

FrameWork 1/18

Esmé Hogeveen on Krista Buecking

After a busy day of keyboard tapping, my hands just need a rest. Or perhaps it's my mind that needs a holiday. Take a break from jumpstarting a new habit by saluting an old one. Fingers cruise me to a recently de-activated social media platform and my eyes glaze over at the incomprehensibly blank screen. It's January, so self-care takes the form of vitality and not schlumping. Hello world! - - perhaps just one post to indicate my good health and intentions . . . and then maybe one more to imply my self-awareness - - I don't want to appear cocky! Ahem - -

A suspicion that the posts will outlast the pose arises. I won't confirm and hit "share," then, until I've found myself and ensured I'm resolutely repaired, at which point I'll contract an assistant, someone to photograph this new self so that my followers can forget the old ones.



In several of Krista Buecking's prints on view in *OBJECT LESSONS/STUMBLING BLOCK*, airbrushed-looking hands with heavily shellacked fingernails rest atop insinuations signaled by graphic indicators. The same hand—occasionally seen with its pair—is seemingly featured throughout the show, inhabiting the chimeric role of narrator-cum-host-cum-model didactician.

I find myself drawn to the hands, interpreting them as both inert and active. The closer I regard them, the more they conjure the apprehension of an amateur infomercial demonstrator. Reminiscent of a character (real person?) on *Dragon's Den* trying to justify an on-air product malfunction—*It's never exploded like that before, I swear!*—the hands in Buecking's prints are unexpectedly human in their bald-faced (palmed?) contrivance. The gestures are simultaneously unsure and obvious, but not necessarily obviously unsure. Lurid nail polish exceeds the cuticles. The left hand has not had time to assist the right, and vice-versa, in slowly chipping away the dried fuchsia excess. These hands, I reckon, are doing the best they can to keep up their own appearances.

I draw myself a hand bath in the sink and reflect upon a day of internet dwelling. In between job hunting and school work, I "command + t" and peruse the lives of reality tv stars to regain personal equilibrium.

Tracking the lives of ascendant celebrities on Instagram over the years has taught me the value of perceived omniscience. A photograph taken from a distance farther than a selfie stick will permit (i.e. by a trained assistant, perhaps a photography undergrad), yet still taken for the purpose of circulating one's values and aesthetics via tiny screens, seems to be the most tasteful selfie format amongst contemporary B-listers. This kind of directed image of the self confers value predicated on confidence upon the subject: I am worth a professional image. My bodily ease mustn't be limited by the task of capturing *myself*. This is similar to a lesson learned while keeping a childhood diary and comparing it with Young Adult fiction: the realization that, though the third-person can seem deeply dull and unimaginative, the first-person invites accusations of navel gazing. The third-person, ideally in its proselytizing omniscient form, creates a useful frame for granting worthiness. The photography student out on summer break may serve such a purpose. Self-doubt can be off-loaded and transformed into lifestyle bait.

On the other hand, bona fide A-listers can post traditional, arm-out selfies because their star status and elevation above the masses makes such gestures read as quaint and authentic. Luxury affords the capacity to pose without trying to conceal the means by which the selfie subject—the body, typically the head and torso—is connected to the capturing apparatus—the camera, typically supported by the subject's hand or monopod. In such cases, the arm forms the bridge that connects the photographed subject and the camera operator.



The taut forearm muscles in (*my problems are opportunities I exercise them with force*) and (*I take steps each day to retie the Gordian Knot*) recall the difficulty of framing oneself non-ironically. It is a considerable challenge to present the framed part of one's body as calm—"grounded," one might say—although subtly tensed here and there so as to present smooth lines and flattering angles to the camera, while also contorting one limb beyond the frame in order to snap a favourable portrait. The subject must strive to embody the kind of active inertia manifest in Buecking's hands, a peculiar commingling of affectation and naiveté. This balancing act frequently goes on for several minutes until the desired, or the least undesirable, image has been achieved. There is a kind of maximalist duality in the appendages in Buecking's work; the hands toil hard to present themselves in a state of purest ease.

A dark side of self-care—or at least the performance of this recently hyper-branded and then selectively derided concern for personal improvement—is endless preparation for the candid documentarian that is oneself. To be one's best self™, one must constantly consider visibility: How does someone who cares about personal betterment* dress? How do they appear while ordering a matcha latte? (Or do they abstain from cafe life, favouring homemade refreshments without an apprehending gaze?) How do they look when arguing with a loved one? (Or are they so skilled at deescalating conflict that they no longer experience petty frustration?)

How do they stand as they mitigate disaster? (Or is calamity only an option when one is not in full possession of oneself as a known, (re)posed being?)

**betterment {noun}: improvement, amelioration, advancement, change for the better, furtherance, upgrading, enhancement; reform, rectification. —notable, perhaps, how “betterment” and “care” sound so much kinder and less avaricious than “upgrading” and “advancement”*

Is continuous preparation for the face that looks down upon these pink tipped fingers a facsimile of waiting to see myself recognized? While I wait, ought I peruse the tomes suggested in Buecking’s dusty rose carpeted tableaux? The titles, clearly, are all that matters because *anyone [who you know or care to have know you]* will have also prepared a cursory response to such references. Close reading is redundant when we may assume a common milieu and point to meta-incidents and media rather than admit to a nagging desire for details. Surely Michael Wolff’s latest will soon come to rest beneath this numberless clock and the indifferent IKEA fronds.

In (*it happens by itself*), the left hand’s forefinger points down, pressing upon the dip of a curve-fitted line plummeting (nestling?) into a muted turquoise rug. There are no x or y axes. The viewer only sees the line, three-dimensional and red, and its downward-pointed arrow. In the twin print (*I feel the silent action of the object as I take consistent action to shape my destiny*), the hand strokes the line, soothing a decline while exposing a vulnerable wrist.

Seen in one light, Buecking’s images ask the viewer to admit to their pretenses. As always, the question becomes: what next? Does the breaking of a posture equate to a proffering of truth? How does one begin to delve beneath surfaces without the support of a framework, a mantra, or at least the promise of aesthetic release? The pseudo-irony of a schmaltzy sunset background and the power of an all-caps quip evoke a dizzying fear of what will happen when the clock begins to tick.

Evaluating the hands’ poses relative to Buecking’s aphorisms and millennial-baiting colour scheme is a tonal exercise akin to interpreting a new social media contact’s sensibility. Is there a joke afoot? Or would noting the humour be redundant? Is the joke a retired one and therefore a wry commentary? The scattered books, amongst them *ON LIBERTY*, *The Art of the Deal*, and *Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department*, are unreadable because they are, quite literally, hollow. Would a knowledge of these texts, or the events and ideologies they refer to, really help a person cope with their realities? Buecking plays with symbols of reliability. “THE ALGORITHM FLOWS THROUGH ME” one print declares, the hand miming walking across a yellow cube precipice.



Work converting pose into repose, intention into default, best practices into rituals. Once I've remade myself carefully, I'll write to you again.

My forefingers sting as I dry them after their long soak. Apparently when shellac dries on skin, the top layer of flesh is burnt off.