

Sadie Benning

Blow Ups

In film and photography, the director uses the camera lens as an eye for the viewer, delivering and withholding information in order to shape a particular narrative. Sadie Benning, who is renown for their early video work of the 1990s, understands the language of the moving image and calls upon the techniques enacted in Michaelangelo Antonioni's eponymous 1966 film, "Blow Up," a film centered around themes of perception and ambiguity. In this iconic film based on a Julio Cortuzar short story), a photographer unveils curious discoveries while reviewing negatives in the darkroom. The act of looking closely or "blowing up" the image, reveals clues to a potential crime and ultimately compels the protagonist to question what reality is.

Benning's second exhibition with kaufmann repetto, *Blow Ups* features a series of twelve new paintings derived from portions of zoomed-in photographs that Benning took while looking carefully at work by artists such as Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Sigmar Polke, Lee Krasner, Paul Gauguin, and David Wojnarowicz. Benning's process of producing these paintings went through many stages of translation—going from a digital image to a transparency to an outline drawn by hand on wood, to the final, sculptural result, which was cut out with a jigsaw, coated with aqua resin, painted and fit back together. In Benning's process of reimagining the blown-up images, aspects of the original disappeared or were vastly distorted—imparting the notion that the copy is always a reconstruction of the original. Benning has cited the trippy experience of looking in the mirror too long as an influence on this work: "The longer you look at your face the more alien you become. And when you look at a painting for a while, it's the same. You start to see other things. The surface changes. Everything is subtly morphing."

The twelve paintings comprising *Blow Ups* can resemble cells under a microscope, something quite alive. "When you are far away from a painting, you see the picture," Benning has recounted. "Up close you see the marks more than the picture itself—and the marks retain the energy of the person who made them, you feel their hand. It's very intimate, leaning in to see, even a bit forbidden—in museums, you're often yelled at for getting too close to a painting."

Benning's sourced works of art were photographed almost as though they were people, the lens moving from feature to feature, zooming into particular areas that look very different when seen in isolation. In this way, Benning pushes us to consider borders within borders, pictures within pictures: the infinite multiplicity that resides at all times within the whole, not only in works of art but also in the self. Benning reminds us that identity is not solid, but rather constructed from parts. The self is not one thing, such as a man or a woman—it is interconnected and dispersed, full of mystery, and forever in flux. Like much of Benning's work, these paintings draw attention to how we process visual material—the transformation inherent in seeing and archiving meaning.

By blowing up and reimagining parts of larger works by other artists, the canon is also drawn into question. We must consider how art and its makers are sanctioned and the long history of sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia implicit there—compounded by a confused sense of the visionary in popular culture, who is often depicted as one who stands alone, free of influence, a singular voice chiming. *Blow Ups* instead magnifies the collectivity embedded in all creations—pushing one to consider how capitalism informs our sense of value and meaning. Including both canonized and less celebrated artists as source material, Benning evaluates how perception is linked inextricably, and often insidiously, to power.

Sadie Benning (b. 1973, Madison) live and work in New York.

Their work have been exhibited nationally and internationally, at institutions such as Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus (2020); MoMA, New York (2019); Camden Arts Centre, London (2018); Kusthalle Basel, Basel (2017); The Renaissance Society, Chicago (2016); The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2009); The Power Plant, Toronto (2008); Dia Foundation for the Arts, New York (2007); Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2005); among others. Amongst the various group shows, Benning's work have also been featured in the 7th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju (2008); the Whitney Biennial, New York (2000; 1993); the 45th Venice Biennale, Venice (1993).