

Jane Hammond

GALERIE LELONG

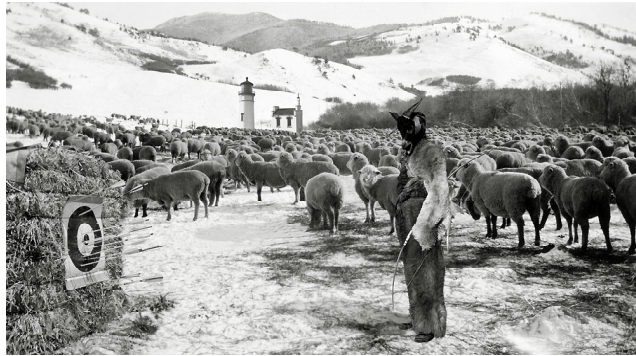
We are the willing and unwilling recipients of so many altered images over the course of a day that assessing their truth content no longer seems important. As a result, the eeriness of photographic manipulation is largely lost to us. Jane Hammond brings it back, in photomontages in which the rupture inherent to collage is held in tension with the smoothness of fact. On a neon-lit street, a car with two dead deer atop it—laid nose to nose, in the manner of a crest—stops next to two ecclesiastical figures standing with their backs to the camera, almost out of the frame, in magnificently embroidered robes (*La Bendición* [Blessing], 2007). A flock of sheep on a snowy mountainside surrounds a creature part human, part goat, that has risen on its hind legs and filled an archery target with arrows (*Cabrito* [Young Goat], 2007).

The best works in this exhibition are, like these two, beautifully allusive without being easy to pin down. They suggest familiar narratives, allegories, fairy tales, but at the last moment swerve away from being knowable—a function, it would seem, of their combining of things that are not entirely consonant but reasonably so (church figures, deer laid in a sacrificial position, the uncanny netherworld of neon lights). While the images fall all along the spectrum of plausibility, the most compelling tend to be those that are both most surreal and most natural—that is, those that propose the most absurd things in the most believable way. There are also a few compositions that feel so entirely real—one, for example, with a boy holding a chicken in front of a run-down house, has the feel of a Farm Security Administration photograph—that it is difficult to find the works' seams, although the knowledge that they are there somewhere renders the images more mysterious than they would normally be.

Between these two poles is a middle ground in which a much more obvious kind of compiling occurs, with scale and shadows variously attended to, and images of a much more glaring incompatibility sharing space. Sometimes this produces an atmosphere of benign kitsch (as it does in a composition featuring assembled bits of statuary), and sometimes with oddly persuasive results (as in one work featuring the artist marrying Elvis Presley in a catacomb, the last word, perhaps, on



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Jane Hammond,
Cabrito (Young Goat)
2007, black-and-white
photograph, 11" x 14"

the ambivalence of wish fulfillment). Although these are less compelling on the whole than the more seamless works, they feel closer to the heart of Hammond's project: the assembling of meaning out of disparate parts. (In recent years she has worked such a vein in her paintings, culling source material from her archive of 276 found images—often shuffling and reorganizing the same images among various canvases, mining them for meaning, investigating where such meaning in visual work comes from, and how pliant, or not, an image can be made to be.) It is here—in those compositions in which the juxtapositions are patently assembled—that Hammond more clearly recalls her predecessors in photomontage, from John Heartfield to Martha Rosler, which is perhaps more of a formal inevitability than a thematic likeness: Her pictures have an aura of propaganda, though they are seemingly without a target.

Hammond begins with Google and Photoshop and ends with a silver gelatin print made from a digitally produced negative, a process that encompasses both the daily pileup of information (itself often the result of intuitive leaps sideways rather than steady forward movement) and an old-fashioned-seeming object. These works suggest that even if meaning in the contemporary world is accidental and cumulative, it still can be made to feel tangible and necessary.

—Emily Hall