The Event of Art

Marc Lafia, Mathieu Borysevicz, Daniel Coffeen

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In his new body of work Marc Lafia invites us to deeply immerse ourselves in our senses. Best known as a conceptual photographer and filmmaker, he has taken up something very new and sensate here. If in his past work he created an image of seeing, here he creates that which sees and folds our senses of touch and sight.

Maybe it was the his time in Japan and the ambience of the Setouchi Islands or wanting more to touch materials and light with his hands, to make something immersive, additive, sensual, sensate, something alive. Here he presents not an object image, but an object event, an event of being, of light and temperature, of texture, both of material, and its relation to the environment, and its beholding.

If his early works emerge in and around network culture—which has now become so pervasive it's invisible—this new work is not of virtual bodies and performative identities, but rather gives forth a site specific embodiedness, a sense of touch that affects sight. Rather the world at the screen, at a remove, as an abstract thing, that is managed as a thing, as data, this new work re-situates and re-positions us, literally into the fabrics of material life.

If Lafia was interested in the social body in the network, its power to shrink the world, here he is interested in the ambient and experiential, the layered and contingent, the variable event of a realm of materials constructed and arranged to be pliable and responsive, to revealing themselves in their ambient character as they drape and drift.

Each of the pieces—all fabric works and light sculptures—are pliable, complicated and textured, made of silk, plastic, neoprene, rubber, latex, paper, all pleated, elegantly engineered with stitching and zippers, each folding onto and into each other, responsive to heat and cold, light and dark, time. Though
precarious, they are enduring and will endure, each work embodying material memory, each adaptable, agile, and resilient and made to wear their decay. Like us, they seem to hang together while falling apart.

In his inviting philosophical title, Lafia asks many questions, both of his objects and his audience. What is it to finish when we never really finish? What is a today, a now, as we live in the event of becoming? After all, these works change with temperature, change as to how they are hung or installed, become other as they are layered over with varying works of the series. In a most beautiful way, they give forth in their site specific placement a singular and tactile experience of light and form, and shape. And yet from one instant to the next they are variable, becoming stable, then unstable, as they work to perform and adapt in their environment. They are a language, a material that is continually to come.

Perhaps Lafia here, amongst all the sumptuous textures and hues of colors, has come upon tactile seeing and wants us to re-embody ourselves with delight, to realign touch to sight, alert and alive to the full amplitude of our senses.

(https://vimeo.com/219447231)
The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert’s dusty Face
Lighting a little Hour or two—is gone.

(Omar Khayyam, translated by Edward Fitzgerald)

The beginning of volume. An architecture of light.
In the new statement, “the precarious,” I want to connect my foray into the non-image to the non-screen world of materiality. thinking about it, this is what i did with the anatomy series and with the book sculptures. here i turn to industrial materials, plastics, ikea light paper, rubber, latex, neoprene, silk, gauze - each with very specific qualities of opacity, weight, texture and feel, and each carrying with them some sense of a human interaction, now presented as a poetic relation, in the form of a new object made with familiar materials one would find in clothing, in hospitals or plumbing. i see it moving from sight, seeing (instascapes) to allusions (don’t know the right word) metaphors, of sexuality and the body, as well as death and the subconscious—skin, tubes, wardrobe vinyls, why latex seems to me an artificial skin, not sure.

1. The Precarious

As the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity have been replaced in the 21st century by comfort, security, and sustainability how can we respond? We are fed cute icons of urban life, integrated with harmless devices, cohering into pleasant diagrams in which citizens and business are surrounded by more and more circles of service that create bubbles of control.

These bubbles in our lives have become increasingly facilitated and embedded with all kinds of digital infrastructure and networks, devices, sensors and actuators and the volume of data produced about us and the information graphics and analytics to display and understand this data has grown exponentially. Yet in a very certain sense all of this has made us increasingly anxious and lost. We are following screens not knowing where we are and what’s around us. As we transfer authority to the market and data, to our sensors and screens, and the analytics of this information the dominant values of our culture increasingly privilege sight over touch, information over empathy, the cognitive over the sensate, the image over the event. Working principally in the realm of the image, moving image and the society of the network, in this new work, I want to engage with the ambience of light, the qualities of touch, the situational and the environment, the materiality of the event of light, plastic, rubber and paper, each with its own tactility.

Taking cues from the society of data and its representations in abstractions and pristine graphics, here the work, screen-like is messy, risk, unmanageable, and legibility, uncertain. In this inverted order, play supersedes reason, the continuous overcomes the discrete and the embodied and material takes the fore over the virtual and immaterial. If the central emergent feature of modernity was the further development of a rational capacity and at the height
of abstraction there was the idea of an ideal, a certain perfection or purity or simplicity these works bring show a materiality that is torn, uncertain, sheared and sewn. According to Heidegger, calculative thinking

races from one prospect to the next. [It] never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is.

For Heidegger the modern world is under the one sided dominance of this type of thinking, and as a result the earth now appears “as an object open to the attacks of calculative thought, attacks that nothing is believed able any longer to resist. The instrumental rationality of Big Data has become a tool used by elite power for imposing order, dominance and control. The future will likely reflect narrow corporate and state visions, rather than the desires of wider society, a society and myself, that wants to become re-embodied, present to the material and ambience of the world.

Everything is dissolving, we are all falling you better give it away.

Working principally in the realm of the image, moving image and the society of the network, I want here to engage with the ambience of light, the qualities of touch, the situational and the environment, the materiality of the event of light, plastic, rubber and paper, each with its own tactility.

to get away from flatness, from the informational, the too cognitive in its apprehension and move to the sense of touch, volume, light, object hood, not so much as a thing but as a presence with the apprehender. something that sees with me, something i see through, not an image, but light passing through, oddly a kind of camera, camera filter, a very simple apparatus, both a thing and a processing, an ambient translucence.

what interest me in this work – are ambient and experiential qualities, the layered and contingent, the variable event of a realm of materials constructed and arranged that are for the most part (except perhaps for Eva Hesse) considered too precarious, unstable and of a lower grade for global art products. after all, these works change in temperature, change as to how they are hung or installed, become other as they are layered over with varying work of the series. in a most beautiful way they give forth in their site specific placement a singular and tactile experience of light, form and shape. in every instant of their being they are singular, variant, stable but unstable, as they work to perform and adapt in their environment.
Each work is a pliable, complicated and textured surface, made of silk, plastic, neoprene, rubber, latex, paper, all pleated, all folding onto each other, into each other, responsive to heat and cold, light and dark, time. all the while they are enduring and precarious, embodying material memory, adaptable, agile and resilient and made to wear their decay. these works can live on the floor, piled up, placed against a window, or on a clothing line in the rain or at sea, all the while building character and history. these are works made in the computational age but speak back and forward to the embodied and material, to the specificity of now, the living now and yesterday and tomorrow.

If we think of other surfaces of art; paintings on canvas, prints on archive paper, 3d printing, sculpture in bronze, aluminum, video of ephemeral performances, they are fixed, unchanging – and in that sense an image, always to be that image.

Why has Laâgia, most noted as a conceptual photographer, filmmaker and occasional painter, turned away from the image to produce this new work.

If the previous work is the event of seeing, reading, performing reading, the new works interest me as events unto themselves, not about my seeing, but these things being modes of going and seeing, yes they afford seeing but they in themselves are a material presence, not solely an image.

"Plastics", in overall, is the most versatile and useful material invented by humans but this versatility is due to thousands of compounds of different compositions and properties.

Reality, this earth, all of it, from the atomic to the mythic is full of tears, folds, holes and cuts, all of it delicate, fragile, contingent, interlocking, a mesh of fabrics. In these works all i want the material to be a record of those that touched it. In a fabric store, this one the mood fabric store in the shrinking garment district of Nyc customers often ask for samples of particular fabrics, so you see all the hazardous cuts of the fabrics here, translucent, transparent, zig zagged into each other, things falling apart, stitched together, laying over one another, silk and synthetics, Fiberglas and gauze, forged and folded together, on the precipice, a retina, a flag, detritus, derangement and arrangement.