



ARTIST

Julio Grinblatt

TITLE

#9943.16

DATE

1996

DIMENSIONS

12 in H x 18 in W

MEDIUM

Gelatin Silver Print

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 16 x 20

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2004.061

CURRENT LOCATION

2024-14B

JULIO GRINBLATT

BORN

1960

BIRTHPLACE

Buenos Aires, Argentina

GENDER

Male

CITIZENSHIP

Argentina

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Argentinean

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2003

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

BIOGRAPHY

Julio Grinblatt lives in New York City and participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program from April 15-May 15, 2003.

ESSAYS

Nicolás Guagnini: Why did you decide to take pictures of people in front of their birthday cakes? Julio Grinblatt: The actual decision is not to take them, but to choose them. The natural way of working with recording my reactions to things or events is to organize them in a series. Then there is, in certain situations, something revealing about photography, memory, social interaction, and roles. If you find yourself with a camera in front of a birthday cake, your relationship with taking the picture is as irresistible and unavoidable as the one that the guy who is blowing the candles has with his or her own celebration. NG: Why in black-and-white? JG: Black-and-white is already an abstraction, a permanent reminder that photography is just a code of representation. NG: You seem to locate all the operational forces that make the work as choices among givens, which are in turn, part of larger structures: editorial processes, codes of representation, social conventions. If this is an attempt to debunk the romantic notion of a subjective author, how do you neutralize the decisions strictly connected to the camera and the situation? JG: I don't think you need to get rid of the author. Photography allows for an unfolding of the process of subjective decisions in distinct moments in time. First—your reaction to the moment; second—your work with the contacts; third—your work in the lab. These moments can be years apart. Since the birthday situation is a ritual with predetermined rules, and the photographer is essential to the ritual, all camera-related decisions are predetermined beforehand: a quarter-second exposure, lens wide open, focus on the candles. NG: Your practice seems to be designed to take a closer look at the uses of photography, which are mostly geared towards memory preservation, and uses them to expose intensely strange visions hidden within [these] familiar applications. Your birthday subjects are performing the very private act of wishing, but in public. Often times in these pictures something monstrous, distorted, absolutely not flattering is disclosed. How do you work with this emergence of the sinister? JG: I have always been interested in transitions, in becoming. These portraits are the opposite of the traditional conception of portrait, in which you are supposed to convey and discover presumed fixed essential qualities of your subjects by establishing some sort of trust relationship with them. Any transformation implies a moment of deformation. A specific temporal excerpt of this process is prone to reveal something monstrous in the quotidian. NG: Then again, are predetermined photographic decisions in place to address this relationship with time and ritual? JG: People move forward as they blow air. The flames are already being distorted by the subject, and the ritual transformation from one age to another in front of their chosen witnesses is actually happening. I shoot in the moment where the transformation is socially signaled, demarcated. It is relatively easy. I am interested in the obvious as the most revealing moment. Then there are further relevant choices in the lab. I darken the background into total blackness. This results in an isolation of my subject. When the prints are exhibited I use glass to make the spectator deal with his/her inclusion and the depiction of the transformation in the same image. NG: Since all the steps from shot to show are consciously controlled, it seems that the relevance of the subject matter is somewhat engulfed by your process. On the other hand, that process is generated by the very specificity of the subject matter. How do you balance this? JG: Single pictures can be read in terms of what they represent, but [a] series allows for a clearer reading of who is representing what. That is when they become, in a way, self-portraits. NG: What were your influences for this series? JG: Goya's black paintings, Bacon's self-portraits, Caravaggio's figures emerging from the black, and the work of Georges de La Tour. February 7, 2004, NY Julio Grinblatt lives in New York City and participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program from April 15-May 15, 2003. Nicolás Guagnini is an artist, writer, and filmmaker living and working in Harlem, NY. He is also the co-founder of Union Gaucha Productions, an independent film company.