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AS THE WORLD TURNS Heather Bennett Four Stories by Heather Bennett

Ed Barnas



Heather Bennett, "On the Road, Panel 2" 2013

Photography has long been used to tell stories, whether in a single frame or a sequence of images. While the medium's genesis as "the mirror of nature" once gave the aura of literal truth to the photograph, skillful manipulation by early practitioners lead the way to fictional tableaux and acceptance of a more figurative use of the camera. This tradition continues among many contemporary art photographers, such as Gregory Crewdon, whose work exhibits an almost cinematic approach to the telling of a tale.

Heather Bennett works in this tradition, following the path laid down by Cindy Sherman and Hanna Wilke (and Claude Cahun before them.) Her explorations began a dozen years ago with conscious parodies of fashion advertisements (Untitled 2001-2003) that mimicked the high production values of slick magazines (indeed, her website lists "production credits" for each of her series) and progressed to images of other clichéd generalizations. The Uncovered Works of Hanna Berman 2005-2006, the Empire Trilogy videos, and an exploration of out takes and production stills in Sidetrack are among them. While the prints in the initial series were as large as 60x48, those in the Sidetrack series dropped down to 5x7.

"Four Stories," the current series on display at the Stephan Stoyanov Gallery, offers a trio of still images in support of four narratives – one large image (up to 42x63) and two smaller ones (often as diptychs). Though somewhat static, these images have a cinematic feel and film terms come to mind. A large establishing two-shot is followed by two single-character studies, with the angle of view hinting at the emotional context/distance. In only one image (the woman prone in Crush) does a character look out of the frame directly at the viewer. The man in the video, Always the Same, from Anniversary (B&D) appears to gaze out at us, but it is a blank unseeing stare and all the characters are emotionally distanced from each other, even when in the same frame.

Read chronologically, the viewer can interpolate details for each scene and adapt an

HEATHER BENNETT
Four Stories by Heather Bennett

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29 Orchard St.
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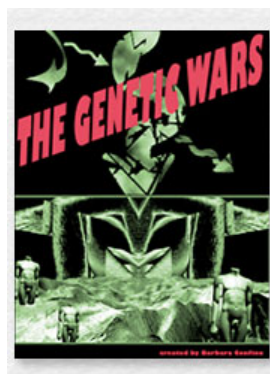


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Heather Bennett, "Texas" 2012

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overarching plot taken from any number of films or TV series. The titles of the stories "Crush, Anniversary (B&D)", "Texas, and On the Road" coupled with the images of well-dressed attractive people of a certain age suggest a number of media fantasies of the one percent (Dynasty and Eyes Wide Shut spring to mind). Adding a narrative twist is the arrangement of the images. The opening image of a formally attired couple in a library (the woman bowed down) followed directly by a poolside conversation between two women from Texas is completed with a print of the woman and a static video loop of the man called "Always the Same."

These two are hung at the head of the stairs to the lower exhibition space and could easily be missed when moving to the "On the Road" sequence, whose establishing shot also breaks pattern by being in black and white and including a shadowy third person.

In these dozen images Heather Bennett offers the bare bones of seemingly static narratives that call up enough cultural references to let the viewer fill in the details from any number of story lines. And by using her body as the primary actor, she addresses — and plays with — the representation of women in contemporary media.


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