

Dennis Balk at INOVA

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Five basic questions animate journalism: Who? What? Where? When? Why? As a self-described “quantum journalist,” Dennis Balk has continually refigured these questions, jamming them together and splitting them apart in the atom-smasher of his practice. He understands that the fundamental physics of plot and narrative drive non-fiction as well as fiction, both of which cooperate to form reality. What if he applied the same process to himself? With this survey of early work at Inova, Balk exhumes his past, collecting and piecing together fragments of his own history to present an intentionally disjunct narrative, destabilizing the relationship of past to present.

Science fiction writers extrapolate possible realities, ways in which our world might go, from existing technological and sociological developments. Rarely are whole new universes imagined. Instead, even the most fantastical stories are based on people like us, things much like the things we use, and worlds very much like our own. Likewise, Balk begins with plausible considerations of possible realities. The basic unit of his theoretical universe is the culture particle, an almost-real construction that gives material basis to the thoughts and ideas that wend their way into and out of various consciousnesses, subcultures, cultures and civilizations across time. Balk plays out these quanta on various scales, in subatomic depictions and electron-microscopic examinations of basic language formations, and in cosmological proto-narrative patternings and photos of rock formations as random and solid as thought constructs.

Balk’s artistic method exists as scattered bursts of energy. His tools include theater and theory, photography and electromagnetics, digital drawings and thought-diagrams, true fiction and false realism, painting as printmaking, and printmaking as prop-mastery. At a whim, he can fashion a new mode of image-making to serve a specific purpose—for example, a kind of speculative photography to illustrate a complex particulate event. As disparate as the

elements of his production have been, his subject has remained consistent: how the frictions, fissions and fusions of competing visions of reality are inscribed upon the world.

Like the sci-fi writer turning imagination back on itself to ultimately question the real, Balk asks us to see the simple realities we assume every day as complex narrative inventions, refracted through individuals into their cultures. Nations conjoin and divide into agreements and concomitant disagreement, and the only inescapable truth is that no reality lasts for long. Each fragile truth has its own trajectory that intersects, intercourses, collides, scrapes, entrains, explodes and otherwise interacts with other trajectories.

The best journalism dissolves into further questions. Approach Dennis Balk: *Early Work, 1890-2090* as an archaeologist might approach a dig: not only with the scientist's skepticism, but with the idea that questions are the real find, and answers are at best theories, contingent narratives, transferences of tense--one present into another, with xerox-like generational loss of resolution. History is not proof that the past has happened. Instead, as Balk suggests, it is the ghost of a continuous present.