



JUNGLE #08, 2014
ARCHIVAL PIGMENT PRINT, CERAMIC TILES, MIRROR
108.6 x 83.3 x 4.5 CM © THE ARTIST, COURTESY SADIE COLES HQ, LONDON

As elusive as her photo montages are alluring, MICHELE ABELES chooses to let her work speak for itself. While garlanded for her still lifes, she shuns award ceremonies, allowing her art to take centre stage as she remains on the sidelines, observing rather than interacting.
SARAH NICOLE PRICKETT visits her studio as Michele keeps shtum.

Men, colour gels, Michele

There are two beginnings. One is that Michele Abeles graduated with a Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale in 2007. She held her first two solo shows, *Re:Re:Re:Re:Re:* (2011) and *English for Secretaries* (2013), at 47 Canal, the sharpest, gutsiest gallery in New York's Chinatown, and her fourth and latest, *Find Out What Happens When People Start Getting Real* (2014), at Sadie Coles HQ in London. The Brooklyn artist's handily manipulated photographs take up a space between the Pictures Generation of the Seventies and the Pics Generation of the Noughties (and beyond), and have appeared in *New Photography* 2012 at MoMA, as well as several seminal expos in the US and Europe. By this account, Michele is that rare and rarefied talent who survives her emergence in a discriminating sector of the art world.

– ‘In the World of Michele, everything is still, and all of it is life’

The other beginning is that in 1999, Michele graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the second-rate Washington University, which she attended on a basketball scholarship and where she did not study art or art history. When she turned 21 she returned to her native New York; she wanted to photograph bands. By this account, Michele is a natural, an outsider; not an ‘outsider artist’, just an outsider.



MALECHUTES, 2013
ARCHIVAL PIGMENT PRINT
31 x 41.5 INCHES (78.74 x 105.41 CM), COURTESY OF 47 CANAL, NEW YORK

JUNGLE #03, 2014
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JUNGLE #04, 2014
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As the meeting point of these two opposed approaches, her work is sometimes loopy. She stacks photographs, ephemera and colour gels like so many thin plastic bangles. Her set-ups use and re-use images of things both widely available and inexpensive: wine bottles, potted plants, penises. The names of her works are prosaic; three years ago, she was maybe best-known for a series of still lifes (often erroneously categorized as ‘nudes’ for including the anonymous, forgettable bodies of young men) with titles like ‘Fuchsia, Yellow, Green, Blue, Numbers, Man, Cement, Paper’ (2010) or ‘Man, Shadow, Table, Fan, Rock’ (2009). Some critics took her desultory lists to imply that a man is as inanimate as a rock. It’s more accurate—and fun—to say that, in the World of Michele, everything is still, and all of it is life. Fuchsia and blue are alive. Cement is alive. A shadow is alive, and so is a man.

Michele, now 37, doesn’t mean to be deadpan, nor to subvert some dusty hierarchy. Because she seems to love making the work—doing so herself and alone, without an assistant—it also seems likely that by the time she’s done with a piece, she’s simply too tired to think of a name. She isn’t precious about her possessions and she’s careless with her archives; when *Lula* visits her studio, she demonstrates the properties of laser-printed static wrap by haphazardly sticking it to white tiles over a picture of infinite flora. (The Jungle works shown at Sadie Coles HQ display the tiles in avant-garde arrangements, like Tipp-Ex poems or Jenny Holzer’s Dust Paintings, but in this one the tiles look more like bricks paving paradise). It’s rare to see an artist touch finished work but then Michele would not use a word like ‘finished’. Her images have a Sellotape quality, you can’t tell where in the frame her long-lens shot of shoppers in Soho stops and her sketch of a ship interior starts (as in ‘NYCMIAMI #01’ (2014)).

Michele grew up pre-internet and is often identified as ‘post-net’, a cloudy term for online/offline crossover art made by artists who turn immaterial structures and experience into physical objects. In other words, artists who do what most artists have always done. Some do the inverse. Michele’s in-camera, in-real-life techniques—colour gels, cut-and-pasted tiles—are crafty appropriations of digital effects, while her use of Photoshop renders the fake real. Each still and collage seems bent on making objects immaterial and Michele, who works with whatever works best, can pack a great deal of life into a single layer, while leaving her own life absent—sometimes conspicuously so.

In ‘Sunglasses, Lips, Head, Reflection’ (2009), a man sees his own pose in the lens of his nu-rave shades, even though, technically, Michele and/or her camera should appear. In an unrealized transparency, a languorous woman appears to paint on her own Perspex covering, a red squiggle concealing her face. Indeed, for this piece, as with most other profiles of her, Michele declined to be quoted in any way; in 2010, when nominated for a top award, she asked *Boardwalk Empire* actress Paz de la Huerta to ‘play’ Michele at the gala, then stayed at home. A publicity stunt? A joke about the artist being present? Or a pointed move to sharpen the line between self and celebrity? She’ll never tell. Insider though she may now be, Michele stays outside the picture. LULA MAGAZINE



792012, 2012
 ARCHIVAL PIGMENT PRINT
 37.125 x 27 INCHES (94.30 x 68.58 CM). COURTESY OF 47 CANAL, NEW YORK



TOO ____ TO ____, 2012
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