

Lincoln Hancock

*A Bird, Not a Feather*

311 W. Martin Galleries, Raleigh, NC

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#### ARTIST'S STATEMENT

In a lecture delivered at Harvard in 1985 (posthumously published in *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*), Italo Calvino describes *lightness* as expressive of a certain kind of possibility in face of “the weight, the inertia, the opacity of the world” (4). Calvino’s talks at the Charles Eliot Norton lectures were centered on literary values, but painting — indeed, the entirety of the art experience — has always been about this for me. In art, I look for a space outside of the enumerable into which to leap.

This urge is pervasive. Art is a practice that informs life, and provides ways to elude Medusa’s gaze. Calvino takes the myth as poetic allegory: “Perseus’s strength always lies in a refusal to look directly, but not in a refusal of the reality in which he is fated to live; he carries the reality with him and accepts it as his particular burden” (5). So, to fly up and out of the panopticon of fixed meaning and moral surveillance is not a wanton act. It is a creative, meaningful gesture enabled precisely by an acknowledgement of its situatedness and necessary relationship to the world. As Calvino indicates, *lightness* entails looking at the world “from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification” (7).

My nonrepresentational paintings are not indicative of a wish to abandon the incumbencies of the world. They are, rather, paeans to the possibility of the here and now — a possibility and potency too often neglected by conventions of being and seeing. For if there is a chance to find resonance and meaning in simple structures of color and line, our position as empowered, creative, agents is reasserted. We need spaces and monuments that sanction things not quantifiable, indexible, mechanically apprehensible. These moments help us transcend, and remind us that things mean *for* us — not the other way around.

My mixed-media work draws on my ongoing photographic practice, which is itself informed by the same values. The improvisatory process of taking pictures helps me come away with impressions of my lived experience that avoid being weighed down by the prefab fixities of existing systems of meaning. I shoot in ways that privilege spontaneity over perfection, because yielding to “the way things are supposed to look” already forecloses on the possibility of potent new awareness. In select pieces for this show, I have chosen for the first time to collaborate with my longtime friend Benjamin Spiker, whose photographs always push me farther into other views on our shared experiences.

Calvin Tomkins writes in the Preface to his recent book, *Lives of the Artists*, that contemporary art practice is “...among other things, an approach to the problem of living.” *Problem, weight, opacity* — from a certain perspective these words sound like detractors. But lightness is an expressive center that leverages our intentional relationships with the substantial qualities of the world into a radical remaking — as Calvino alludes, it is a “balance of forces that enables heavenly bodies to float in space” (23).