

CARLO GOLIN'S DOUBLE TROUBLE

An appreciation by W.H. Chong



Arch classicist Nicolas Poussin painted moments of crises like an ideal world — *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake*; *The Adoration of the Golden Calf*; *Et in Arcadia ego*. Whether fleeing, cavorting or pondering, the placement of each figure (and tree or shape) depends on and is predicted by every other thing in the composition; in his art both life and death are harmonious events. A canvas by Poussin is like an epic equation.

Carlo Golin's new work draws slyly on that grand tradition of the classic. In *Double Trouble* Golin has invented a set of elegant and very European equations — photographs in subversive counterpoint to canonical works of art.

His method and the look it achieves is deceptively simple: A book is open at the reproduction of an artwork. A photo is loosely placed on the facing side, then the whole is rephotographed. At a casual glance they now belong in the same book — they're on the same page, so to speak.

The effect, however, is complex. Picture-pairs in dialectical tension, in a time-travel conversation: prosaic modernity rubs up to the classical ideal, digital image vies with the laborious handmade — the new gets dignified by association, the antique becomes contemporary.

The match is the thing of course, if one image is in some way to predict the other. The central idea derives from the kind of insight that only happens to an obsessive, someone who thinks about their subject all the time. Looking through a box of photos taken over twenty years, Golin was struck by possible correspondences to the art of museums. The critic Tom Lubbock dryly observed that 'Art history loves to find sources and echoes.' That instinct is stubborn. What if those parallels are not random, but have arisen from years of looking at museum art? If Golin's photos have echos of paintings, then maybe the echo *was* the trigger. What people call vision is selection: how we see has a lot to do with what we've seen.

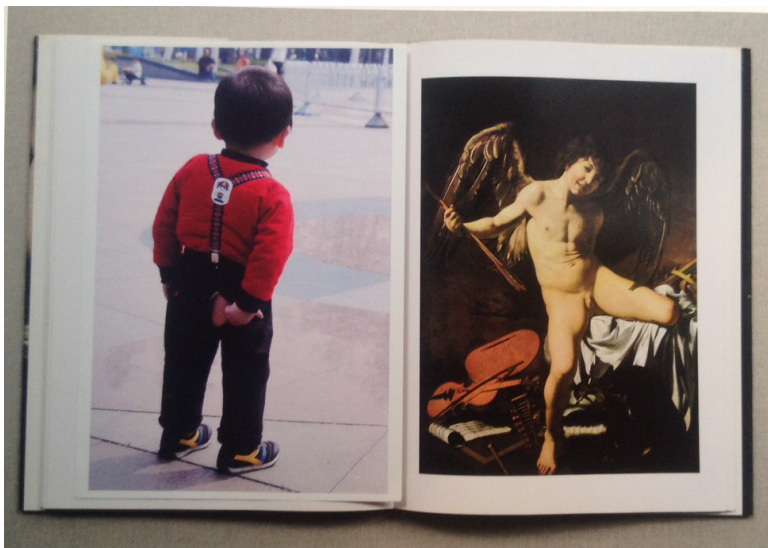
If any set of pictures can speak for themselves, it's *Double Trouble*. And if ever pictures invited commentary, these are they. Take the one exception with the found image from a front page. The photo by Pat Scala shows four polliés sharing a hearty laugh (you know who they are). Opposite this brace of good fellows is *Christ Mocked* (c.1490-1500) by Hieronymus Bosch. This is a meek Christ, turning the other cheek. The four men surrounding him are scowling or leering, though the man at top left is just trying to do his job and place the crown of thorns.



The moment of Scala's funhouse mirror is as beautifully judged as in the Bosch, heads and arms in perfect rhythm, only missing an object of mockery. The pairing is a black comedy, because we know that the sacrificial Lamb is in yet another mirror: we are the sheep, the goats.

Golin's punning doubles can be witty or humorous, tender or caustic, and occasionally touching. The old man in the yellow bathrobe is only worth looking at because he is Picasso. The old man in the orange bathrobe is only worth a glance because he looks like Picasso in a bathrobe. Two octogenarians in strangely similar settings, Picasso and the artist's father-in-law; a certain equilibrium has taken place between them, they are sharing something they can't give away.

Laocoön and His Sons have been wrestling the serpents for five hundred years. Golin's photo of a can of sealing foam shows an accidental triumph of the plastic arts, its bubbling forms assuming the monumental muscularity of the Vatican sculpture, which suddenly looks funky in this company. Caravaggio's earthy Roman urchin is seen through the looking glass as a little Beijing treasure, with a corresponding itch. (A friend of mine wondered: *Worms?*)



This series provides immediate pleasures — every twin is a surprise — but the cerebral, emotive and even spiritual are not beyond its reach, while its formal refinement recalls a previous order of art and observation. But even if we have no desire to adjust our screen back to Poussin's dream of harmony, we can still reboot the program for the good old stuff: beauty, balance, meaning. And connect that with our new stuff. With *Double Trouble* Carlo Golin jolts us out of world-weariness — the world is enough. Just see for yourself.