

Art Review:

Leigh Ledare

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17 March – 21 April By Andrew Berardini

Same house. same woman. Very close to the same time. Only a different husband. I see her a thousand times, twice. I see her cold-shouldering, repelled, exhausted, closed. I see her beckon with a joyful face, open eyes. There is weird rawness that separates the two versions of her that's hard to get around, an open wound, the whole irreconcilable plot violating some rule whose exact boundaries I've never known. The plot, a double bind: Leigh Ledare invites his former wife, five years after their divorce, to be photographed by him in a cottage in the woods. Before they leave for the shoot, she remarries, another photographer. Ledare and his ex-wife go on their trip to the cottage, sleep in separate beds, talk; he photographs her. Two months later she returns with her new husband, same place, cottage, woods, and he then photographs her. The new husband turns over the undeveloped photographs to Ledare.

The artist displays them, collaged and alone, Ledare's on black mat, the new husband's on white, with the whole situation explained on a tattered, handwritten document riddled with strikethroughs and corrections, which hangs outside the room that has been constructed, in the middle of the gallery, to contain this piece, *Double Bind* (2010). Together, Ledare and his exwife's new husband took more than a thousand photographs of this peculiar situation.

The emotion is direct, but the medium, the display and the form are equally direct. Though emotional, the work does not gush. It has a conceptual clarity that is almost too precise, an awareness of itself and its representation that makes clearly accessible how meaning is mercurial. If Ledare is elusive at all here, it's in the display. The photographs are collaged with another archive, directed by different and unknown terms, that comprises works of pornography (fetish, gay, straight), old textbooks, *Cigar Aficionado* magazine, family photos and scraps of books, magazines and other ephemera. *Bataille* peeks out from around a picture, men wave their not insubstantial cocks, ladies' asses get paddled, Ledare's ex-wife curls away from the camera. Photos taken, found, received – all get arranged here.

While trawling through Meghan Ledare- Fedderly's looks at her two husbands in *Double Bind*, I hear two videos of Ledare's mother. One room away are the sounds of his mother getting spanked. In the other direction, up some stairs, the sound of her weeping. Ledare includes these videos from another important body of work and another woman from his life. Ledare and his mother (who went from teenage fashion model to adult-movie performer) appear to have an uncomfortably intimate relationship, one that discomfits a sense of propriety I didn't know I had. The spanking film, *The Gift* (2008), his mother made but deemed not commercial enough, so 'gifted' it to the artist. In the other video, his mother is prompted to act out weeping on her son's shoulder. What begins as a seeming put-on (her opening remarks are too casually acidic) turns into a truly- felt tragedy. Her weeping and her anguish feel authentic, moving. Truth, like meaning, has become unstable in these gripping and disconcerting pictures.