from a different generation – he was born in 1930 – but his work reminds me of yours because he also negotiates ideas of consumption, desire, satisfaction, and where the origins of culture might lie. Some of the objects you use in your work, like the prospectus for Rugby, symbolise the desire to preserve certain values and uphold ideologies.

BE: I didn’t know about Spoerri...

LKM: His table work is also full of blue, like yours! Is blue an important colour for you?

BE: Yes. The blues you see in the table works are painted backgrounds that I’ve made. They’re based on the pigment colours that George Washington used for a mansion he built in Virginia called Mount Vernon. In this early Colonial period, it was very fashionable for wealthy people to paint all their walls in these bright blues, because it was the most expensive pigment available. They look really insane, very garish. The English thought it was tasteless! They said it was *dégueulasse*! I’m interested in how the value of this colour has shifted over time. I also use it as a formal device. The Delft Blue plate works very well formally.

LKM: How long have you been making the table works and will you keep making them?

BE: I made the very first one in 2012. I’ve made about one or two a year since then, so there’s six now. I’m going to keep making them. I like that they have a set of parameters. They’re all shot from above, with natural light, and a lot of them have the blue background. They’re all printed 10% larger than the actual image that’s a convention from advertising, to show texture. They all include an image from another source within the frame.

LKM: Do you like moving between commercial work and fine art?

BE: I just did my first commerical shoot for this issue of POP with Charlotte Collet. She approached me to work with her to shoot Ralph Lauren, and I really enjoyed it. I thought it was a really beautiful way to make an image, with so many people working together. That’s so different to my studio practice which is very solitary. The images which I exhibit and are sold are supposed to exist forever, whereas I like the idea of producing an image which is meant to be consumed quickly! People throw magazines away...

LKM: They don’t now! Magazines are becoming super collectible again!

BE: That’s true, everything’s changing, the printed magazine almost has the same status that a book has, and the digital content does something else. I’m dipping my toe in...I’ve always thought there was so much great work being produced in the commerical realm. This line between art photography and commercial photography frustrates me.

LKM: The hierarchies have shifted quite a lot. Think of someone like Collier Schorr who is mainly working in fashion advertising now.

BE: It’s funny how so much art photography reminds me of commercial work from the 1920 and 1930s – images that were produced in Germany or American for an advertisement for screws, or cups, or saucers. That’s something that the photographic medium can do, so we shouldn’t deny ourselves that.

LKM: Do you know the photographer Torbjørn Rødland? He lives in LA and I thought you might know each other. He works in both commerical and fine art photography.

BE: I know his work but I haven’t met him. I’d like to meet him! I really like his work and I don’t feel that very often. That thing of when you’re looking at something and you don’t understand it right away.

LKM: What’s unusual about his work is its utopian nature. He’s interested in making images that deploy the symbolism in which we’re all well-versed – like the cuteness of a kitten, or the sanctity of a priest, for example – in order to synthesise a new type of meaningful-ness. Are you ultimately trying to make positive work or something which is more of a critique?

BE: That’s a tough one. I think you can do both at the same time. I’m not interested in either of those extremes. To promote a lifestyle through the images isn’t interesting. But it’s boring to critique a certain type of person, too. We already have a lot of photographic ‘inventory’ on both sides of that coin. My intention is to create an image that can go both ways. Art lets you do that, and maybe commercial work does too, under different terms.

LKM: I think that’s an optimistic response. What’s next for you?

BE: I did an exhibition in a German castle last year called Bad Bentheim. And we have produced a book that relates to the show, so I’m launching that. It’s a small run of 400 called *Country Day*. And I have shows in Paris and Berlin this year. I’ll send you a copy!

LKM: I’d love to see it. Better, I’ll sell a couple of hundred in my bookshop!