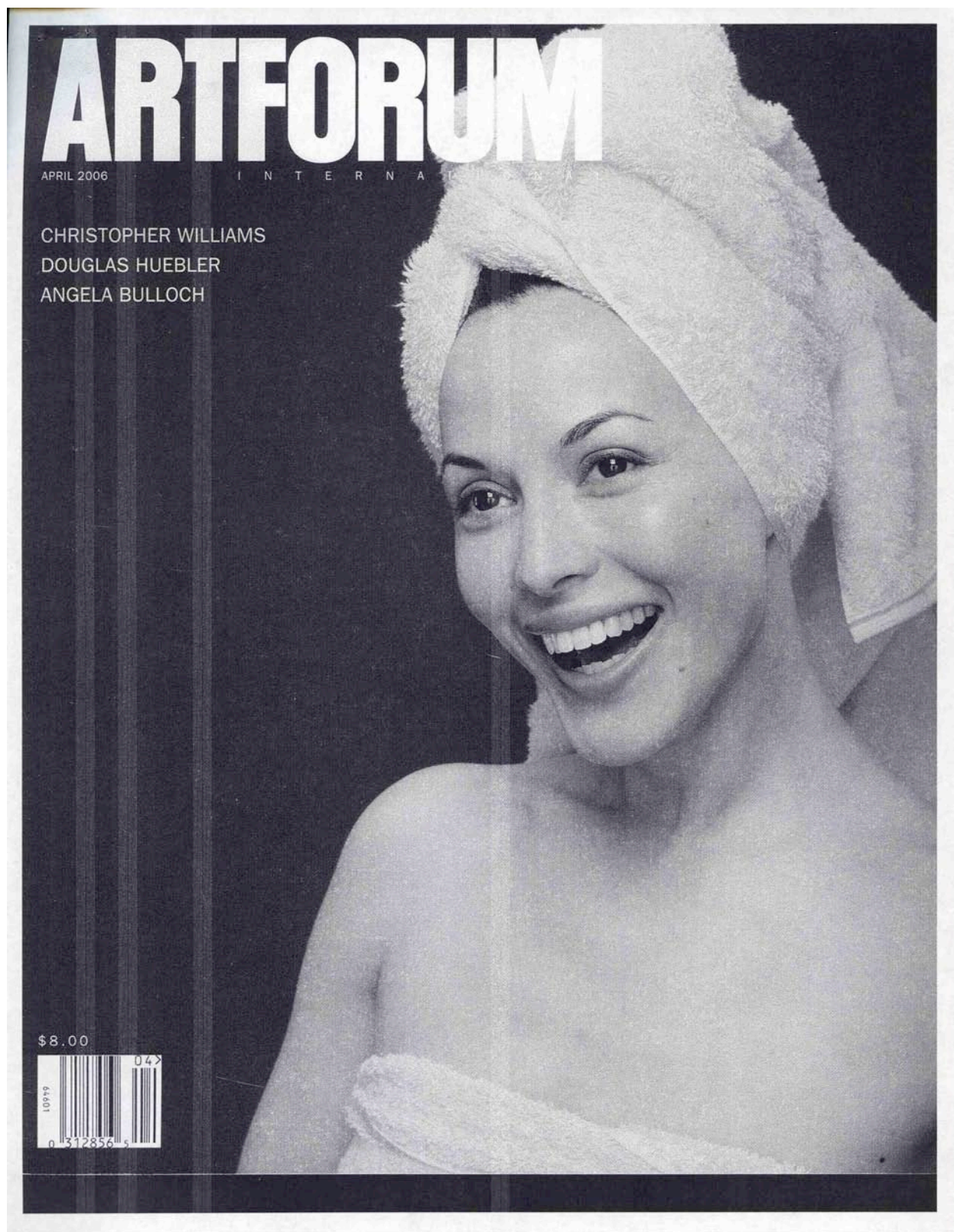


# GLADSTONE

Michelle Grabner, "Cecilia Edefalk: Art Institute of Chicago," *Artforum*, April 2006





## Cecilia Edefalk

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Seven years ago, Swedish artist Cecilia Edefalk visited London and embarked on a quasi-mystical journey that began at Tate Britain. Purchasing a drink in the museum's cafeteria, she noticed that it was stamped with an unusually precise expiration date and time—May 6, 2000, 15:33—which led her to wonder what she would be doing at that very moment. It so happened that she found herself back in London on the date in question. Having retraced her steps and revisited the museum, she attended a dinner in a private garden in Chelsea, where she saw a dazzling blue flash and a mysterious silhouette. Returning the next day with a camera, she discovered (her memory and the actuality proving disconcertingly divergent) that the figure she had glimpsed was a statue of an armless, legless Venus, standing on a plinth in a grotto of fig trees. The resultant black-and-white photograph inspired the twelve paintings that compose "Double White Venus," her first US solo exhibition.

The circuitous route by which Edefalk came to the image is typical of a methodology based on the experience of memory. It is not the repeated image of the statue that is central to each painting, but rather the process of reflection on the events that led her to it. In these works, the Venus figure is merely a vehicle for exploring ideas of originality and repetition, specifically their influence on recollection. A slow-working and deliberate artist, Edefalk completed the dozen paintings in the exhibition over the course of six years, and the numinous narrative that gave birth to them is as essential to her project as the extended period of time that framed their production.

Edefalk employs replication and doubling as psychological and formal tools to further unmoor photography's persistent (though weakened) claim on the real, though in a more intuitive manner than such a description might suggest. The first "Venus" paintings are all small renderings of the classical replica in cool, spectral blues, warm grays, and whites. A wind chime hangs on a branch to the figure's right and a wooden bench is tucked behind it. In the earliest of these canvases, the paint handling seems stiff and awkward, as if the artist was frustrated by the technical difficulty of approximating a photographic image, but her approach shifts somewhat as the series progresses.

In later examples, Edefalk introduces drastic shifts in scale, steps up the degree of abstraction, delimits tonal values, integrates collage elements, and experiments with projecting slides over the paintings. Over time, the artist's memory, and our image, of the series' primal scene becomes hazy, corrupted, or otherwise inflected. A large canvas from 2004 reduces the figure to a silhouette framed by a field of thin paint that has dripped in many directions, while another, from 2006, returns to the small scale of the original photograph but subsumes the image beneath strokes of amnesiac gray. Unlike the soda she purchased at Tate Britain all those years ago, Edefalk's paintings never expire, they simply move along an axis that runs between memory and meaning, without ever settling at either pole.

—Michelle Grabner

Cecilia Edefalk,  
*Double White Venus*,  
2005, oil and tempera  
on linen, 8½ x 6½".

