



Ben Gest's portrait *Chuck, Alice and Dale*, 2003 taken in the first years of the twenty-first century, is not a "straight photograph." It is an amalgam of photographs taken by the artist, combined in his computer, and then output digitally as an inkjet print. As with Cindy Sherman, Gest synthesizes the phenomena of the world into a simulacrum of reality. But while Sherman's vision involves a postmodern deconstruction of the cultural myth of identity, Gest's is a synthetic cubistic approach to portraiture in the manner of his predecessor David Hockney. Gest has built an image of multiple perspectives that is aligned with his emotional knowledge of human relationships. The three people in Gest's picture are a family unit: two male partners, Chuck and Dale, and Chuck's mother, Alice. Their environment is shown as a home of collectors and readers. Though they appear to be in the same room at the same time, they were not necessarily together when their portraits were taken. Gest makes multiple photographs of different sections of his subjects' bodies and their surrounding environments, which he then compiles in this computer. The seated man reaching for a cup on a table is made up of many photographs (of his hand, wrist, arm, shoulder...) that are then combined to depict the gesture from several vantage points. There is in this synthetic family portrait, as in all of Gest's work, an isolated cohabitation of space. Seen pursuing their individual tasks, Chuck, Dale and Alice are together in the room – but literally not on the same plane.

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*One of a Kind: Portraits From the LaSalle Bank Photography Collection*