

In her *Drape* series, Eva Stenram plays with found images, pinups from the 1960s. The title refers to the curtains that are a pervasive element of studio pornography. This is digital montage with a particular set of rules. Although Photoshop allows images to be combined in infinite ways, Stenram works only with what is already found inside the original frame of the photograph. She copies and pastes sections of the image, extending the curtains to cover most of the figure. The bold pleats of fabric look familiar, strangely right even as they create a jarring effect. Images with a customary set of studio conventions become mysterious, both witty and slightly menacing.

As background usurps foreground the remaining bits of exposed flesh take on heightened importance. Some aspects of the women's poses—a pointed toe or a leg cocked out toward the lower-right corner—underline pinup clichés. In the absence of faces, breasts, or genitals, hand gestures take on added poignancy. We are redirected from the central figures to the superficial details of their surroundings, a fetishist's delight of tactile surfaces, from sheepskin to vinyl to velvet. It is hard to know where we are: the shallow spaces teeter between actual domestic environments and photographers' studios. Some of the curtains hang in front of real windows, while others appear to cover blank studio walls.

While Stenram interrupts the conventional staging of male desire, she embraces visual, and specifically photographic, pleasure. For this series she worked with pages from the 1960s U.S. men's magazine *Cavalcade*, and with anonymous black-and-white negatives of the same era. The images are classically composed and exposed, with formal satisfactions that carry over into Stenram's revised versions of them. The color magazine images retain the specific gritty hues of their period printing process. In exhibition, the pictures have been printed and framed to echo the scale and presence of 1960s art photography.

There is another level of visual pleasure in tracing this artist's intervention, especially noting the decisions she has made in finishing the jagged edges of the drapes. The digital manipulation is not meant to be illusionistic. The drapes have a stiff frontality that does not wrap around the figures, so they take on a fascination of their own. Stenram's gesture is almost puritanical; it imposes modesty on the female figures, shields them from a predatory gaze. Yet in obscuring the central action of the pictures, the artist draws us into a guessing game. Photography is so good at *showing* things that it is easy to forget how well it can activate the imagination. Hiding the main attractions of pornographic images, Stenram invites us to seek them in our minds. What are the models' expressions? Their hair and makeup? Their physiques?

Stenram has a history of working with loaded source imagery, ranging from family photographs to famous hoax pictures to NASA images of Mars. In each case her extensions and erasures reveal unexpected aspects of the originals and open up new spaces for exploring the imaginary.

Eva Stenram: Drape

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