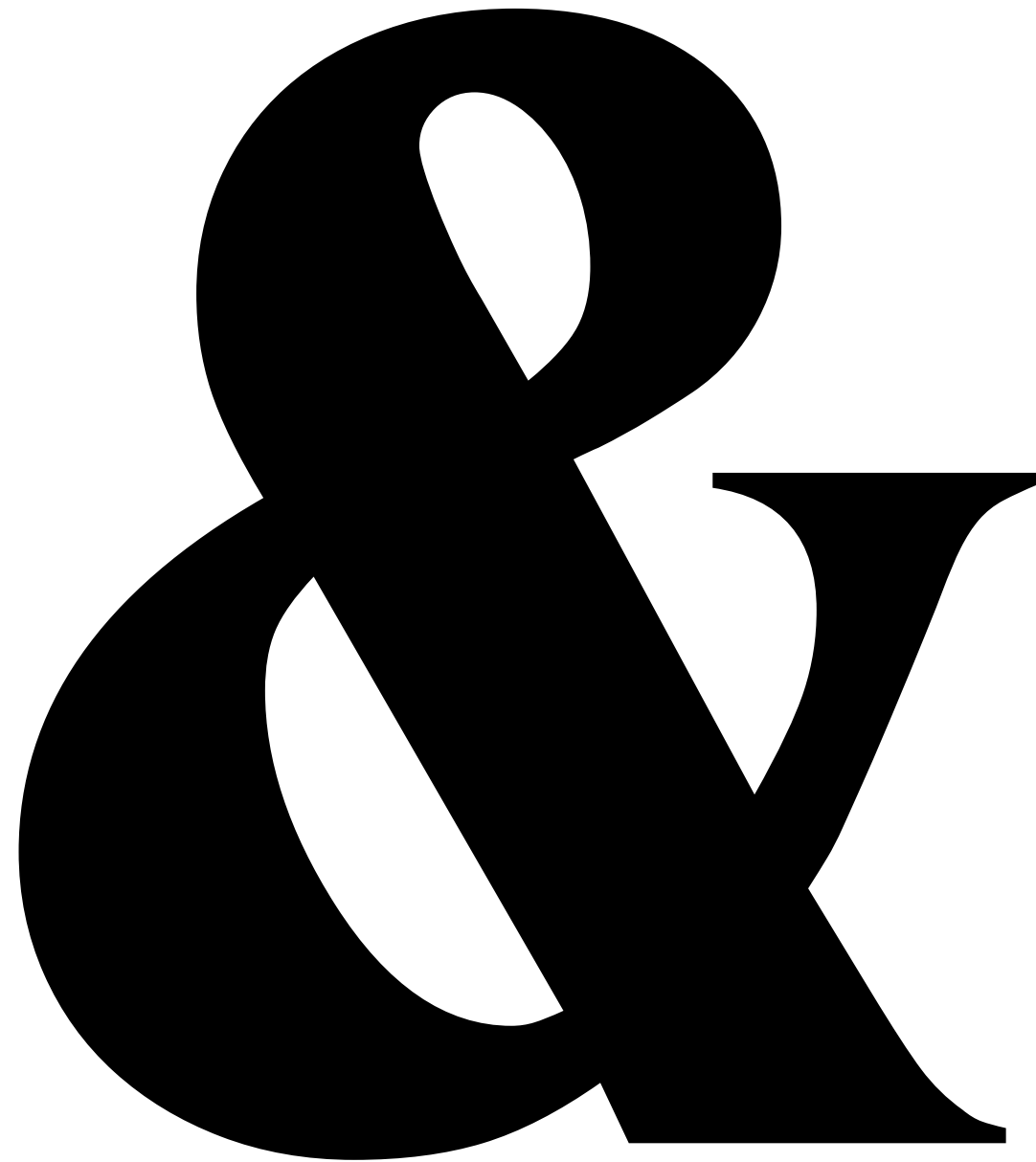


**Bubble
Gum**



**Crushed
Depressant**



COURTESY DAVID KORBANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES, CA

“You can’t really make an art practice about a cell phone, an iPhone, about LOL, or whatever,” **ELAD LASSRY** tells **KATYA TYLEVICH**. The LA-based artist’s work might seem very ‘age of Instagram’ but this master of optical illusion is sceptical about the impact of the digital revolution.

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Elad Lassry's studio in West Hollywood is camouflaged as a single-family stucco home on a flat residential street. Inside, Lassry has stripped the place of all its qualifiers, replacing the expected bedrooms and family photos with libraries and art detritus, scraps from his research, physical evidence of past and future projects, work tables and white walls, some covered like scrapbooks, others bare. The workspace is a deception from the outside, which seems worth mentioning given the conversation I end up having with Lassry. 'I'm interested in optical illusion and the failure of the eye,' he quickly tells me.

Born in Tel Aviv and now based in Los Angeles, Lassry came swinging out of art school in 2007 with projects driven by profoundly compelling photographs, or 'nervous spaces', as he calls them, which capture charged meeting points between the candid and staged, domestic and commercial, past and present. They have the sweetness of bubble gum spiked with crushed depressant. They also have the unique ability to feel extremely relevant — photography, reproduction, subterfuge. What could be more 'age of Instagram'? But they're not. His works are purposefully untethered from the present day. That same kind of fluidity and uneasiness works itself into Lassry's sculptural, film and performance works, especially those smiling in bold colours and geometries.

In March 2012, I saw Lassry's performance work *Untitled (Presence 2005)* at the Hayworth Theatre in Los Angeles, which launched the opening of his second solo show at David Kordansky Gallery in LA. Using six New York City Ballet dancers as his subjects, Lassry came again to the juncture formed between the grace of movement and the instability of standing still. Two years later, at his studio, Lassry and I talk about his own geographic and artistic

PORTRAIT BY ALEXEI TYLEVICH



Previous

Untitled (Boot A), 2013
Silver gelatin print, walnut frame, four-ply silk, 39.4 x 31.8 x 10.2 cm
Unique

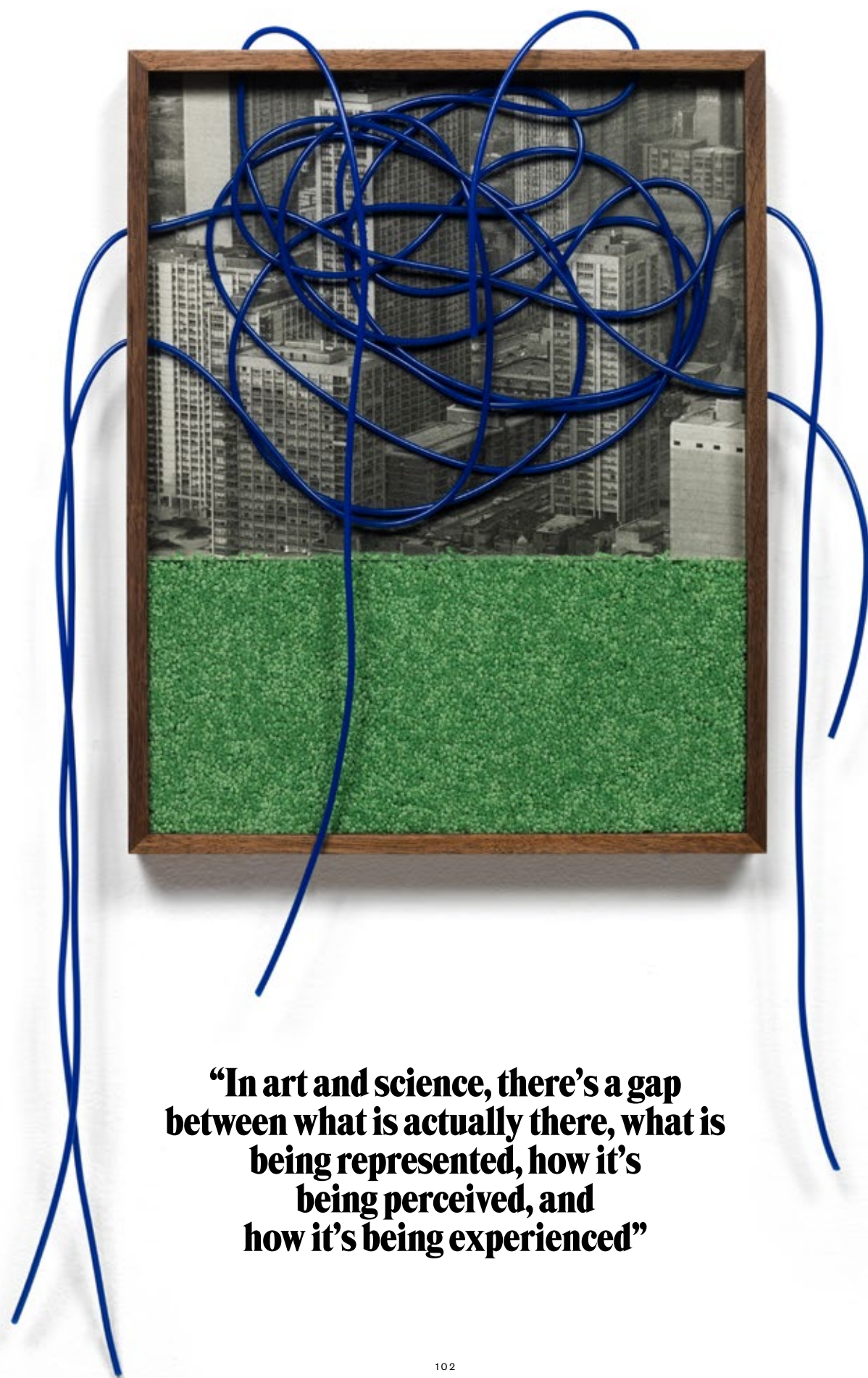
Next, left

Untitled (Studio 1), 2013
Silver gelatin print, walnut frame, four-ply silk, 50.8 x 39.4 x 7.6 cm
Unique

Next, right

Untitled (Yellow, Blue), 2013
C-print, walnut frame, four-ply silk, 29.2 x 36.8 x 3.8 cm
Unique





“In art and science, there’s a gap between what is actually there, what is being represented, how it’s being perceived, and how it’s being experienced”

Left
Untitled (Skyscrapers)
2014, C-print, walnut frame
tubing, carpet
63.5 x 38.1 x 3.8 cm
Unique

Right
*Cherries, Raspberries,
Blackberries (Marbled)*, 2010
C-print, painted frame
36.8 x 29.2 x 3.8 cm
Edition of 5, with 2 AP

Bottom right
Hoffmann (Swirl), 2011
C-print, painted frame
36.8 x 29.2 x 3.8 cm
Edition of 5, with 2 AP



movements in his search for shakiness, even on steady ground.

Were you an artist from the day you were born?
No, I studied science in high school. Growing up in Tel Aviv, I chose a major in high school and from there all of my studies had a single emphasis: chemistry and biology. However, I did make art throughout those years, but only ‘after hours’. At my school, art could never be a priority. It wasn’t offered as a major. If you wanted to make art, then you took classes before school even started. I would leave the house while it was still dark outside to attend an art class early in the morning. I never thought that art was something you could do as a profession. I didn’t know people who were fine artists. My classmate’s dad was a painter, but he had come to Israel from a different country. Coming from my very blue-collar background, art never came up like that. Still, I was into photography as a kid, I made a lot of videos, I painted, I made ceramics. But I never came across the kind of ideas that you’re presented with in art school [Lassry went to California Institute of the Arts as an undergrad and the University of Southern California for his MFA]. Art school made me realize that art is actually important for some people, that there’s room for art, that there are entire organizations around art. Before then, I thought the only way for art to exist was for you to find avenues to do it yourself. Then I discovered that some people teach art as their jobs, and that others curate. Art has an infrastructure.

It seems your ideas about being an artist changed with your geographical location.

Among the reasons America has been so interesting to me, and so alluring, is because it offers the option of starting over and having a limited engagement with geography—as problematic as that sounds. There is a sense of ‘new’ here, because the history is less overwhelming than in a place like Israel or France or Italy.

Does that reflect itself in your art?

Well, any place that has an overwhelming history, or even too much celebration of its national cultural achievements, can be challenging for a contemporary artist, unless that’s what you focus your work on. But when I work, I actually resist any geographical relationship. I prefer the ‘amnesia’ of Los Angeles, this place that has a history of forgetting. As an artist, I find it a very beneficial backdrop.

It’s funny you say that about amnesia, since much of your work is with photographs, which are generally tools for remembering.

I’m interested in the *experience* of looking at a

picture, not so much the picture itself. The photo has been scrutinized to a point of abstraction. We have questioned the indexicality of the photograph, the possibilities of the photo to speak of life, every modernist notion around the photograph, and also its relevance to abstraction. Once an image has been doomed as ‘generic’ or ‘cliché’ or ‘exhausted’, well, what does that mean? What happens then to that picture? The truth is that photography was always unmanageable. We could never control it. It was always something that was so accurate, so much like what we see, but so drastically unlike it. Which is a very scary place, and also flippant: it’s very hard to not be overwhelmed by a photo’s accuracy, even as it’s simultaneously inaccurate. A photograph is a very nervous space, and that’s what I’m interested in. It’s subjective, it’s absurd; at times, it’s irritating even to me. So the art I was making early on was very much about entering a nervous space, about reconsidering an oversight, celebrating it, toying with it.

Is your artistic process at all connected to a scientific one? Does it go back to your studies in chemistry and biology?

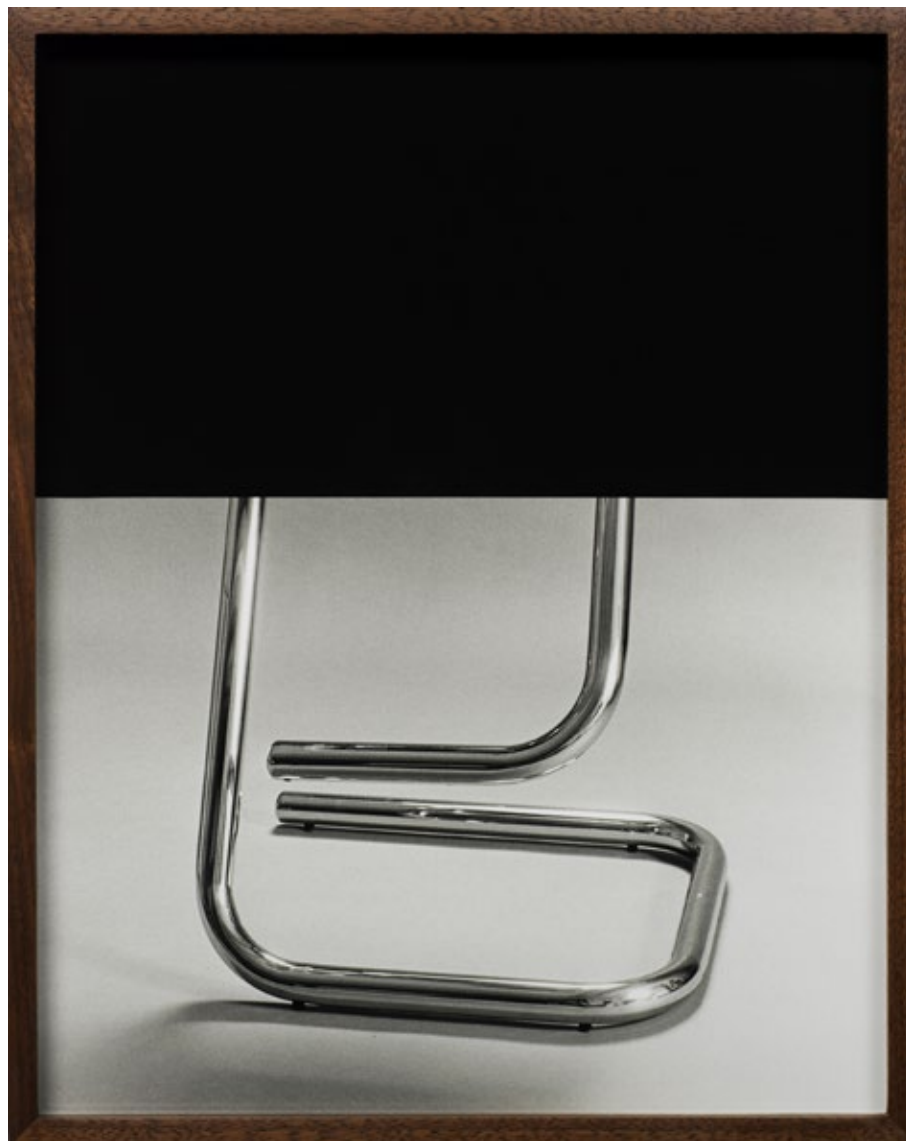
I think my strong interest in experience might be scientific. And a lot of my work suggests the absurdities of what happens in one’s biology; it’s the idea of the animal as a subject, the human or viewer as a subject, the human eye versus the animal’s eye. In art and science, there’s a similar kind of gap between what is actually there, what is being represented, how it’s being perceived, and how it’s being experienced. That gap exists in my own work, I think, because so many of my representations seem so clear at first sight, or seem as if they should be very clear. A photograph of a tree should be very, very clear. I’m very interested in that potential that it’s not. I’m interested in optical illusion and the failure of the eye.

Are you interested in correcting that failure?

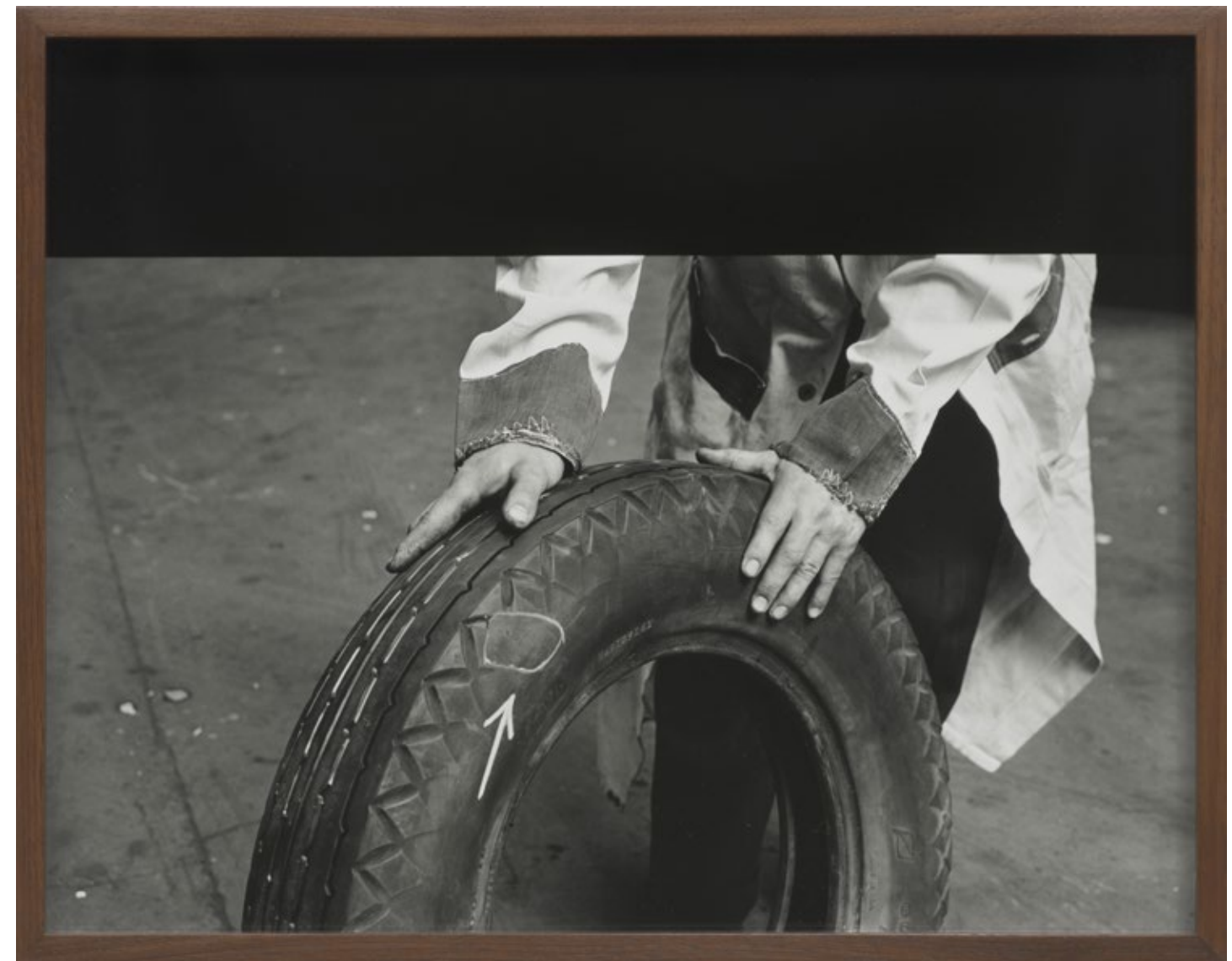
No, I want to explore failure, I don’t want to find answers for it.

Everything you’ve said so far makes me think that LA and geography are at least somewhat relevant to your work, because of the gap between the LA that’s in so many pictures and the one that actually exists. LA is also saturated with images and then saturates other places with images.

I know that’s true, and it’s something that’s come up before in different conversations, so maybe I’m just in denial. I don’t see it that way. There are always images around you, no matter where you live. You might not even notice them. I actually find it exhausting, talking about the idea that we’re saturated by images, that images are everywhere. Yeah, I mean, that’s what pictures are for—they’re meant to be circulated.



**“I prefer the amnesia’
of Los Angeles, this
place that has a history
of forgetting.”**



They were sent in the mail before they were emailed, they were used as postcards. So, I’m careful not to contribute to the mantra that we’re bombarded with images, because that is true, and it has to be true. Related to that, I also don’t think it’s necessary to make a point about the digital revolution of images, because when you look at an old *Life* magazine, even if the circulation of that image was more limited, the potency was just as crucial as anything being circulated today.

The digital revolution conversation is an easy one to fall back on in art conversations.

It’s a huge simplification. All it is talking in the same big sentences at symposiums. I won’t go so far as to say that these conversations aren’t

relevant, but the art practices that they lead to seem so closed down to me. They seem so resolved.

What do you mean by that?

I mean, you can’t really make an art practice about a cell phone, about an iPhone, about LOL or whatever. It’s just not that interesting. It’s very simplistic. It gives a lot of answers to the current conversation, and it makes a lot of good magazines covers because it’s very easy to explain what the art is about. For me, art is not that. Not at all. Art is not meant to teach, art is meant to be an experience. I look at art, and the best I can hope for is a moment that reminds me of my mind and emotions, a moment that reminds me of being human.

Opposite

Chrome A, 2014
Silver gelatin print,
walnut frame,
36.8 x 29.2 x 3.8 cm
Unique

Above

*Quid laborant,
sunt pori qui consequuntur
aut scienis si
ducia dus nissedia*