



BLOGS & STORIES

Up in the Air

by Rachel Wolff

January 21, 2010 | 6:54pm

In a gravity-defying new show, French photographer Denis Darzacq captures dancers flying through the air with the greatest of ease. [VIEW OUR GALLERY](#)

Denis Darzacq's candy-colored photographs of young men and women gliding, floating, and falling through French grocery store aisles have a sort of cinematic quality. He gets at that *Matrix*-like tension, balancing frenetic energy with an ethereal (and sometimes eerie) sense of calm. Titled "Hyper," and on view at New York's Laurence Miller Gallery through March 27, Darzacq's new body of work is as much about process as it is about clean lines, contrast, and beauty. The subjects of his photographs are dancers, jumping, twisting, and tumbling with the sort of stamina and grace that comes only with years of disciplined training.

But these aren't Adonis-types. Baggy, pedestrian clothing hides their lean muscles; there are no perceptible rock-like calves, no prominent triceps or pectorals. It's an approach that differs from most dance photography (which tends to center around artists' fascination with these extraordinary physiques) and one that brings to mind the suited subjects of Robert Longo's excellent "Men in the Cities" series from 1979. But while Longo is said to have thrown tennis balls and stones at his models to induce odd and compelling poses, Darzacq steps back a bit to let his performers do their thing. I like that he captures those in-between moments—not necessarily the poses or peaks of each jump, but rather the ascents, the descents, the near catastrophes and the awkward transitions. The resulting effect is like one of those falling dreams—the kind where you feel yourself sink suddenly and your mattress becomes a dark, scary void.

Darzacq's backdrop is familiar as well. It's hard to enliven the supermarket-as-setting canon post-Andreas Gursky and I wonder what the same subjects would look like frozen mid-air on busy Parisian streets or in graveyards or cathedrals, energizing something so somber and still. The stop-motion look (enabled, of course, by a lightning-fast shutter speed) starts to stale after a while too, and tubs upon tubs of Greek yogurt and crème fraîche don't add much to the effect. What does suggest another layer, however, is a small historical show on view at the gallery concurrently. Titled "Body Language," the exhibition offers some interesting black-and-white counterpoints to Darzacq's hovering shoppers. There's Gary Winograd's 1975 shot of Texas cheerleaders in laborious-looking leaps; Harry Shunk's famed *Leap into the Void* from 1960; and Philippe Halsman's photograph of a giddy (and slightly levitating) Richard Nixon from 1955—there's a faint smile on the then-Vice President's face and it's hard to imagine what could have possibly inspired this zippy little jump. It's fodder that maybe 35 years from now Darzacq's grocery stores and falling patrons may have some historical relevance as overwhelmed (and overstocked) emblems of a specific time and place.

Rachel Wolff is a New York-based writer and editor who has covered art for New York, ARTnews, and Manhattan.