



ARTIST

Suzanne Mejean

TITLE

One Eye

DATE

2005

DIMENSIONS

19 in H x 19 in W

MEDIUM

Chromogenic Color Prints

IMAGE NOTES

sheet 20 x 20"

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2007.007

CURRENT LOCATION

NA 10

SUZANNE MEJEAN

BORN

1980

BIRTHPLACE

New York, NY

GENDER

Female

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2007

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 147

BIOGRAPHY

For a more recent CV or bio please visit the artist's website, www.suzannemejean.com

Suzanne Mejean arrived at Light Work ready to make c-prints and a final edit of her three-year project photographing her mother and other family and friends in the Greenwich, CT community. With this work, Suzanne gives great consideration to the issues of authorship and collaboration inherent to portraiture, particularly when photographer and subject are close and the subject is photographed over lengths of time.

Suzanne Mejean has studied at The School of the International Center of Photography, Certificate Program and holds a BA from Bucknell University in Art History and Studio Art. She has exhibited internationally and received numerous awards, including "ICP: 20 Photographers From 20 Years," presented at the Annual Photo Festival in Arles, France. In addition to her artwork, she has comical photography clients such as Dovecote Records and Getty Images. She is currently living and working in Los Angeles, CA.

circa 2007

ESSAYS

"The human subject needs to protect itself against the loss of the object (i.e. the always absent real object of desire) and the loss of identity." (1) Suzanne Mejean returned at the end of last summer from an extended road trip of America. During her travels she visited military families around the country to find out how they cope with the deployment of loved ones. Initial research on this topic quickly led her to Elaine Dumler's book "I'm Already Home," and to the discovery of flat-daddies. Flat-daddies are life-sized photo portraits, primarily of fathers, offered to military families as a ready-made. They have enjoyed word-of-mouth popularity while websites post positive and humorous testimonials. Communicating through Dumler's newsletter, Mejean introduced her intention to make a film and photographs on the subject and sought families to visit. With a map of the US, a car, video and still cameras, plus thirty families to meet, she set off across America in June 2007. Her dizzying zigzag trip from the West Coast to the East, North, South, and back put 17,000 miles on the car, captured one hundred hours of videotape and interviews, and recorded 150 still photographs that serve as a parallel, second narrative. Five of these photographs are published here, environmental portraits of families and individual children. The images relinquish their documentary function to the video and interviews, allowing for a more vulnerable and contemplative frame. They provide a pause or oasis from the emotional stories of post-traumatic stress syndrome and extended tours of duty. The subjects (visibly) and the photographer (invisibly) position themselves in these pictures, commemorating their shared encounter. Mejean's work looks at how photographs capture the tensions and fears that surface when talking about death, loss, or desperate times, as well as the function and impact of the flat-daddy when everyday family life has been suspended. As a memory aide or a visual support for families, the images explore the psychological conditions that shape the relations between images, children, parents, and actual fathers. Meanwhile, spouses and children wait for the missing one to return. At home and in Iraq or Afghanistan there are sensitivities that limit the scenes that can be seen, and what can be imaged or imagined. Daddy is both here and not here—he is over there in harm's way and also here at the dinner table, in the van, on the porch, and at the football game. These familiar, uncanny, flattened bodies turn fathers into images or objects of affection, yet they are also disembodied selves stuck in the limbo of non-death. The security of being an object that can be touched and carried yields to the image that has been frozen in time; the illusion of security is nomadic and can easily be placed in a shadow world. An infinite number of selves can be reproduced, but mostly it is a binary affair—a military doppelgänger. New and ambiguous histories proliferate. Flat-daddies appear to function in a liminal space/time continuum, between the real and the fictive. Time is alternatively delayed, repeated, and deployed in reverse, then and now folding in and upon each other. Similarly, space relations acquire fantastic proportions as the doubled self can be in more than one place at a time. Flat-daddies become even more paradoxical when we begin to question the status of memory and selective amnesia. Questions emerge including what reality to refer to when an image is substituted for a father, and whether a real father can replace the flat-daddy upon return from service. It is also necessary to consider what to do with a flat-daddy when the serviceman does not return, or returns with injuries that contradict the imaginary wholeness of the picture. These strange and uncharted relations may result in long-term effects. The simple elegance of Mejean's photographs returns a respectful gaze, offering additional time to consider the specificity of each person and locale. The images are mute, but not silent, slices of time where light returns from its journey through the interior and rests on the surface for us to see. Robert Blake (c)2008 1. Victor Burgin, quoted by Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001). Suzanne Mejean lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. She participated in Light Work's Artist-in-Residence program in January 2007. Robert Blake is a photographer, writer, and video artist who resides in New York City. He is the director emeritus of the General Studies Program at the International Center of Photography.