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On Feminism

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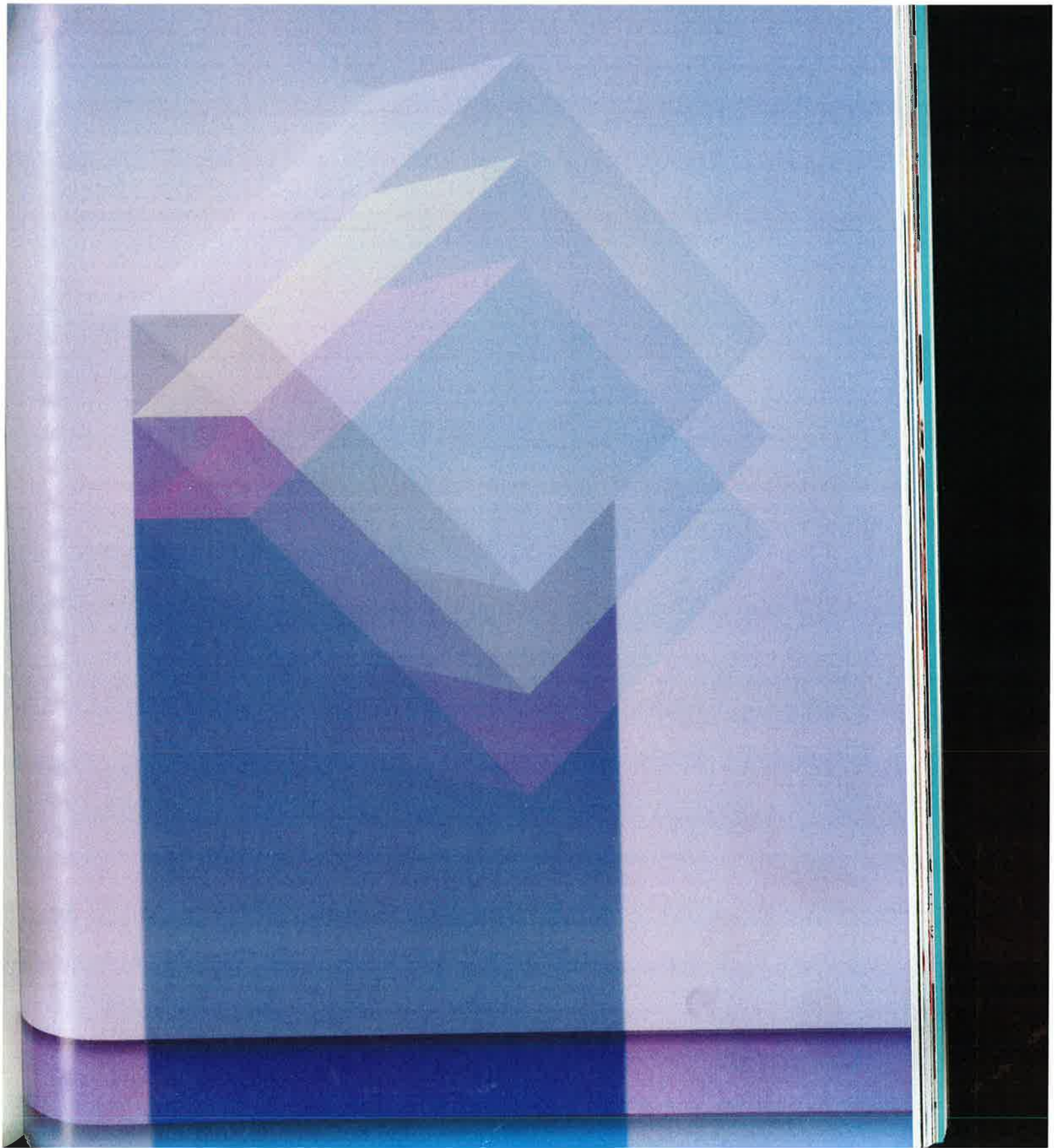
ON DEFIANCE

Eva Respini

Experimentation as resistance

Sara VanDerBeek, *Concrete Forms*, 2015
Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York



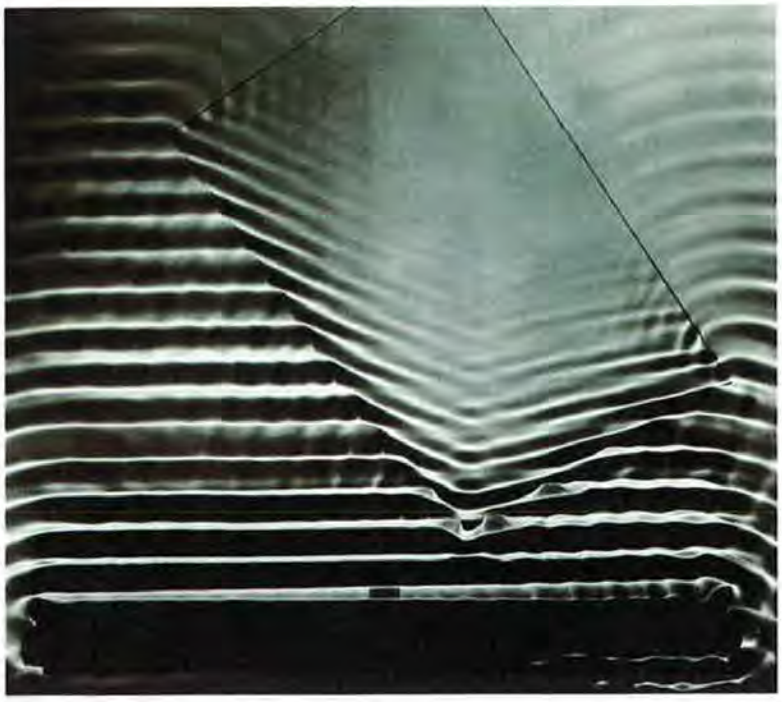
In 1971, Linda Nochlin famously asked in the title of an essential essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Lamenting the meager representation of women in art, she declared: "There *are* no women equivalents for Michelangelo or Rembrandt, Delacroix or Cézanne, Picasso or Matisse, or even, in very recent times, for de Kooning or Warhol." In the heated debates of second-wave feminism, these dialogues were crucial and vital, and were essential to creating a more pluralistic narrative of art in the twentieth century. But those conversations rarely included photography—or film, or architecture, or design, for that matter—art forms that were *other*.

Photography is now our lingua franca—it is the dominant medium of our image-saturated era. Over the last half century photography has joined the ranks of painting and sculpture in the art market and the museum (this May, for instance, the newly expanded San Francisco Museum of Modern Art dedicated an unprecedented 15,500 square feet to photography). Recent years have also seen a spate of women-only exhibitions, including the Centre Pompidou's 2010 *elles@centrepompidou* featuring works from their collection, the Musée d'Orsay's *Who's Afraid of Women Photographers? 1839–1945* (2015–16), and *Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women, 1947–2016* (2016) at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel in Los Angeles.

Despite exhibitions to further the visibility of women artists, many museums have fallen short of presenting balanced and diverse programs. In 2007, the Museum of Modern Art came under fire for its lack of female representation in its permanent galleries, with critic Jerry Saltz tallying a pitiful 3.5 percent of the art on view from their collection as being by women. But his numbers reflected displays from the collections of painting and sculpture only, not the collections of architecture and design, drawings and prints, and photography, where there were more works by women on view (although still not 50 percent). As a curator working at MoMA at the time, I was acutely aware of the imbalance, but dismayed by Saltz's limited (and retrograde) view of art. In fact, MoMA was in the midst of organizing *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography* (2010–11), an exhibition (of which I was a cocurator) that surveyed the history of photography with some two hundred works by women. This is all to say that even in the early twenty-first century, photography is still *other*.

Below, left:
Miranda Lichtenstein, *Last Exit*, 2013
Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

Below, right:
Berenice Abbott, *Water waves change direction*, 1958–61
© Berenice Abbott/ Getty Images



This century has witnessed a boom of women artists investigating the possibilities of the photographic medium in new and exciting ways. Artists such as Liz Deschenes, Sara VanDerBeek, Eileen Quinlan, Miranda Lichtenstein, Erin Shirreff, Anne Collier, Mariah Robertson, and Leslie Hewitt all defy the dominant idea of a photograph as an observation of life, a window onto the world. While each artist possesses her own aesthetic language and artistic concerns, as a whole, their practices represent a look inward—to the studio, still life, rephotography, material experimentation, abstraction, and nonrepresentation. Driven by a profound engagement with the medium, these artists have created a dynamic domain for experimentation that has taken contemporary photography by storm.

It's certainly risky to create a binary of "traditional" photography, which claims an indexical relationship to the world, versus the avant-garde tradition that considers the properties of photography itself: its circulation, production, and reproduction. As curator Matthew S. Witkovsky notes, "Abstraction … is not photography's secret common denominator, nor is it the antidote to 'traditional' photography." Recent scholarship has gone a long way to recuperate, and problematize, the status of experimental photography within photographic discourse. Nevertheless, throughout photography's history, the avant-garde tradition has been considered an "alternate" to the dominant understanding of photography. Can an argument be made that women have found fertile ground in the underchampioned arena of nonconventional image making? Have the historic marginalizations (of photography, avant-garde experimentation, and women artists) contributed to the vitality we see today? Can working against photographic convention, in a medium that is still sometimes considered *other*, be viewed as an act of defiance? It's also challenging to make an argument based on gender (or race, sexuality, geography), since men have undoubtedly made accomplished work in the avant-garde tradition. Do we still need to discuss gender? Do we need exhibitions of women artists to shine the spotlight on underrecognized practices?

I think so. At the time of this writing, Hillary Clinton has clinched the Democratic nomination for president, but the threat to reproductive rights and women's scant representation in boardrooms and in government confirm that there is still much work to do. In the arts, there is marked gender inequality. Last year *ARTnews* cited the paucity of solo exhibitions dedicated to women in major New York museums (and for women of color, it's even more dismal), and a 2014 study, "The Gender Gap in Art Museum Directorships," by the Association of Art Museum Directors, reports that female art museum directors earn substantially less than their male counterparts. While there has been some progress since Nochlin's rallying cry, the artists of this generation are more aware than ever of their roles in an imbalanced art world.

Photography has always been hospitable to women, and women have made some of the most radical accomplishments in nonconventional image making. It's a relatively new medium, free from the crushing millennia-long history of painting and sculpture. In its infancy, photography was practiced by scientists and alchemists, not artists. A photographer didn't have to be enrolled in the hallowed halls of the academy; she could cook it up in the kitchen. Victorian England saw the early botany experiments of Anna Atkins, narrative allegories by Lady Clementina Hawarden (featuring her daughters as sitters), and Julia Margaret Cameron's purposeful "misuse" of the wet collodion process to create her signature portraits. The proliferation of mass media and new camera and printing technologies in the early twentieth century ushered in radical collages by Hannah Höch, Bauhaus experiments by Lucia Moholy and Florence Henri, and the modernist compositions of Tina Modotti. Some women worked in isolation, like Lotte Jacobi,

Anna Atkins, *Convalaria Multiflora*, 1854
Courtesy the Getty's Open Content Program

Can working against photographic convention, in a medium that is still sometimes considered *other*, be viewed as an act of defiance?

who created her light drawings in seclusion in New Hampshire; others had patronage, such as Berenice Abbott, who was commissioned by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to make pictures of scientific phenomena. The postwar movements of pop art, land art, conceptual art, and performance art significantly incorporated photography—Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, and Adrian Piper leaned heavily on photography, in all its uses. Their work is unfathomable without it.

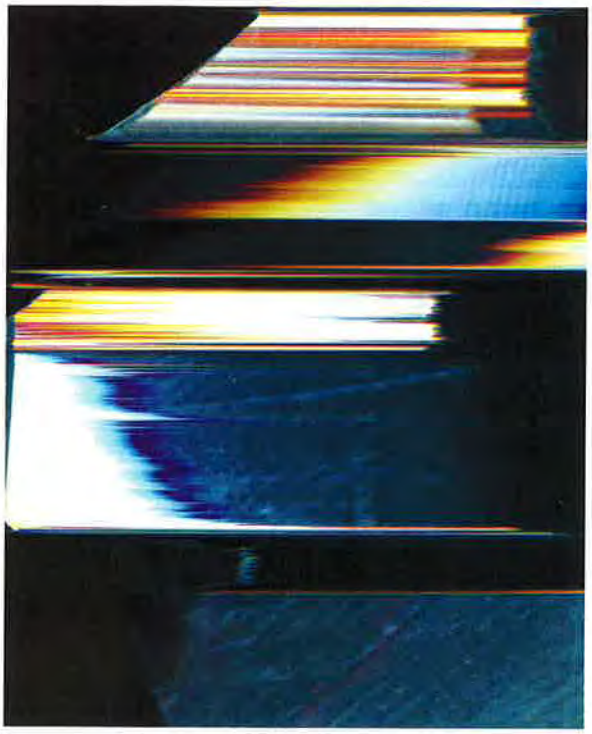
The experimentation, manipulation, and disruption of photographic conventions of the early twentieth century reached a crescendo in the century's last decades. Art of the past forty years has set the stage for the dominance of contemporary experiments by women today. Since the 1970s there has been a plethora of women working in photography (some asserting they are artists "using photography," *not* photographers), including Cindy Sherman, Sherrie Levine, Sarah Charlesworth, Louise Lawler, Barbara Kasten, Lorna Simpson, Barbara Kruger, and Carrie Mae Weems. These artists share an interest in the status, power, and representation of both images and women within cultural production. They collectively challenge the chief tenets of traditional photography—originality, faithful reproduction, and indexicality. While we now refer to many of the women of this time period as Pictures Generation artists, Sherman recalls, in a 2003 issue of *Artforum*, the unprecedented prevalence of female practitioners:

> In the later '80s, when it seemed like everywhere you looked people were talking about appropriation—then it seemed like a thing, a real presence. But I wasn't really aware of any group feeling.... What probably did increase the feeling of community was when more women began to get recognized for their work, most of them in photography.... I felt there was more of a support system then among the women artists. It could also have been that many of us were doing this other kind of work—we were using photography—but people like Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer were in there too. There was a female solidarity.

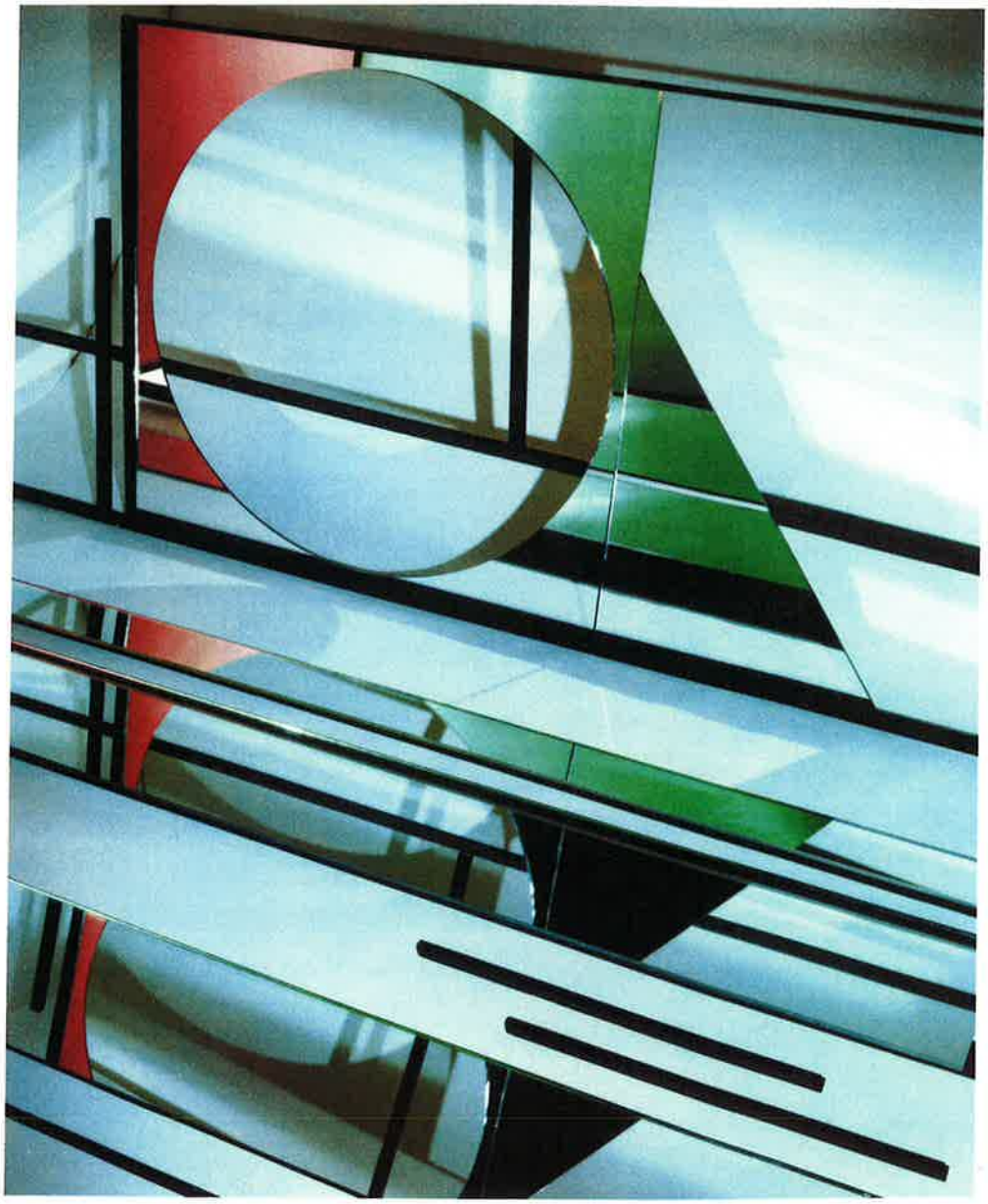
These women embraced the expansiveness of photography's parameters and have deeply informed, animated, and ultimately liberated the work of the artists who came after.

Recent years have witnessed a generation of women exploring new ground in the photographic medium. I spoke with several of them for this article. Liz Deschenes, whose work sits at the intersection of photography, sculpture, and architecture, is central to current conversations around nonrepresentational photography. Working between categories and disciplines, Deschenes is also deeply rooted in the histories of photographic technologies, challenging the notion of photography as a fixed discipline. Deschenes questions and resists all power structures, including binaries that confine works of art. Photography is frequently reduced to polarized classifications—color versus black and white, landscape versus portrait, analog versus digital, representation versus abstraction. As an educator, she underscores the medium's fluidity by introducing disregarded figures (often women) and so-called alternate histories into her teaching. Deschenes explains:

> It does not make much sense for women to follow conventions. We have never been adequately included in the general dialogue around image production. I think women have carved out spaces in photography because for such a long time the stakes were so low or nonexistent, that there was no threat of a takeover. I believe that has shifted with the female-dominated Pictures Generation.



Eileen Quinlan, *Monument Valley*, 2015
Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York



Barbara Kasten, *Construct XI A*, 1981
Courtesy the artist; Bortolami, New York; and Galerie Kadel Willborn, Düsseldorf

Miranda Lichtenstein, whose lush images have revived the contemporary still life, similarly cites the influence of the Pictures Generation on her work:

> I began working in nontraditional ways with photography because I wanted to push against the images around me (particularly of women). I used collage and alternative processes because it allowed me to transform and control the pictures I was appropriating. I studied under Joel Sternfeld, so "straight photography" was the dominant paradigm, but I was lucky enough to see work by women in the early 1990s that had a dramatic impact on me. Laurie Simmons, Sarah Charlesworth, Gretchen Bender, and Barbara Kruger were some of the artists whose work cleared a path for me.

As Lichtenstein suggests, these women opened avenues for new ways of observing and interrogating the image in today's culture. In the digital age, where photographs are most often *images* (that is, JPEGs and TIFFs, not prints), Lichtenstein, Deschenes, and others affirm the material properties of the medium and contribute to a more malleable idea of photography within a historical continuum.

Photography's history and its relationship to sculpture, media, and film technologies are central to Sara VanDerBeek's work. Through carefully calibrated photographs of her own temporary sculptures, neoclassical sculptures, ancient edifices, and architectural details, VanDerBeek has developed an aesthetic language that deftly prods the relationship between photography and sculpture. In addressing the history of sculpture, she shifts a mostly male-dominated history into a contemporary female realm, where object

This page:
Liz Deschenes, *Gallery 4.1.1*, installation at MASS MoCA, 2015. Photograph by David Dashiell
Courtesy the artist; MASS MoCA; Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; and Campoli Presti, London/Paris

Opposite:
Sarah Charlesworth, *Buddha of Immeasurable Light*, 1987, from the series *Objects of Desire*
Courtesy the Estate of Sarah Charlesworth and Maccarone

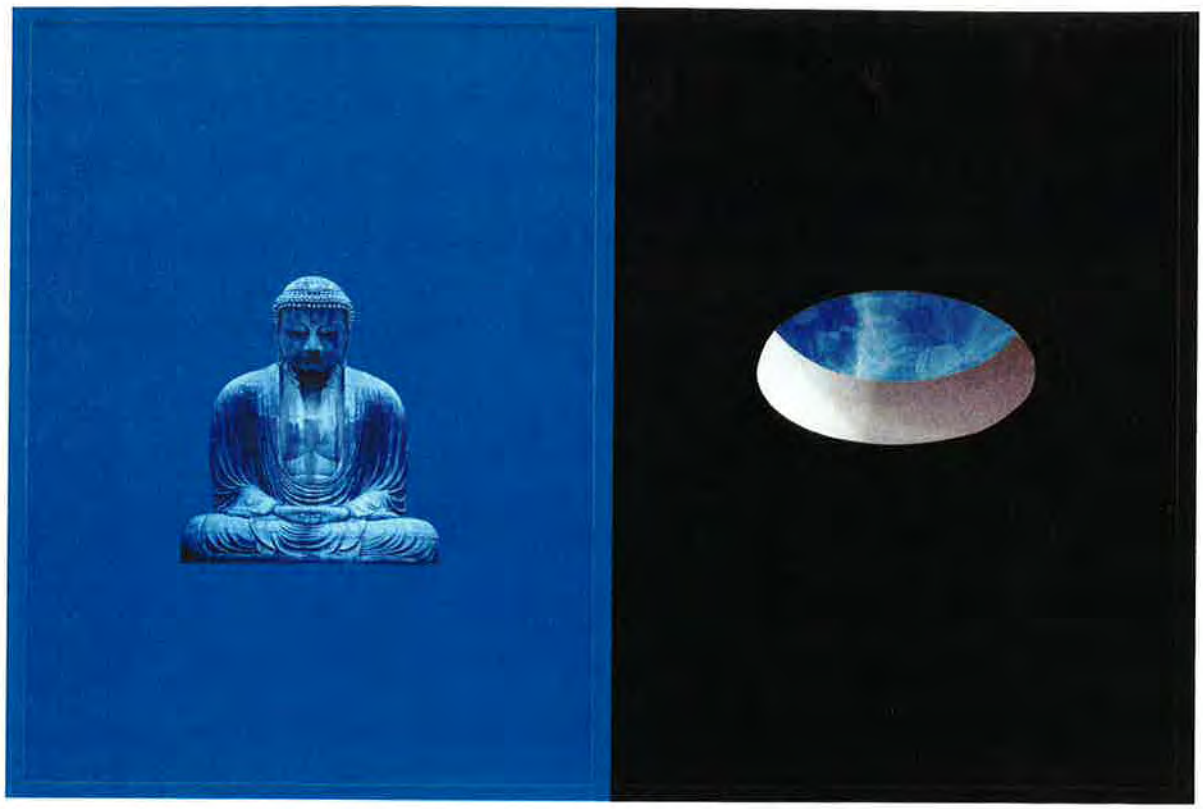
and image are leveled. VanDerBeek, whose recent art addresses "women's work," remarks:

> This sense that there is a quality of impermanence to our progress [as women] leads me to photography. Specifically I'm referring to its expansive and elastic nature, its space for experimentation and its "democratic" nature. Photography has always been open to diverse practitioners and throughout its history it has included the possibility for expression for many who were not easily allowed into other arenas. I think some of this does come from its status as "other," and perhaps, for me, even more so from its interdependent relationship with mass media and technology.

Eileen Quinlan, whose photographs are grounded in material culture, the history of abstraction, feminist history, and, most lately, the ubiquity of screens, cites the predominance of conventional photography curriculums as fomenting a type of resistance:

> Photographers have always created constructed, nonobjective, and materially promiscuous pictures. But this history isn't taught, and if it is alluded to, it's mentioned derisively. Photography remains a male-dominated field, both in the commercial and fine art sectors, and is saturated with "straight" photographers who supposedly harness the medium's "strengths," that is, the ability to sharply and irrefutably record and depict a kind of truth about the world. Maybe women sense that taking unconventional approaches to photography will somehow afford us more room to move? Jan Groover was political when she made abstraction in the kitchen sink. Working with still life, setup, or self-portraiture isn't only about investigating interior or domestic worlds,

Recent years have witnessed a generation of women exploring new ground in the photographic medium.



either. Women are more sensitive to the potential for exploitation when we photograph others … as an artist I am consciously rejecting much I have been taught about pure photography as observation of reality. I understand all photographs to be made rather than taken or found.

Many of these female artists are educators, and in some cases their roles as teachers can be profoundly impactful. Deschenes asserts, "There is no domain within higher photography education that does not have a male authority and history inscribed in its hierarchies, curriculum, alumni, buildings, and more. To attempt to subvert any of that is certainly a political act." Perhaps the most important figure in this regard is Charlesworth. Deeply respected by younger artists (she is cited as an inspiration by those quoted here), Charlesworth created a vital link between her generation and the next. She taught, wrote about, conversed with, and empowered a new generation of artists working in experimental ways, who, in turn, have made community and dialogue central. Through her own groundbreaking work and her strong desire to build community among women artists, Charlesworth established a space for diverse photographic practices to flourish. Her advocacy for the medium and its continuation today by Deschenes, Lichtenstein, Quinlan, Hewitt, and VanDerBeek, who teach at prestigious schools, has unquestionably influenced the course of photographic history and how it is taught.

Like their work, each artist under discussion presents a different viewpoint on photography and so-called experimental practices. However, together they affirm that the medium has always been fluid and resistant to typologizing. Through exhibiting their work, teaching, publishing, and public and private conversations, these artists celebrate the inherently hybrid, pluralistic, and mutable nature of photography, within a robust space for dialogue, debate, and, I would posit, defiance. As a curator who has worked with many of these figures, I have witnessed artists creating work, meaning, and community in arenas long hospitable to women but outside the mainstream, marshaling a shift from the periphery to the center. Artist Emily Roysdon, in the 2010 catalogue *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art*, perhaps expressed it best: artists today are not "protesting what we don't want but performing what we do want."

This essay was inspired by conversations with Liz Deschenes during the preparation of her survey exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. I am also deeply indebted to a community of women who have met regularly over the past two years and whose conversations, ideas, and friendships have animated and informed my thinking on photography.

Eva Respini is the Barbara Lee Chief Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

Interview with Eva Respini for her article. “On Defiance: Experimentation as resistance” *,* *aperture* 225, Winter 2016, p.100-107

Can an argument be made for women finding particularly fertile ground in the under-championed arena of experimentation and non-conventional image making?

I began working in non-traditional ways with photography as an undergraduate, because I wanted to push against the images around me (particularly of women). I used collage and alternative processes because it allowed me to transform and control the pictures I was appropriating. I studied under Joel Sternfeld, so “straight photography” was the dominant paradigm, but I was lucky enough to see work by women in the early 90s that had a dramatic impact on me. Laurie Simmons, Sarah Charlesworth, Gretchen Bender and Barbara Kruger were some of the artists whose work cleared a path for me. I think that experimentation and non-conventional image making remains fertile ground because they provide processes that can address issues of representation in myriad forms. I don't think it's a place for women because it's "under-championed", I think it's fertile because it's as much a space for interrogation as observation.

Furthermore, is photography’s status as *other* (in relationship to mediums of painting and sculpture) another contributing factor to the richness of women working in non-traditional ways?

The list of women photographers who influenced my generation (see above plus Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Barbara Kasten) used the medium in ways that helped reposition photography as a legitimate challenge to the assumptions of “higher” art forms. The expansive face of photography today has crossed lines of gender, and even its status as “other”.

In considering the work made in the last decade within an ‘‘alternate" history of photography, the mutable and plural nature of photography is continually affirmed. The work being made today has an ethos of expanded possibilities for the medium, shifting perspectives, and varied models put forward as a resistance to the traditional conventions of the medium. Can working this way – against photographic convention, in a medium that is still sometimes considered *other* – be considered a political act? An *act of defiance*?

I think any form of art production can be considered a political act. Its reception as an act of defiance depends on the context and viewer. As the plural nature of photography has been affirmed, the expanded possibilities for the medium are exciting in terms of what can be made (i.e. with new technology) and how work can be displayed. One of the ways photography remains relevant to our contemporary moment is the fact that the medium is always struggling with re-definition, and I think a lot of important work made by women is contributing to the shifting ways we think about what photography is or can accomplish. The affirmation of its mutability can also make it more difficult to be defiant, as both the culture industry and the art market have absorbed and neutered some of its potential for resistance. This is why exhibiting work still feels so important. A circulating image can't be controlled in form or context. An installation of work, however, gives the artist ways to create meaning by building relationships: between images, objects, scale, light, and architecture. I think its both the control and freedom that an artist has working in her studio that can make it a laboratory for resistance. Experimentation suggests openness, and lack of definition, which historically has been seen as other. Because I am a woman, I don’t feel the space of the other is necessarily where I want to reside personally, but I do know I have never wanted to be pinned down. It has always appealed to me that the mutability of the medium allows for this kind of shape-shifting, which is an act that defies convention.

Miranda Lichtenstein
More Me than Mine

The edges of Miranda Lichtenstein's new photographs are indeterminate, though not in a physical sense. Instead each intuits a series of questions surrounding their making, at the center of which is: at what point does an artwork become a subject, or an object? These works result from a two year engagement with the work of fellow New York artist Josh Blackwell, unfolding as part-dialogue, part-homage, and part-obsession, all the while maintaining their own autonomy as artworks.

Like most of Lichtenstein's photographs, they're shot in a small corner of her studio with mirrors and paper screens, treated as malleably as their original materials. For years, Blackwell has been embellishing the ubiquitous detritus of our contemporary society, plastic bags, through intricate yarn embroidery, laser cutting, and the physical fusing of multiple elements. Originally begun as a collaborative effort, Blackwell's work recedes in the narrowness of the camera's viewfinder - this intuitive process of selection favoring Lichtenstein's own subjectivity.

The resultant images are records of her own engagement with Blackwell's painting-sculpture hybrids. They're cropped and enlarged to a scale outside themselves, depicted in fragments with a tactility that mimics our own relationship to the material, something we handle potentially even more than each other. Works like *Thank You* inhabit a pop sensibility, flattening and recasting the bag's familiar text (that has been degraded in Blackwell's work) as a slogan simultaneously peppy and pessimistic, as if the plastic bag itself were aware of its snide humor as a positive and friendly pollutant. Photographs of Blackwell's *Bodega bags* alternatively work to inflate their eponymous subjects, giving otherwise flattened works volume, form, coupled with the seductive passage of light. Plastic appears simultaneously fleeting and disposable, as well as monolithic in its permanence and recurrence.

These investigations place Lichtenstein's works within a complicated though often overlooked history of photography's relationship to sculpture, specifically that of artists photographing their own work or other artists works. Lichtenstein points to Man Ray's photograph *Dust Breeders*, a long exposure of dust gathered on Marcel Duchamp's Large Glass in his New York apartment as being fundamental to this – it's an instance in which the photographic representation divorces itself from the parameters of the work it depicts. A similar operation is enacted in the work of Louise Lawler, in which works themselves fade deeply into the networks and associations they inhabit. Through this, the artwork itself becomes its own kind of found object, one replete with signifiers. This does not diminish its original authorship, but instead affirms the artworks' status as contemporary artifacts of our time, that can be used to develop understandings outside and further than itself.

Throughout the works complicated twists of ownerships and authorships (in most images, Blackwell's work as rendered is nearly unrecognizable), what remains at its core is the generative affinities and admirations that emerge between artists. Underscoring this is the exhibition's sole collaborative work, *Welcome Water*, a sprawling pile of outsized prints of Blackwell's work. Scanned, and in some instances pieced together by Lichtenstein, each element displays a hyper level of detailing with a space foreign to the photographic image. Translated and transformed by the light of the scanner bed, they spread and expand across the gallery floor - edges overlap, and individual elements blur into a new whole. Mimicking the operation of Lichtenstein's own photographs, the works apparent mutability functions as an outpouring of generosity, and speaks to a malleability of objects and ideas that remains separate from their authors.

Alex Fitzgerald

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REVIEWS

Miranda Lichtenstein

ELIZABETH DEE

Plastic bags have fallen on hard times since they stole the show in *American Beauty* (1999), in a scene reminiscent of Nathaniel Dorsky's film *Variations* from a year earlier. No longer the mesmerizing Isadora Duncan of refuse, reminding us of the surprising elegance stirring in the corners of parking lots and our lives, plastic is now understood to represent a growing crisis, leaching toxins and forming garbage continents in the ocean. In New York City, it's one more index of class—Whole Foods no longer uses plastic bags, but your corner bodega does.

Into this mix come Miranda Lichtenstein's alluring 2015 photographs of plastic bags, in her fifth exhibition at Elizabeth Dee. At first glance, this show appeared to take up familiar themes of her practice: the still life as experiment, an interest in surface obfuscations and misaligned systems of representation, and the photograph as a container of enigmatic presence. Lush and mysterious, these images' deep teals and complementary oranges, wet and weathered skins, sutures and flatness, kept reminding me of decoupage and even the stunning textures in the Alberto Burri exhibit simultaneously on view uptown. (The most abstract photographs were found in the side office, shadowy black-and-white prints whose titles—*Bodega [Slash]* and *Bodega [Mirror]*—carried a little heavier portent.) Their subject matter is actually thrice recycled: Over the course of two years, Lichtenstein has been photographing sculptures by New York–based artist Josh Blackwell, in which he's cut, painted, joined together, and hand-stitched, with fabrics and metal, classic takeout and deli bags—vibrant works that reflect the efficient ingenuity with discarded materials found in folk art around the world. Lichtenstein's photographs never show the complete object.

Miranda Lichtenstein, *Thank You (orange)*, 2015, ink-jet print, 40 × 26½".

In some, it's not clear you're even looking at a plastic bag anymore: *Have a Nice Day (front)* resembles the singed wing of some bird of prey. In others, the telltale font and wording make the material obvious.

The quietest collaborator was Anthony McCann, the poet whose lines from "Vow" give the exhibition its name: "more *Me* / than mine." If this was the motto of authorship in Lichtenstein's subtle photographs, language also served as found poetry throughout, quietly underscoring the social exchanges and environmental hazards of plastic bags. The works' titles borrow the stacked words found on so many, whose looping script and block letters are cheerfully grateful (Thank You! Have a Nice Day!) and alarmist (To avoid suffocation . . .). In *Thank You (orange)*, we can just make out the fragment FROM BABIES AND CHILDREN and MAY CLING. *You!* repeats its title three times down the center of the photograph, the sentence fragment underscoring the strange serial refraction of self at the center of a plastic bag's economy. Thank anonymous you for spending money here—YOU! YOU! YOU!

These photographs overlooked an elaborate floor piece, *Welcome Water*, authored by both Lichtenstein and Blackwell, consisting of flatbed scans of Blackwell's sculptures that are ink-jet printed and, in places, cut away. The piece resembled a quilted island, stitched together with bright silk and wool and delicately silhouetted. But its beauty was at odds with another reference that came to mind, the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, one of several "trash vortexes" in the world's oceans that are hundreds of thousands of square miles in size. (Blackwell has more effectively displayed his bag sculptures in trees, appropriating the space of trapped litter that flutters throughout cities while suggesting a repurposed release into the wild.)

The commitment of Blackwell's project is reflected by Lichtenstein's: To take two years to do anything in the art world today feels like an eternity, let alone to focus on someone else's work. This restraint doesn't sacrifice self. The original bags' text and material point to a subject that recedes but never disappears. The same is true in Lichtenstein's photographs, except they are all the better for it.

—*Prudence Peiffer*

Nov 24, 2015

THE DAILY PIC (#1440): This is a photo by the Miranda Lichtenstein, whose latest solo is now at Elizabeth Dee in New York. The image shows one of the manipulated plastic shopping bags that are the main art form of her fellow artist Josh Blackwell. I'm not sure I know of another example of works of found-object art, or "assisted readymades", by one artist being used as found objects in the art of another.

This matters because we seem to have lost track of how vexed the whole found-object tradition has turned out to be. We see it everywhere in today's contemporary art, but it is mostly used naively, as though there were nothing at stake beyond what the found object happens to look like. Lichtenstein and Blackwell know that there's much more to it than formal play.

The Daily Pic also appears at Artnet News. For a full survey of past Daily Pics visit

ART

ART

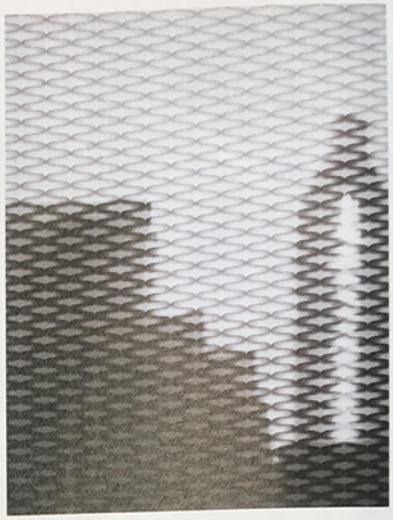
"THE ACTUAL"

December 11 2014 - February 15 2015

Beauty isn't necessarily a priority for photographers working in process-driven abstraction these days, but it's one of the attractions in this smart show of work by six contemporaries. Even the most restrained pieces here pulse with energy, including John Houck's sharply creased prints and Jason Kalogiros's gridded photograms. Miranda Lichtenstein and Sara Cwynar make a much bigger splash with layered pictures loosely grounded in representation. Marsha Cottrell constructs intriguing quasi-architectural spaces, and Jessica Eaton abandons her usual strict geometries for gorgeous images of what looks like torn paper, glowing in outer space. Through Feb. 15.

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

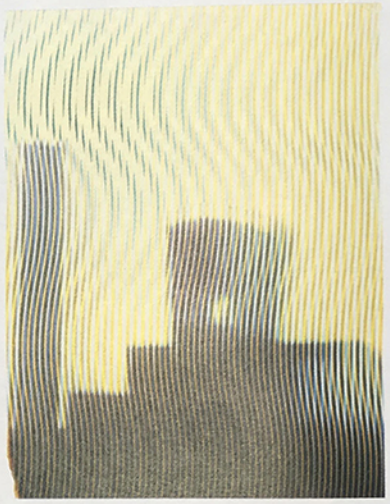
THE PHOTO ARTIST PUTS A SURREAL SPIN ON THE INSTAMATIC IMAGE

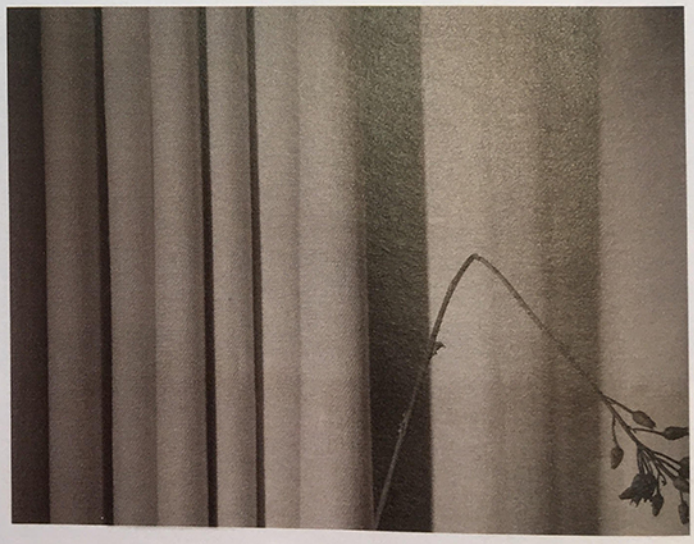


CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN'S *NEW YORK #10*, 2013, POLAROID PRINT; *NEW YORK #9*, 2013, POLAROID PRINT; *NEW YORK #2*, 2011, POLAROID PRINT; *UNTITLED #18*, 2002–2005, POLAROID PRINT; *CIVITELLA #9*, 2009, POLAROID PRINT. ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY.

Miranda Lichtenstein's photos are so mesmerizing that it's almost easy to miss out on their intellectual underpinnings. Layers swell and recede in her photographs, their surfaces shifting constantly between abstract patterns and traditional still lifes. This month, at New York's Gallery at Hermès, the 44-year-old Brooklyn artist is showing a series of 46 Polaroids that not only play visually with time and space, but were produced over the span of eleven years at five distinct locales around the globe. According to Lichtenstein, the project began when she inherited Roe Ethridge's Linhof 4x5 camera (with a Polaroid attachment) that Ethridge, in turn, got from photographer Jason Schmidt. Lichtenstein quickly found herself hooked on the near-instant and nearly uncontrollable outcome of Polaroid as a form. She began painting over the shadows of objects before photographing them, creating a push-pull effect between calculation and spontaneity. "What's more, a unique print of a painted object made sense to me conceptually," she says. "I liked the contradiction of making an instantaneous image of something so labored."

Lichtenstein began by painting the shadows of flowers in Monet's gardens while on a residency in Giverny in 2002; the results were luscious images that edged into the realm of abstraction. She carried on the project at a residency in Connecticut, another residency in Umbertide, Italy, a stint in the fishing town of Ito, Japan, and finally in her hometown of New York City. In each case, romantic yearnings seem to slither beyond the white borders. "The focus is soft and the pictures have a warm, almost orangeish palette," Lichtenstein explains. "It's the same film that my parents shot in the '70s, with the large white border that begs for a caption. And it was used by people like Maripol, whose documents of the downtown scene lured me to Manhattan in the 1980s." Lichtenstein's other influences include Walker Evans, Mapplethorpe's play on beauty and roughness, and the Polaroids of Lucas Samaras, who, according to the artist, "took the theatrics of the studio and the surface of the print to new levels, complicating an otherwise simple medium." Ultimately, Lichtenstein's stunning, intimate series could have come from no one else but her. —ALEXANDER ADLER





interview

April 10th, 2014

After Monet's Garden

Aperture spoke with Miranda Lichtenstein about her upcoming exhibit of Polaroids on view at the Gallery at Hermès, April 11–May 5, 2014

Miranda Lichtenstein, Steep Rock #2, 2006

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Starting tomorrow, April 11, Miranda Lichtenstein presents a career-spanning exhibit of her Polaroids at the Gallery at Hermès. Culled from eleven years of residencies all over the world, Lichtenstein's photographs in the show are reflective of her surroundings, capturing the light and shadows of each locale using the serialized format of the Polaroid camera. Aperture caught up with the artist to discuss the editing process, and the self-discovery that resulted from considering a decade's worth of images.

Aperture: How did this exhibition and collaboration with Hermès begin?

Miranda Lichtenstein: The exhibition was put together by Cory Jacobs, whom I've know for years. I had been to a number of the shows she has curated at the Hermès gallery. She approached me about doing a show a year ago; she had seen some of my Polaroids at the Hammer Museum in 2006. I thought Cory's idea to look back at my Polaroid work over the past eleven years would be a great opportunity, and I was also interested to show in a space that is dedicated to photography, a new context for me. We decided that I would go through my work from the very beginning, when I first start shooting with a 4-by-5 Polaroid back, up until the present.

A: What prompted you to first use the Polaroid camera in your

work?
ML: It began with a residency at Giverny, which was the first time I shot 4-by-5 film. Roe Ethridge gave me his 4-by-5 with a Polaroid back to take with me to France. I shot with that to learn how to shoot 4-by-5 film, as a test. The more I shot,the more I became interested in considering the Polaroid as the final object.
A: This exhibit is a departure from the non-indexical photographs you made for last solo exhibit at Elizabeth Dee in 2010. How do the Polaroids in this show relate to the rest of your work?
ML: There are a few images in the show that are Polaroid versions of the suites I showed at Elizabeth's. However, that exhibition does differ; it was a great mix of scale and genre. I was exploring different strategies of image making, which involved distorting or refracting the images. I would say that approach is in play now as well; all the images deal with shadow play, refracted light, and elements of misrepresentation.

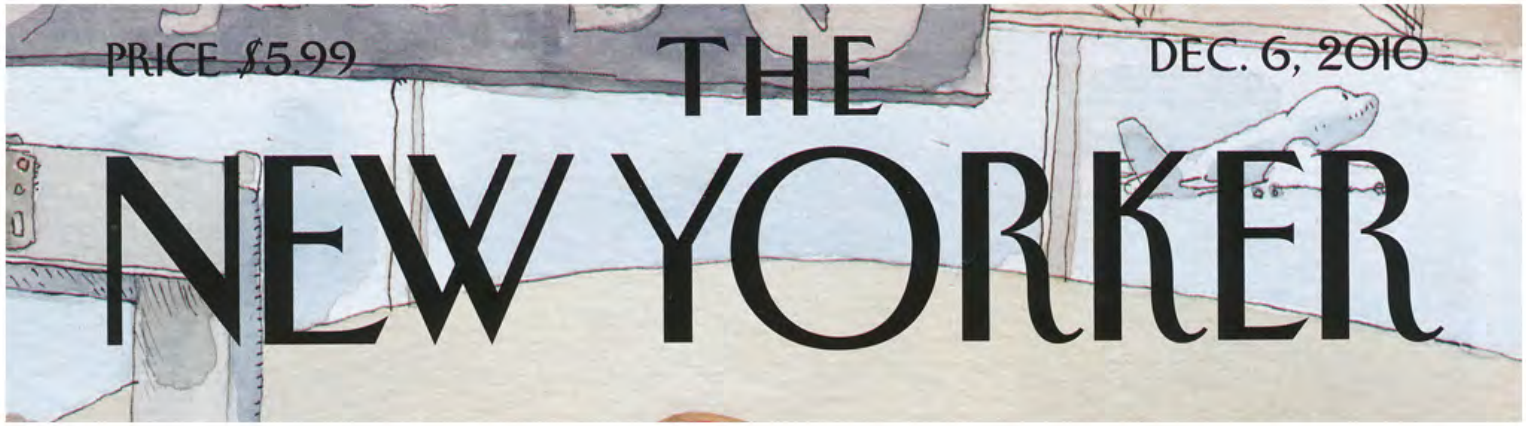
Miranda Lichtenstein, Civitella #5, 2009

A: The photos in the exhibit are from your travels and residencies over the years—are they a response to those different environments?
ML: Yes, it has a great impact. There is a clearer formal thread as the photographs are all still lifes, but I am definitely responding to the environment. I use the light in each place, and shoot using what's around me. In Giverny, where the whole project began, I was pulling the clipped plants and flowers the gardeners cut at the end of the day and bringing them into the studio. In Japan, I discovered washi paper, and used it to make the paper screens I shot my compositions through.
A: It must have been a long editing process, going over eleven years of work. What is it like to see all this work in one place?
ML: It's exciting. When I looked at the work from 2006, I realized both how much it's had evolved and what consistencies exist throughout. The first Polaroids that I shot in Monet's Garden were made thinking about how to photograph those ubiquitously photographed things in a different way. The newest

works are entirely abstract and don’t deal with place at all in the same way. But it’s been interesting to see how I have worked with light and shadows throughout. I hadn’t considered it all together before. My own trajectory is much more clear to me now.

A: You mentioned there is new work in this show, can you describe it to us?

ML: The new work for the show is made from the screen-shadow photographs that I have been shooting for the past few years. I used the Polaroid to photograph my current digitally shot work, making a one-of-a-kind image of something out of something infinitely reproducible.



GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

Lichtenstein's photographs would not be out of place in MOMA's current "New Photography" roundup; like much of the work there, it's brainy, polished, self-conscious, and deliberately opaque. But it's also intriguingly layered and beautiful in a style that recalls Liz Deschenes, Walead Beshty, and Eileen Quinlan, other shrewd and seductive artists. Lichtenstein explores several strategies here, all of which involve obscuring or refracting the image: flowers almost dissolve behind colorful moiré or checkerboard patterns; the heads of singing women hover on the edge of perception in white-on-white images. And, in an 1896 film that Lichtenstein splashed with color and projects on curtains, the dancer Loie Fuller radiates free love in a rain of psychedelic light-show effects. Through Dec. 18. (Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

TIME LightBox

Out There Thursday, April 10, 2014 | By Richard Conway

Beautiful Lies at Giverny: Vibrant Polaroids by Miranda Lichtenstein

At first glance, Miranda Lichtenstein's Polaroids may seem to be simply vibrant studies of flowers. But look a little closer, and they get just a little less bright – and even more interesting.

Taken in 2002 while she was on a residency at Monet's gardens at Giverny, these are not just beautiful pictures: they each form part of a rigorously constructed tableau, one that speaks of disharmony, half-truths and even failure.

It's all in the shadows: While Lichtenstein was at Giverny she would pass through a garden shed every day, one that had shadow-like tool outlines painted on the walls to indicate where, say, the rake should be hung, or a garden fork should be kept.

But, "almost all the time," Lichtenstein tells TIME, "the tools were put in the wrong place, on the wrong shadow." This seemed to her to be a noble — but totally failed — system, and she replicated this in her Polaroids.

She took to painting bold, angular shadows on paper behind the colorful flowers – what we see is not the actual shadow cast by the flower. Her pieces had become beautiful lies, wonderfully constructed misrepresentations. Indeed,

as her work progressed, the shadows, at times, became more and more prominent.

"They look like they are a reflection of the flower, or that they come from it," she says. "But I stage the object — the flower — in front the paper backdrop, and then I photograph it."

Now, a show at Hermès in New York presents 46 of her works produced between 2002 and 2013, and aims to show how her style has evolved. We see her polaroids from Japan using Washi paper — which seem to be *entirely* about shadows — and there's her work from Italy, which seems to be a rigorously constructed take on bucolic Tuscany. And then there's also her most recent work — architecture-like photographic studies taken in New York (which are actually close-up shots of earlier work hanging on the wall of her studio).

"In a sense, I'm always photographing where I am," Lichtenstein says. "It's not necessarily going out on the street and shooting there — but I'm certainly pulling from the environment."

Miranda Lichtenstein *is an artist who works in photography and video. Solo exhibitions of her work have been held at venues such as the UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and the Whitney Museum of American Art. An exhibition of her work at The Gallery at Hermès in New York will run from April 11, 2014 – June 4, 2014.*

Richard Conway *is Reporter for TIME LightBox*

Miranda Lichtenstein's Memento Mori

Art Miranda Lichtenstein

Through the instantaneous lens of the Polaroid camera, Miranda Lichtenstein captures contemporary flowering still-lifes as resonantly exquisite as old master paintings. The polaroids describe moments in a process of becoming—a snapshot of a bouquet's afternoon shadow, the memento mori wilted plant, or a painterly disruption of a domestic interior. The vitality of the work arises through the juxtaposition of the polaroid's nostalgic point-and-shoot nature and the lasting potency of her visual signifiers and formalist compositions. The artist's exhibition, Miranda Lichtenstein: Polaroids, curated by Cory Jacobs at the Gallery at Hermés, includes 46 works spanning the last 10 years of Lichenstein's multiple Polaroid series. The images are at once delicately effervescent and vibrantly evocative. In an age where we all are digital exhibitionists, the intimate scale of Lichtenstein's photos is not only refreshing, it's a flash of surprise.

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN: POLAROIDS AT THE GALLERY AT HERMÈS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIRANDA LITCHTENSTEIN
TEXT BY RONALD BURTON

American artist, Miranda Lichtenstein, is fluent in both photography and video mediums; however, in this particular gallery, she solely explores the injection of Polaroid photography. The **Fondation d'entreprise Hermès** presents Miranda Lichtenstein: Polaroids at the Gallery at Hermès, highlighting 46 works produced between 2002 and 2013. Just before Lichtenstein's departure to Monet's garden in Giverny, France, for a summer residency program, a friend provided her with a polaroid camera. While in the gardens, she began to photograph newly wilted flowers as they had been cut by the gardeners, and mirrored the original image against distorted hand painted shadows; here began the journey of Lichtenstein's idea to re-imagine reality, and explore the evolution of objects as images. In efforts to constantly challenge and grow as an artist, she found it necessary to try and create new dialogue in her work; images that are progressive in thinking, allowing the viewer to have deeper findings, beyond just a beautiful still life image. Lichtenstein took this technique of distorting shadows and latter, objects, throughout her travels around the world and really challenged the construction of still life imagery, and how it can progress. "I'm interested in instilling a sense of wonder in the viewer in an age where there are very little surprises" she explains.

Lichtenstein's exhibit will be running through June 4th, 2014, located on the fourth floor of Hermès, at 691 Madison Avenue.

Miranda Lichtenstein
Danse Serpentine (doubled and refracted)
2010
HD Video, Endless loop
installation view
Elizabeth Dee, New York

Miranda Lichtenstein
Screen Shadow #17 (For Maya)
2009
Elizabeth Dee, New York

CONSIDERING THE IMAGE
by Mary Barone

In 1897 the Lumière Brothers released Danse Serpentine*, a 49-second-long film of American dancer and lighting technologist Loie Fuller performing her* Serpentine Dance*, which had been first done in 1892 at the Follies-Bergére and which was based on popular skirt dances of the period. It was a radical, conceptual innovation in the field of dance and marked an important influence on early 20th-century visual artists, notably Pablo Picasso and the Futurist F.T. Marinetti.*

The film and the dance continue to find a place in artistic production today, notably at two exhibitions now on view in New York. It is one of the first things that a visitor sees at "On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century" at the Museum of Modern Art, and it also plays an important role in Miranda Lichtenstein's solo exhibition of photos and video at the Elizabeth Dee gallery in Chelsea.

According to the critic Bridget Goodbody, Lichtenstein -- who took her MFA from Cal Arts in 1993, has had a dozen solo shows since 1997 and lives in New York -- has a thing for the "search for spiritual transcendence," typically undertaken in isolation. Roberta Smith, who found her 2007 exhibition "puzzling," noted all the same that Lichtenstein seemed able "to do anything she wants with a camera."

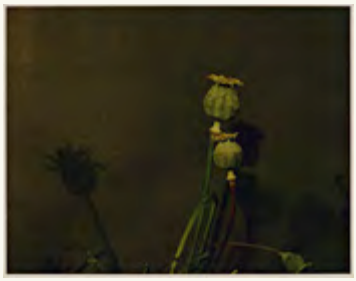
Her new show includes the video, Danse Serpentine (doubled and refracted)*, which manipulates the Lumiere film and projects it onto a folded theatrical curtain, reducing its subject "almost entirely to shadow and light" so that it "teeters on dissolution."*

Artnet Magazine *contributor Mary Barone caught up with Miranda Lichtenstein to talk about Fuller and the influence on her current work.*

Mary Barone: "On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century" takes *Danse Serpentine* as a starting point in its survey of line and drawing in 20th-century art. Can you talk about the film's impact on your photographic works?

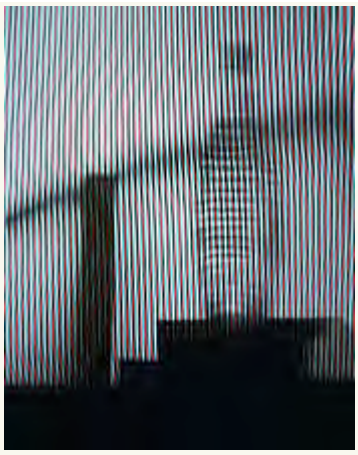
Miranda Lichtenstein: I first saw *Danse Serpentine* a little over two years ago and knew I wanted to use it in some way, whether this meant collaborating with a dancer to restage it or to work with the original film. Then I saw it on YouTube and kept seeing it in museum shows, at the Reina Sofia in Madrid, and in a design show at MoMA last year. It's actually surprising that I hadn't seen the film before because it is one of the earliest examples of cinema and modern dance, particularly Loie Fuller's performances which were tied to the new medium.

Danse Serpentine can be considered as pre-cinematic -- Fuller was a



Miranda Lichtenstein
Untitled #1 (Plant)
2005
Polaroid
Elizabeth Dee, New York

Miranda Lichtenstein
Untitled
2005
c-print
Elizabeth Dee, New York



Miranda Lichtenstein
Screen Shadow #21 (Staircase)
2010
archival pigment print
Elizabeth Dee, New York

moving image on stage, not dissimilar to the magic lantern shows of the period. She used light to describe movement but also as a hypnotic device, performing the piece against a black curtain so that her image would disappear when the light wasn't hitting her. This appealed to me because I like to imagine the sense of wonder produced by such a simple gesture and because a series of photographs I began in 2005 called "The Searchers" came out of an interest in hypnosis.

Hypnosis was actually the catalyst for Fuller's *Danse Serpentine*. During an early performance she improvised a section pretending to be hypnotized. The audience went wild, and she responded to their reaction by choreographing a dance that worked with these repetitive and swinging movements.

The photographs I've been making for the past two years concern light and the notion of the screen, both physically and metaphorically. I want the subject of the image to be difficult to pin down, so the objects in the images are unanchored. I do this by using reflective surfaces and Japanese paper, or washi, which I always backlight. I think we are at a point where backlighting is taken for granted -- mostly everything is viewed on a digital screen now, and the surface of the image, particularly of a photograph, is not considered unless we have the chance to see it in person.

I use the reflective surfaces to double an image, but I stage the tableau in a way so that this is not always obvious. I also stage compositions behind paper screens so that it is difficult to tell if you are looking at a silhouette, a projection or something printed on the paper itself. It forces you to consider the surface of the screen as one possible subject. In *Danse Serpentine (doubled and refracted)*, 2010, I downloaded the film from YouTube and treated it in a similar way by projecting the video onto a reflective surface and re-shot its refracted reflection, with a second projection of the film projected onto that surface making it both doubled and refracted. The original film already moves from figuration to abstraction and plays with light and movement in a way that disorients the viewer, and in the video I enhance this effect.

The film historian Tom Gunning has written about the connections between the early cinema of attractions and cinema prior to 1906 to the video-sharing site YouTube. As Gunning puts it, "It is the direct address of the audience, in which an attraction is offered to the spectator by a cinema showman, that defines this approach to filmmaking. It was a cinema based on spectacle, shock and sensation. Today many of the clips on video-sharing sites like YouTube bear a remarkable similarity to these early films."

I decided it was best to appropriate the original film since I wanted to use current modes of viewing and sharing imagery by reusing the source material in its current form as a YouTube clip. This circling back calls attention to backlighting, and reworks the surface or the screen in a similar way I've been thinking about surfaces in making my photographs.

MB: The MoMA exhibition looks at the ways that artists interprets line through sculpture, installation, painting, performance and film to explore the idea of what constitutes a drawing. Photography is included in the exhibition but mostly to document a performance or

Miranda Lichtenstein, 2010

action. In your current work you seem to be asking what constitutes a photograph and you "question what role depiction might continue to play in the capricious visual field."

ML: For a while now I've been working with lines, both of light and also hand-drawn lines that I photograph. In 2002, while on a residency in Giverny, France, I discovered a toolshed that had a clumsy trompe-l'oeil painting of each of the tools that was used in the garden. Every time I walked through the shed I saw that the tools were misaligned with their own shadows -- for instance the shovel might be hanging on the painted shadow of the rake, and the spade would be hanging over the shadow of the shovel, and so forth.

I was struck by this image as a pithy example of a failed system. It prompted me to start drawing the shadows of objects and I began with clipped plants and flowers from Monet's garden. Then I photographed the object in front of this second shadow, but slightly misaligned. Eventually I started photographing the painted shadows themselves, and they became more elaborate. I used black flashe on black paper so it was very matte, and I would then photograph the drawing so the paper might be read as a sky, or natural backdrop, depending on how I printed it.

I thought of it as a send-up of Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor of the calotype, who made his first photogram because he was frustrated with his drawing skills. On the contrary, I was sharing a studio at the time with two painters and was feeling frustrated by photography. I wanted to make something in the studio, and was struck by how much drawing shadows of objects was equivalent to using my hand and eye as a camera.

What constitutes a photograph has become very open-ended and I think some people embrace this while others are disappointed in the shift. The material of the medium has been a subject since the early 20th century but we are witnessing a renaissance of concrete work, which I think makes perfect sense given the ubiquity of the medium. As I mentioned before, I think light has become something to pay attention to perhaps now more than ever, since there is the light of the scanner, and the light of the computer screen to contend with, and a kind of surface tension to call attention to.

I still shoot film with a 4x5 camera because I want to get the kind of detail it gives me, and the subject can be distorted or confused depending on how I shift the camera itself. Depicting a composition, a space or a still life has a quotidian quality that interests me, since it constitutes de-familiarizing the ordinary and the everyday. I like how flexible the medium has become and so the way I work with the material demonstrates this flux. I still want to slow people down, to make them stop and look, and wonder, and if I can do this with a photograph, then I believe there are still plenty of places for the medium to go.

Miranda Lichtenstein, Nov. 5-Dec. 18, 2010, at Elizabeth Dee, 545 West 20th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011

MARY BARONE is the auteur of OutwithMary.com.

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

3/15/11

ELIZABETH DEE

by barbara pollack

NEW YORK Miranda Lichtenstein creates photographic images that are handsome to look at but difficult to interpret, as seen in her recent luscious but tricky exhibition. Luscious, in that the pictures are luminous and seductive, drawing viewers in with patterns and color variations that are downright decorative. Tricky because each photograph is a disguise, concealing the way it was made and masking the objects and people that were placed before the camera.

Lichtenstein pirouettes between a number of formal strategies, varying her technique and approach, and rejecting the notion that an exhibition should serve as an authoritative statement. Nonetheless there was an overarching theme to the diverse images on view, namely the destabilization of "reality" via the manipulation of the subject matter, achieved more often than not through low-tech means and a conventional 4-by-5 view camera. In one series, "Screen Shadows" (2009–10), Lichtenstein placed sheets of sheer, patterned Japanese paper in front of backlit still lifes, so that her subjects become shadowy silhouettes in the photographs' backgrounds. In Screen Shadow No. 17 (For Maya), 2009, a flower arrangement on the artist's balcony seems to be seen through a green textured curtain. In another, Screen Shadow No. 21 (Staircase), 2010, Lichtenstein achieves a moiré effect with the paper, using modest materials to produce an image that has the look of digital manipulation.

At times, Lichtenstein mirrors and duplicates her subject matter using a sheet of Mylar. Stare carefully at Extension (2010) and the curled edge of the Mylar reveals itself, distorting the white flowers in the glass vase beside it. The artist's camera can also be seen vaguely emerging from the darkness in the top-left corner. The silent video Danse Serpentine (doubled and refracted), 2010, makes use of an 1896 hand-colored film by the Lumière brothers, which features dance pioneer Loïe Fuller whirling about in a flowing dress that appears to shift in hue. Lichtenstein shot two simultaneous projections of the film on the same wall, one of which she bounced off a facing mirror so that the footage is seen in refraction. The result is a haunting duet of two dancers in a psychedelic array of pinks, yellows and blues.

Because Lichtenstein varies her subject matter and style not only between shows but also several times within each show, she has defied identification with a signature style and might be mistaken for something of a dilettante. But this is one extremely smart photographer, steeped in ideas and able to enliven them with stunning visual appeal. Her relinquishment of a decisive statement suits the trends of post-appropriation photography, a wide-ranging movement with any number of photographers working against the conventions of the photo-essay, but her thoughtful manipulation of the medium is as modernist as a work by Moholy-Nagy.

Photo: Miranda Lichtenstein: Screen Shadow #17 (For Maya), 2009, pigment print, 413⁄4 by 321⁄2 inches; at Elizabeth Dee.

the village VOICE
DECEMBER 1–7, 2010 ▮ VOL. LV NO. 48 ▮ AMERICA'S LARGEST WEEKLY NEWSPAPER

Best in Show

Recommendations by Martha Schwendener

Art

Focus Here!

Last year, at the entrance to "Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West," MOMA curator Eva Respini mounted one of Richard Prince's *Untitled (Cowboy)* photos. Originally shot by Sam Abell for Phillip Morris, it's an arresting image — and probably the only one in the exhibition originally created for advertising. Respini's choice was canny and mercenary, akin to Prince's original appropriation. What other image would've lured you 40 feet down the hallway into the ghetto of MOMA's photography department?

The preternatural allure of media images was, of course, a primary lesson of Pop and Pictures. But once artists had this information, vigilance was required, like wearing Hazmat suits around radioactive materials. Biography, beauty, and sentiment were forbidden. A prominent '80s art dealer best summed up the defensive ethos: "Expression embarrasses me."

The past decade, though, saw photographers groping toward embarrassment. Forays into abstraction, spirit photography, and early photo techniques served as preliminary gestures. Now, the commercial and personal are being reconciled, and the critical no longer precludes beauty and expression.

You see this in "New Photography 2010" at MOMA (*11 West 53rd Street, through January 10*), where Amanda Ross-Ho has taken a perforated drywall screen and created a mini-display of framed photos — everything from abstraction to portraiture to advertising still-life. The catch is that among the images are photos taken by her parents, one of whom is a professional photographer.

The slickest work in "New Photography" is by Roe Ethridge, who cruises effortlessly between formats and photographic realms, repurposing his commercial images for art's exigencies. A misty, neo-Pictorialist portrait of a model posed next to a tripod hangs alongside a trompe-l'oeil photo of a pumpkin sticker, fashion photos with eerie digital interventions, and a folksy-gorgeous still-life with moldy fruit, originally used as a *Vice* magazine cover.

Elad Lassry's MOMA display is extended in an overhung solo exhibition at Luhring Augustine (*531 West 24th Street, through December 18*). Basically, Lassry is a very talented Ethridge, Prince, Christopher Williams, and Jack Goldstein redux who leans heavily on gimmicks like printing his photographs the size of a magazine spread. (Um, why?) Nonetheless, perusing his genre-bending lineup of images is like thumbing through a competent DJ's album collection: vintage advertising, snapshots, auteur and Hollywood cinema, conceptualizing setups — it's all here.

Annette Kelm, at Andrew Kreps (*525 West 22nd Street, through December 22*), is also very much in the Ethridge mode, with some Josephine Pryde thrown in. There's genre slippage and trompe-l'oeil trickery, but Kelm's use of craft and kitsch objects — a thrift-store driftwood lamp, bandanna, and casino-themed scarf — creates a kind of well-lit, post–New Age surrealism.

Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

No more denial: Miranda Lichtenstein's *Untitled #20*, 2008, at Elizabeth Dee

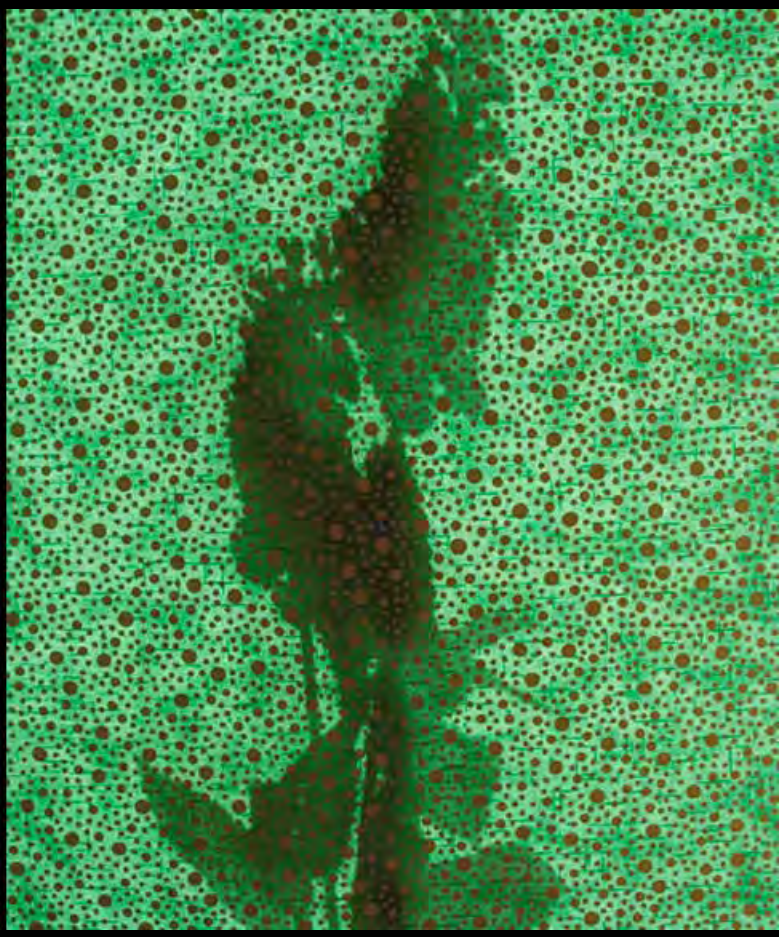
Collier Schorr is the elder stateswoman of this round-up, but her current offering at 303 (*547 West 21st Street, through December 4*) is notable for its turn away from the conceptual-essay format into autobiographical mining. Like virtually everyone mentioned here, she's eschewing seriality: The installation looks like a group rather than a solo show. It's also richly optical, with images of cut flowers tied back into landscapes and ad hoc formalist compositions, such as a mottled wall that recalls modernists like Aaron Siskind.

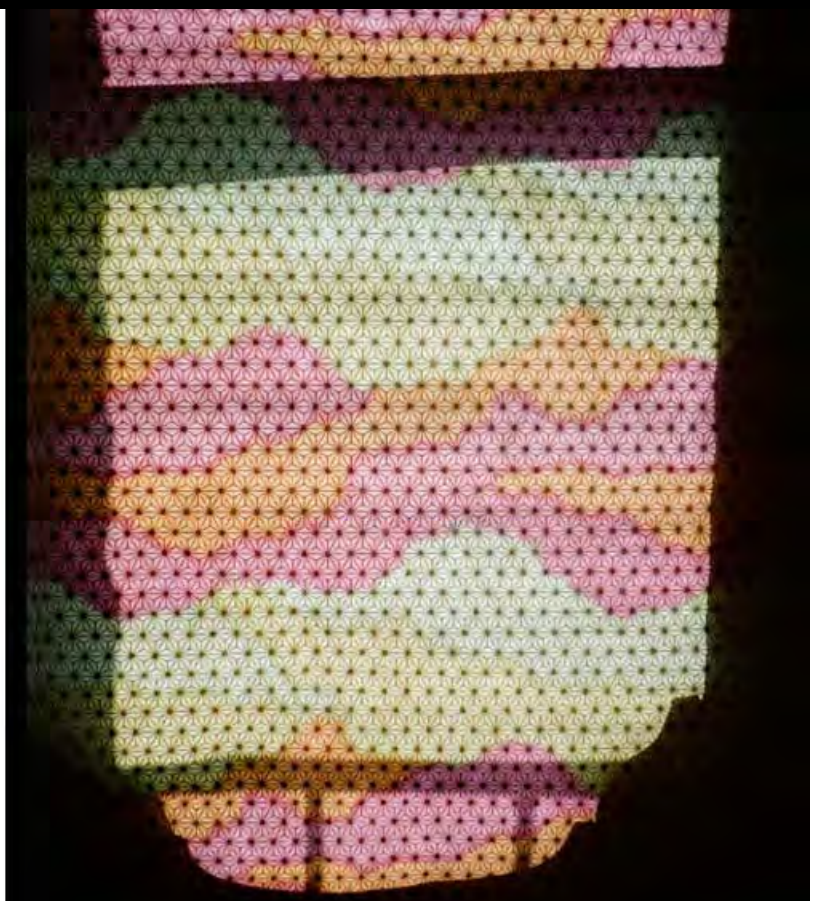
Dan Torop's exhibition at Derek Eller (*615 West 27th Street, through December 23*) is autobiographical, too, but in a rustic, neo-romantic way. Scenes from a camping trip suggest cast-off snapshots that wouldn't have made the photo album — only these are cased in tasteful walnut frames. Torop's show isn't as pleasingly weird as his last one, but it's defiantly unplugged and meditative.

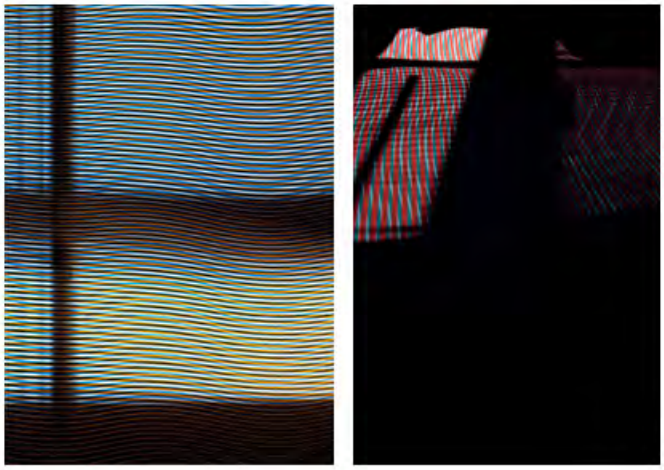
Expression is captured and distilled by Miranda Lichtenstein at Elizabeth Dee (*545 West 20th Street, through December 18*). There's singing, dancing, decaying flowers, allusions to early film and modern aesthetic utopias — all compressed through the post-postmodern filter, which is to say, effectively refracted and transformed, rather than appropriated and reproduced (or re-anything'ed). Criticality takes on a new form here. Because, in the same way Respini covertly got me to admire that Prince/Abell photo, on a purely formal level, Lichtenstein shows how the postmodern beauty-and-expression embargo was essentially a form of denial: Advertising's magnetic aesthetics, after all, were often crafted by freelancing "fine" artists. Irony was good for the '70s and '80s, but too much has happened since then, both in photography and life, to maintain that stance. With Lichtenstein, the stubbornly "resistant" artwork gives way to a primordial, yet contemporary, admission: Images contain magic.

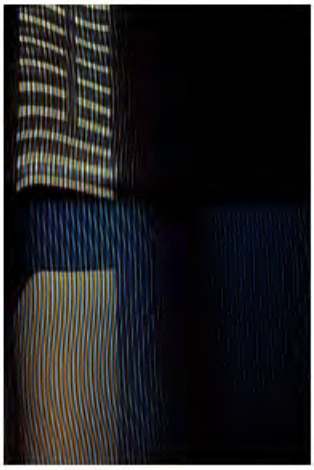
AMERICA
PART FOURTEEN

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN
BY DANA OSPINA
PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF
ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY









Miranda Lichtenstein by Dana Ospina

Miranda Lichtenstein's most recent body of work engages with and deconstructs canonical themes in photography. Rather than offering an ironic response to photography's inability to reveal a universal truth or an unmediated image, Lichtenstein kneads the medium, cannily and with curiosity. The result is the creation of four series that stage the problematic of capturing performative acts, of portraying interiority, and of placing faith in representation, through an aesthetic externalization of the process of production. Lichtenstein's work brings together an exploration of the prestidigitory possibilities afforded by the medium and an interest in epistemologies of perspective and representation. These explorations coalesce to disrupt that which we think we know and to explore what is made manifest when we seek to represent the experiential world.

The artist alters perspective with a large format camera, creating reflections, shadows, and screens using materials such as Mylar, washi paper, and natural light. At first glance, these works appear to be the result of a highly controlled studio practice; however, they are, in fact, as reliant on conditions established by a fleeting moment as they are on premeditation. Whether capturing a performance or a particular reflection or shadow, these images are the result of an unpredictable encounter between aesthetic determination and circumstance. Orchestrating an oscillation between the poles of familiarity and disorientation, naturalized associations and familiar perspectives are acknowledged only to be summarily undermined. Objects such as flowers, a vase, a face, a dancer, are lifted from their original environment and restaged in a manner that subverts context, shifting our attention away from the worlds these objects usually populate to the ones they now construct.

A series of photographs of singers builds upon Lichtenstein's interest in transcendence and out-of-body experience. Motivated by a number of performances she attended in which the musician appeared to enter into a trance, Lichtenstein recruited singers to sit for her and requested only that they perform a work that elicited a strong emotional response from them. The resulting images approach the matter of capturing deeply interior experiences in a manner that runs counter to many photographic strategies. While documentary photography often emphasizes the expression of the subject in heightened detail in order to reveal deeper interior states, Lichtenstein's barely perceptible subjects result in spectral images stripped of readily available signifiers of state of mind and evacuated of detail. The result is a rumination on ethereality, redirecting the focus to an experiential, otherworldly realm. Lacking the vocality of their subjects, these images visually ventriloquize an interstitial state, commanding our attention, but ultimately evading our embrace.

The source material for the *Dancers* series originates in a book of prints acquired by the artist in Prague in 1991. The images were produced on Kodalith film, an extremely high-contrast technology that, while now outmoded, was at one time a popular medium used to make line and halftone negatives for graphic artists and printers. Lichtenstein scanned these Kodaliths, maintaining them as negatives, to further accentuate the contrast. As with the singers, the images capture the performers, in this case renowned early-twentieth-century modern dancers, in a moment of action. Similarly to *The Searchers*, an earlier series in which the artist explored the world of individuals who seek out means of higher consciousness and transcendence, *Dancers* trains its attention on the desire to connect with more primal aspects of the natural world and elements of our existence that elude the rational mind. The dancers portrayed were practitioners of *Ausdruckstanz*, a form of German Expressionist dance in which ritualistic movement was believed to bring the dancer closer to nature and to an ideal, higher state of being. While the singers construct a representation of liminality via erasure, *Dancers* approaches this concept from a diametric position. In these photographs, contrast is heightened, rendering an image that registers almost as an X-ray. The large scale, with its implication that more knowledge is available, is suggestive of deeper access, and yet attempts to solidify enhanced understanding are denied. These images, untethered from the specificity of their historical circumstances, have been reconceived as manifestations of a different sort of knowledge, one that is derived from intuitive rather than rational deduction.

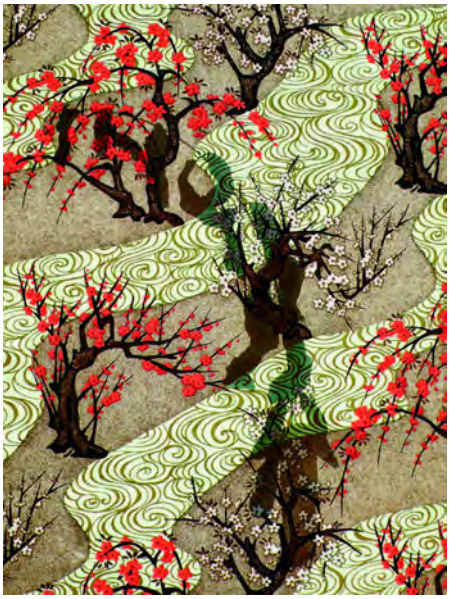
The series of still lifes occupies a space between intention and discovery, for both the artist and the spectator. *Arrangement*, for example, presents the viewer with what appears at first glance to be a beautifully composed image of a loose bouquet of flowers and their reflected image. The flowers are placed against a black background, isolated and decontextualized, a distancing furthered by flattened perspective and cropping. As one regards the work, however, it slowly releases quiet bits of information and subtle deceptions that transform its message from one of representation to one of revelation. The reflection is of tantamount importance, for it is here that the viewer receives the fullest knowledge as to the constitution of the bouquet—we are privy to flowers in the reflection that we are unable to see in the image of the actual object—as well as the location of the light source. That is to say, in *Arrangement*, it is to the reflection, not the image of the object, that we turn for understanding. While they are derived from the same source, the two panes of the image operate distinctly: the still life compels contemplation on form and composition, but it is the reflection that affords us insight into its production.

As with the other images in her most recent body of work, the *Screen Shadows* series shares an interest in drawing the viewer's attention to conditions of ephemerality and flux. Yet just as significant to the conception of this series are contemporary modes of perception—in particular, the role of the screen. Both the film screen and the computer screen exert a powerful influence on the way we perceive the world, constructing a particular visual sensibility whose persistent presence and influence we oftentimes overlook. *Screen Shadows* returns to the viewer an awareness of how the screen mediates and conditions our visual experiences. In this work, washi paper is used to create patterned reflections, which intersect with the shadows of objects. It is unclear to the viewer whether the shadows are being shot through the

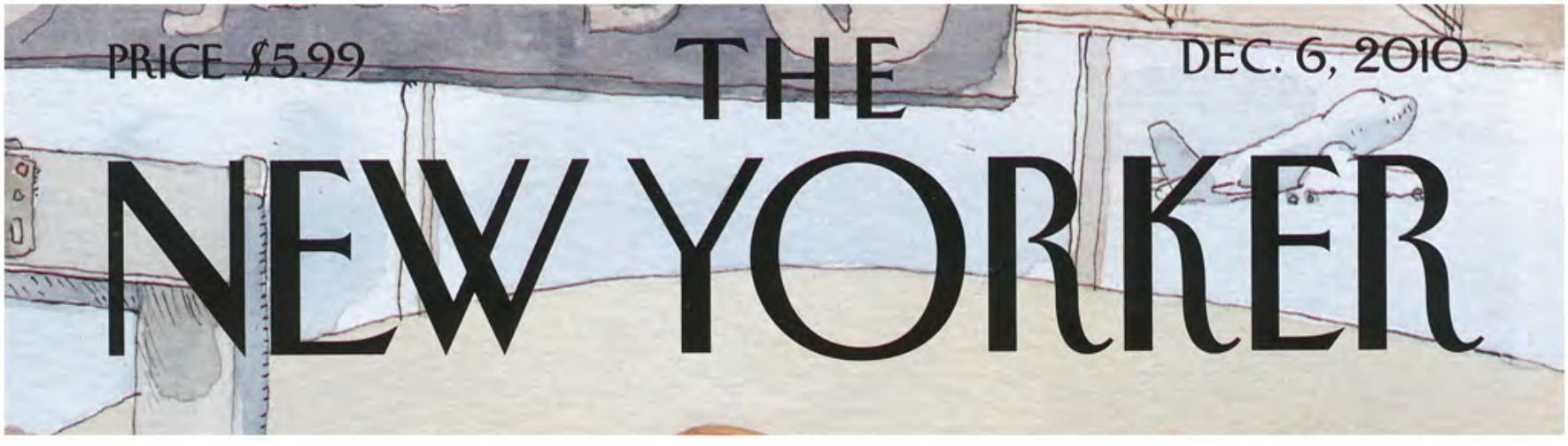
screen, or whether they are projected upon it, literalizing the definition of the screen as both permeable filter and opaque surface. The works are created using natural light, and so their realization is entirely dependent upon the position and movement of the sun. *Screen Shadows* offers the revelation of an event that would otherwise be entirely concealed from view, because it is the reflection captured in these works that is the only evidence that this particular convergence of light, pattern, and object ever transpired.

Interview

WILD FLOWERS



For an artist who takes such pleasure in fleeting configurations, it's surprising that Miranda Lichtenstein has chosen photography for her medium. In the past, she has focused her lens on flowers, dancers, and trees, but has managed to altogether unbalance and spatially unnerve our sense of them. In her latest show, which opens at the Elizabeth Dee gallery this month, Lichtenstein's investigations become even more unhinged—geometric screens drift through botanic silhouettes until foreground and background, the object and its constituent parts, blur toward a kind of sublime abstraction. Lichtenstein is arguably one of the most underappreciated talents on the photography landscape today, which is ironic since she's doing some really dangerous things with that landscape's rosebushes. More info at *elizabethdeegallery.com*



GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

Lichtenstein's photographs would not be out of place in MOMA's current "New Photography" roundup; like much of the work there, it's brainy, polished, self-conscious, and deliberately opaque. But it's also intriguingly layered and beautiful in a style that recalls Liz Deschenes, Walead Beshty, and Eileen Quinlan, other shrewd and seductive artists. Lichtenstein explores several strategies here, all of which involve obscuring or refracting the image: flowers almost dissolve behind colorful moiré or checkerboard patterns; the heads of singing women hover on the edge of perception in white-on-white images. And, in an 1896 film that Lichtenstein splashed with color and projects on curtains, the dancer Loie Fuller radiates free love in a rain of psychedelic light-show effects. Through Dec. 18. (Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

DEPARTURES
NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2008

CULTUREWATCH

THE STATE OF THE ARTS AROUND THE WORLD | Edited by Stephen Wallis


Alejandra Laviada


Anne Hardy


Miranda Lichtenstein


Carter Mull

Muzi Quawson


Rinko Kawauchi


Dan Torop

Faces of Photography Now: Eight Under 40


Julian Faulhaber

A new generation of talent is pushing forward by looking back. **BY BARBARA POLLACK**

In the nineties photography suddenly became the contemporary art world's favorite medium, boosted by Andreas Gursky's panoramic images of commerce and culture and the cinematic inventions of Gregory Crewdson and Jeff Wall. It was the start of the digital age, and artists were pushing photography's technical and conceptual boundaries with work that was ambitious, expensive, and often billboard-size. Smitten collectors began paying sums once reserved for paintings (hundreds of thousands of dollars for the biggest names), spawning predictable hordes of aspiring Gurskys.

But in the past few years a new generation of photo artists has emerged with a different approach. Rejecting the glamour and glitz of their predecessors, they are working in ways closer to photography's beginnings, eschewing Photoshop and digital chicanery and, in some cases at least, scaling down. It's impossible to put a single label on this new breed of work. Many of the images are documentary, some even faux amateur, but they tend to be personal and intimate and celebrate the photographic process rather than mask it, as so much slick digital work does.

CONTINUED »

"Younger artists specializing in photography are moving toward more personal values," says New York dealer Yossi Milo. "And collectors are definitely responding to work that seems truly meaningful to the artist."

The eight international artists presented here, all under 40, are creating smart, complex, textured images that are altering what is considered "cutting edge" in photography. Their work mostly sells in the neighborhood of $10,000 instead of tens of thousands. Some of the artists are already well known, others are just emerging, but all are names to know now.

Miranda Lichtenstein

Eclectic and confounding, Miranda Lichtenstein, 38, is an artist without a signature style. She frequently adopts new approaches and subjects that push the limits of her photography. After a 2002 residency at Monet's estates in Giverny, France, she created a series of images of his famous garden, shot at night in very low light with foliage glowing against deep, dusky backgrounds. For her 2004–05 series "The Searchers," she created life-size environmental portraits of psychics, mediums, and others in trancelike states. Some of her newest works use appropriated images of female modern dancers, enlarged and with the blacks and whites reversed, creating a ghostly negative effect.

"Miranda Lichtenstein's deep knowledge of photography allows her to experiment with a range of possibilities," says Anne Ellegood, a curator at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. "The results are both gorgeous and thought-provoking."

The artist lives in New York, where she is represented by the Elizabeth Dee Gallery. For her show last fall, works produced in editions of five were priced from $4,000 to $15,000, depending on size. "Miranda asks questions," says Dee, "about how photography can transcend the realities of the physical world in ways that are poetic and magical."

Miranda Lichtenstein ***Untitled #4,*** **an archival pigment print from 2008**

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

Art Review:
Issue 18 £4.90
'This is my life... I am here and I am now. I am a product of history and of today, but today is a product of yesterday'

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

ELIZABETH DEE, NEW YORK
20 OCTOBER – 24 NOVEMBER

In Joan Lindsay's 1967 novel, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, a party of schoolchildren go on an outing on Valentine's Day, 1900. Three of them suddenly disappear; one returns, but has no memory of what happened to the other two. Originally Lindsay wrote a concluding chapter to the novel that resolved this mystery, but she took it out before publication, and her canny omission made the book a cult hit. It provoked years of hysterical speculation in fans, it inspired a film adaptation and now American artist Miranda Lichtenstein has taken a portion of the film's soundtrack and used it to accompany her first video, which is the linchpin of her involving new show.

Lindsay's novel was understandably irresistible to Lichtenstein, for not only has she long been interested in the paranormal, but one of the girls who disappears in the tale is called Miranda. Yet in her version of it, *Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place* (2007), we don't necessarily meet Miranda; we see only a woman in a long white dress clambering over mossy rocks in a verdant forest. The soundtrack uncorks the excited voices of the children, but they are nowhere to be seen, and while the sound continues without interruption, the action in the film loops, the woman twice falling asleep on a rock and twice disappearing behind a boulder.

Lichtenstein's film doesn't exactly propose a solution to the novel's mystery, but it hints at the shape of one, one which is equal parts formal, technological and chronological: it is as if she believes that the children slipped into a tear in the flow of time between one century and the next, dooming them forever to repeat their adventures around the same rocks. The exhibition has, it is true, many natural evocations of the uncanny: one photo-diptych, *After the Storm* (2006), presents a picture of a felled and knotted tree trunk alongside its red-tinted mirror image, such that the wood seems to double back into an emblem; and there is also a series of Lichtenstein's very covetable *Shadow* photographs, which comprise prints of the painted silhouettes of still-lifes contrasted against a dusky backdrop. However, one is more encouraged to believe that she favours a technological solution by works like *Dream Machine* (2007), a photo-diptych that portrays the artist sitting behind a stroboscope that whirls a blur before her face as it revolves on a turntable; also by the exhibition's most memorable series of pictures, *9 planes, 5 unrealized* (2007), which appropriate a selection of the painted images of aeroplanes which used to entice travellers in those early, innocent days of mass air travel. Today those dreams look kitsch, presenting visions of rocket-fuelled double-decker jets blasting over sublime landscapes reminiscent of Turner. Finally, one must conclude that, for Lichtenstein, transcendence is rather like disappearance – it's all about getting lost in a futuristic dream and never waking up. *Morgan Falconer*

9 planes, 5 unrealized, 2007, 9 archival pigment prints, 152 x 191 cm. Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

ARTFORUM
JANUARY 2008 INTERNATIONAL

Miranda Lichtenstein

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

Miranda Lichtenstein, *Everything Begins and Ends at Exactly the Right Time and Place*, 2007, still from a color video, 9 minutes, 4 seconds.

While several of the photographs in Miranda Lichtenstein's recent show build on the artist's interest in painterly still life and the frozen moment, a handful break with this pattern to introduce not just a sense of movement but a system of temporal flux. In the photographic diptych *Dream Machine*, 2007, the artist sits behind a stroboscope device that in the first image is still and in the second is blurred by motion. And in another diptych, *Two Trees*, 2007, the image of a tree trunk appears to continue upward from one shot to another hung directly above it, over the gap between frames. Though one's eye wants the two images to cohere, the work's title insists on a stutter. The tree trunk in the diptych's lower half is slender and winding, its delicate, splayed branches dotted with green leaves that catch and filter the yellow light; the upper tree is shot through with stubby, sharp branches that seem to spear the air, draining it of its color. As one reads this difference upward, the three-inch interruption between images becomes a space of radical yet unvoiced transformation: That the photographs are fundamentally different comes as a revelation; the disclosure, however, is so minimal that it is almost missed. Clearly, the doubling points to Lichtenstein's manipulation of perception, but, more significantly, it also underscores the moment of shift.

In the video *Everything Begins and Ends at Exactly the Right Time and Place*, 2007 (the artist's second work in this medium), Lichtenstein extends such pauses and emphasizes the doublings they demarcate in order to evoke the elusiveness of temporal—and thus perceptual—stability. The video was inspired by the 1975 film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the story of three turn-of-the-century schoolgirls who vanish while on an excursion at the titular outcropping. Lichtenstein, who shares her first name with one of the girls, mimics their slow walk through the woods, overlaying her own journey with music and dialogue from the film. As she disappears behind the mysterious rocks, the video loops back to the beginning, though the sound track continues unabated. The gap between photographs in *Two Trees* is here rendered both as the literal space between rocks into which Miranda disappears and as the very act of becoming absent, of a sudden elision in the landscape. The video's title is taken from a line of dialogue in the film spoken by the character Miranda. In *Picnic*, a story with a beginning and an ending (albeit an unresolved one), this statement translates to a kind of fatalism. But Lichtenstein's version, by doubling back on itself with different dialogue, proffers a parallel series of events in which nothing begins and ends at the right time or place.

—*Nicole Rudick*

PRICE $4.50 THE NEW YORKER NOV. 19, 2007

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN
Appropriation gets a sophisticated, personalized twist in Lichtenstein's show. It is bookended by a wall of rephotographed pictures of airplanes and a video pairing the soundtrack from the film "Picnic at Hanging Rock" (the main character is a girl named Miranda) with footage of the artist in a century-old frock picking her way through a mossy landscape. In between are photographs that channel the ghosts of Victorian photography—and perhaps a few ghosts themselves in her self-portraits as a shaman and an apparition behind a stroboscopic dream machine. What the show adds up to is less important than realizing that all images exist as fleeting, flickering fragments. Through Nov. 24. (Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS LEISURE

The New York Times

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2007

Miranda Lichtenstein

Elizabeth Dee
545 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Nov. 24

The best moment in Miranda Lichtenstein's fourth gallery show in New York comes at the beginning of her first foray into video (and repeats at the middle). We see a mossy, shadowy wooded glen, where scale and camera distance are indefinite. They remain so even as a small figure in a white dress begins to climb through the undergrowth. Is she a girl, a woman or a tiny creature out of an English fairy painting? While it lasts, the mystery is spellbinding, like a bedtime story might be to a child.

The video, titled "Everything Begins and Ends at Exactly the Right Time and Place," follows the woman through the woods — twice — to snippets from the soundtrack of "Picnic at Hanging Rock," creating sinister and not-so-sinister versions of the same action. But mostly, the attention is held by Ms. Lichtenstein's camera work and her ability casually to evoke the natural sublime and also play with scale. This has always been one of the strengths of her photographs and it is present in those that, along with less straightforward photo-based works, fill out the show.

Ms. Lichtenstein connects to nature in several photographs of immense, shattered trunks, and also in some transparently fake images of the shadows of unseen plants. But the varied strategies largely summarize those of post-modern photography. (Jack Goldstein, James Welling, Cindy Sherman all come to mind.) It is hard to know if Ms. Lichtenstein wants to prove that she can do anything she wants with a camera, or if she just can't make up her mind. Either way, this is a puzzling show, filled with a sense of talent underused.

ROBERTA SMITH

Reviews

Miranda Lichtenstein, documentation of Sondra Shaye clearing E 4th St

"Strange Powers"

★★★★½

Artists reveal mystic truths. Or do they? Creative Time consults the spirits. By **Andrea K. Scott**

The paranormal is having a mainstream moment: The last Harry Potter book was the fastest-selling novel in history, and ghosts whisper on primetime TV. But when it comes to art, the occult is a tool best suited to subverting the status quo. In the '20s, Surrealists channeled psychic forces in automatic-writing experiments that paved the way for Pollock's once-radical drips. Art objects pulled a vanishing act in the '60s, when they "dematerialized" under the spell of Conceptualism. Figures as apparently unrelated as Barnett Newman and Joseph Beuys turned to mysticism (Kabbalah and shamanism, respectively) for inspiration. Yet even artists who invoke the unseen admit to some uncertainty on the subject. In 1967, Bruce Nauman made a spiral neon sign that reads THE TRUE ARTIST HELPS THE WORLD BY REVEALING MYSTIC TRUTHS. But when an interviewer asked if he believed it, Nauman said, "I don't know; I think we should leave that open."

A similar ambivalence pervades "Strange Powers," an ambitious, if problematic show about the transformative power of art with an emphasis on the occult, curated by Laura Hoptman and Peter Eleey for Creative Time. Installed on the second floor of an East Village tenement building that is rumored to be haunted, the show features 24 artists. Their methods range from inviting a clairvoyant to dictate their actions (Sophie Calle) and videotaping psychic healers (Miranda Lichtenstein and Euan Macdonald) to the classic psychonaut strategy of ingesting hallucinogens (Brion Gysin, and Pawel Althamer and Artur Zmijewski). Using a Ouija board, Christian Cummings makes drawings in collaboration with dead artists (Paul Klee showed up at the opening). San Francisco's Center for Tactical Magic asks viewers to use ESP to help one plant thrive and another wither (the experiment appears to be working). And Douglas Gordon mailed the curators a letter bearing the words DO SOMETHING EVIL; but when Creative Time tried to hire someone to cast the words as a spell, no Wiccan, pagan or Satanist in the five boroughs would touch the job with a ten-foot wand, according to a wall label.

The problem isn't that the exhibition fails to prove its premise, but rather that the premise itself seems torn between the promise of empirical evidence and the (far more compelling) investigation of the metaphoric implications of magic. As Hoptman suggests in a short, lucid essay in the handsome pocket-sized catalog, artists' use of enchantment—the admission of powers beyond reason or human control—can be seen as an antidote to the market-oriented solipsism of much recent art (what she dismisses as "glue and glitter souvenirs of privileged adolescence"). But a second, more significant problem emerges: For a show that aims to reclaim the art of fetishes and ritual, many of the works on view are less than visually engaging.

Notably, the most powerful piece in the show relies on sensory deprivation for its considerable impact. *The Ghost of James Lee Byars,* which Byars (who died in Cairo in 1997) conceived in 1969, is nothing but a dark room, separated from the main space by two sets of blackout curtains. But it is a very big nothing: Once inside, a kind of ecstatic terror sets in that leads to a sense of the infinite. Byars had a lifelong obsession with Zen, and *The Ghost* is an eloquent expression of the koan "form is emptiness and emptiness is form."

The most powerful piece in the show relies on sensory deprivation.

There are works here that deliver more conventional formal pleasures. Peter Coffin's wall drawing of intersecting circles rendered in rainbow-colored pencil conjures a hybrid of tantric meditation and Sol LeWitt. Taken at face value, Anne Collier's small-scale photographs of her friends' auras, shot at a Bay Area psychic shop, testify to artist's "strange powers"—John Baldessari glows blue and Thomas Hirschhorn beams yellow. But like Nauman's neon, Collier's project may also be a sly comment on grandiose expectations and magical thinking, a balancing act of faith and skepticism.

"Strange Powers" raises some interesting questions, but the fact remains: Artists don't need Ouija boards to summon the unseen forces that compel them to make art. As Picasso once put it, "Painting is stronger than I am. It makes me do what it wants."

Creative Time's "Strange Powers" is on view through September 17. See Lower East Side.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY CREATIVE TIME AND ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

Los Angeles Times
CALENDAR

Tuesday, February 14, 2006

Photographer Miranda Lichtenstein contemplates the natural world in stark, not muted, form.

By Holly Myers
Special to The Times

In this era of the monster C-print, with photography dominated by landscapes, portraits and cinematic tableaux, the small, basically traditional Polaroid still-lifes in Miranda Lichtenstein's modest exhibition at the UCLA Hammer Museum are an illuminating novelty.

The sweeping scale of contemporary photography can be thrilling, and Lichtenstein is no stranger to the oversized print. In narrowing the scope to a small space and a few familiar elements, however, an exercise like this zeros in on photography's first and most profound function — the basic act of looking — and reminds one of the sheer pleasure this can entail.

Each of the 48 Polaroids on display involves some combination of plant life, produce and rustic domestic objects, such as ceramic vases and bowls, all photographed at close range in a tight, seemingly airless frame. A few of the prints are a crisp black and white, with the objects (usually the dry and brittle stalks of dead plants) set against a glowing white window curtain. The rest have a rich, moody palette, often involving unnaturally tinted light. Most are dramatically saturated with shadow.

Photographs by Miranda Lichtenstein

IMPERFECTION: *Miranda Lichtenstein's Polaroid of fruit includes dry leaves and eerie shadows.*

STILL-LIFE: *A cauliflower takes on a magical look.*

FANTASY: *Shadows don't always match up to the flowers.*

'Miranda Lichtenstein'

Where: UCLA Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles

When: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays; 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursdays; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sundays. Closed Mondays

Ends: April 30

Price: $3 to $5

Contact: (310) 443-7000; *www.hammer.ucla.edu*

Although lush, the works aren't especially precious. Lichtenstein could make a fine greeting card if she wanted to, and one senses there's a part of her that wants to: to soften the lenses a little, weed out a few of the rattier blossoms and play up the bucolic sentiment. CalArts grad that she is, however, she cultivates an edge. The flowers are crooked, often rather scrawny and sometimes half dead. Jagged shadows loom on the flat screens behind them, emphasizing the shallow, artificial quality of the space, and the focus is sharp throughout, leaving all the images feeling a little thin.

In his essay for the brochure that accompanies the exhibition, Malik Gaines makes much of Lichtenstein's self-conscious relationship to painting, interpreting the work's interplay of objectivity and moodiness as an example of her bringing "photography to painting's edge." This dialogue, however, is hardly unique to Lichtenstein. It has been going on for 150 years, with photographers regularly adopting the subjective stance of painting, and painters emulating the naturalism of photography. Nor is it the most interesting aspect of her work.

There's no doubt that Lichtenstein is looking to art history, drawing on the works of the 17th and 18th century Dutch painters who institutionalized still-life as a genre, on the 18th century French painter Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, on Cézanne and Manet. Equally present, however, are the influences of photographers such as Karl Blossfeldt, Baron Adolf de Meyer, Imogen Cunningham and Edward Steichen. It's the integrity and intelligence of Lichtenstein's engagement with the genre, however — which means her engagement with the history of both media as well as with the objects — that really distinguish the work.

Among the most appealing characteristics of Lichtenstein's past work has been a flirtation with the fantastical. Like Julia Margaret Cameron and her ilk in the late 19th century, Lichtenstein gravitates to that delicate line between the natural, observable world and the world of the imagination.

Past exhibitions at Mary Goldman Gallery (and its former incarnation, Goldman Tevis) have included photographs of naturalistic dioramas evoking legends of feral children and actual landscapes (a mountaintop shrine in northern Thailand, for instance) rendered dream-like by misty atmospherics. A show there now, running concurrently with the Hammer show, features Lichtenstein's portraits of individuals situated on that line, approaching the edge of — or at least courting — higher states of consciousness: a woman floating in an isolation tank, another on a Pilates machine, a man in a soundproof chamber of the sort that supposedly inspired John Cage to create his silent score "4:33."

In the best of Lichtenstein's works, these two worlds — the real and the imaginary, the objective and subjective — begin to mesh. One has the sense of looking at something real through the lens of imagination.

The works in this exhibition are more literal than those others, insofar as what they depict is unambiguous. But there are touches of the fantastical. The shadows, for instance, don't always match up to the flowers from which they have ostensibly been cast. The light is often eerie.

The really fantastical elements, however, are the objects themselves. An apple, a melon, a grapevine, a lily, a hollyhock — most are so familiar that we rarely look at them closely. In this context, however, isolated from the visual clutter of the everyday world, they take on a wondrous character. The magic of the work lies, then, in the conventions of the genre as much as in Lichtenstein's seductive presentation: in the opportunity it affords simply to look, to contemplate the physical aspect of the world in its most basic forms. It is Lichtenstein's un-ironic embrace of the genre, her skillful participation in this worthy if not necessarily sexy tradition, that is the work's real strength.

ARTFORUM

Miranda Lichtenstein

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY
545 West 20th Street
April 30–May 28

Miranda Lichtenstein's new photographs portray young, educated, contemporary Westerners' quest for enlightenment and healing outside traditional avenues (like organized religion). Each photo represents a potential path: meditation, shamanism, sensory-deprivation, yoga/pilates, and so on. Interestingly, the pictures are so stylistically various that it's as if a different photographer had taken each one. In the same way earlier generations ushered in large-scale color prints and unprecedented intimacy, Lichtenstein, along with peers like Roe Ethridge, is bent on breaking the current model and turning away from serial photography, from groups of work easily recognizable as a "whole" (like Hiroshi Sugimoto's new photographs on view two blocks up at Sonnabend). What's sacrificed is the lulling comfort of moving from one photo to the next and knowing, on a formal level, what to expect. But the lacunae between photographs fit the subject—and the moment. Pluralism is integrated directly into the work: One photographer exercises many options and still holds it all together.

—Martha Schwendener

Shaman, 2005.

ARTFORUM
SEPTEMBER 2005 INTERNATIONAL

Miranda Lichtenstein, *Untitled*, 2005, color photograph, 10½ x 13⅜".

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

From Siddhartha to John the Baptist, every culture has its spiritual seekers. In her new color photograph *The Wave*, 2005, Miranda Lichtenstein shows us ours: A well-groomed, thirtysomething white man, seated in a tastefully minimal office, the room's sole adornment a Hokusai-esque print of a crashing wave by Robert Longo. Gently diffused by white aluminum blinds, light floods through the windows, evenly illuminating the clean lines of a blond wood desk, the sleek contours of an iMac, and the man himself, his eyes closed in meditation. On the desk lies a wristwatch, a reminder both of the deadline-driven world of work that he has momentarily abandoned and of the rationalizing transformation of a religious practice into means of enhanced productivity encouraged by "enlightened" employers.

In its succinct imbrication of spiritual yearning, late-capitalist work ethic, and new-age lifestyle, *The Wave* serves as something of a key to Lichtenstein's latest series, "The Searchers" (2004–). Each of the nine photographs in this show (there are ten in the series so far) features a solitary individual engrossed in the pursuit of an altered, presumably higher state of consciousness. In *Ganzfeld*, 2005, a man adept at the sensory deprivation technique known as the Ganzfeld procedure reclines on a leather divan, hands crossed over his chest, eyes covered with halved Ping-Pong balls, while an overhead lamp bathes him in glowing red light. *Floater*, 2004, shows a woman in an isolation tank, her countenance eerily reflected in its bright aqua depths. Although impassive, her face appears strained; she is clearly working hard to achieve relaxation. In addition to isolation, weightlessness emerges as a dominant feature of Lichtenstein's vision of twenty-first-century spirituality–*cum*–self-improvement, as, for example, in the apparently gravity-defying pose of a woman clad in a velour top and fishnet stockings, whose upended legs are hooked into the stirrups of a pilates machine located just out of the frame in *If you bring forth . . .*, 2004.

Perhaps the most powerful work in this regard, *Untitled*, 2005, features the artist herself, posed in the manner of the suicided members of the Christian UFO cult Heaven's Gate, whose thirty-nine bodies were found in a rented California mansion, neatly covered with purple blankets and wearing identical, brand-new Nike sneakers. Dressed entirely in black and set against a black backdrop, Lichtenstein appears to levitate, a pale hand dangling limply at her side. In contrast, the blanket—its every fold and crease captured with crystalline intensity via strobe lighting and a large-format camera—seems to throb with life. A vivid rendering of the release from the "physical container" sought by Heaven's Gate members in their attempt to attain "an evolutionary level above human," Lichtenstein's photograph is both highly evocative and unsettlingly ambiguous. Nothing in it indicates an obvious stance toward the group's morbid desire, or the association of commodity culture and religious cult implicit in their choice of footwear. Indeed, the image's coupling of disembodiment and sensuous immediacy is disconcertingly seductive. Here, one confronts the underlying problem in Lichtenstein's own quest evident in the series's studied neutrality towards its subjects, but perhaps even more so in its combination of visual elegance and slick production values: the fine line it walks between critical mimicry and unreflexive affirmation.

—Margaret Sundell

Time Out New York

Miranda Lichtenstein

Elizabeth Dee Gallery, through Sat 28 (see Chelsea).

In a photograph of an office flooded with white light, a man meditates. There's an iMac on the desk in front of him and a Robert Longo image of a crashing wave on the wall behind. Like Miranda Lichtenstein's other new works at Elizabeth Dee, *The Wave* (2005) explores—and pokes fun at—the ways people in 21st-century America search for spiritual transcendence.

Notably, in Lichtenstein's pictures this journey is always taken in isolation. In *Anechoic Chamber* (2004), a man lies on his back in (according to a gallery statement) an echo-free room that allows him to hear the sounds of his own nervous system. (John Cage composed his famous silent score, *4'33"*, in 1952 after a similar experience.)In *Floater* (2004), an otherwise serenely minimal study of blue water and white tub, a woman's profile is eerily reflected in an isolation tank. Even the man exhaling cigarette smoke onto a smoldering smudge stick in *Shaman* (2005) is oblivious to the apparently drunken woman seated next to him, her hands folded in prayer.

Miranda Lichtenstein, Floater, 2004.

In the smallest photograph here, a figure seems to levitate in space. Because the supine body is covered in a gray blanket, it also looks like it is on the way to the morgue; the swoosh of a visible Nike sneaker invokes the Heaven's Gate mass suicide. In the show's only landscape, *Council Ring* (2004), Lichtenstein casts an otherworldly light on a 19th-century stone bench installed in a suburban park—it looks ready to be beamed up into outer space. *—Bridget L. Goodbody*

V MAGAZINE 32
WINTER
2004/05

GARDENING AT NIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHER MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN SHOOTS NATURE IN A DARKER LIGHT

I spent the summer of 2002 on a residency in Monet's garden in Giverny, France. It was there that I began to think about the garden as a giant tableau. Monet designed his garden at Giverny to function this way—a virtual still life assembled in the outdoors. Nature was curated to excise decay, down to the soiled lily petals Monet had cleaned before he would paint them. I wanted to highlight this staging of the natural by focusing on the traces of labor that were not visible to the hundreds of tourists who cruised the grounds each day. This was coupled with a pictorial effect of flattened space, rendering an artificial and at times abstract quality to the image. Since that time, I have photographed the facsimile of Monet's garden in Japan and a European garden carved out in the middle of a rain forest in northern Thailand.

In this photograph, I am on the grounds of a garden I have been returning to since I was a teenager. My camera is turned away from the organized structure of the inner garden and focused on the coils of extension cords mingling in the frame with the wilting tiger lilies. It is a picture of my own staging—the production of a photograph in production. **Miranda Lichtenstein**

Time Out New York

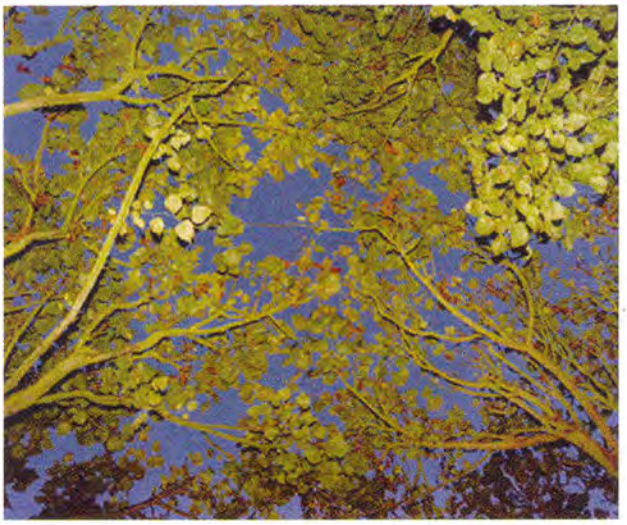
The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment
October 30–November 6, 2003 Issue No. 422 $2.99

Special Halloween Issue

Costume parties, haunted houses and other spooky fun

Goth: The look that just won't die!

Anne Rice on the Hot Seat



Miranda Lichtenstein, *Afternoon*, 2003.

Miranda Lichtenstein

Elizabeth Dee Gallery, through Nov 8 (see Chelsea).

There's a coda to Miranda Lichtenstein's exquisite show of photographs, taken at Monet's garden at Giverny in the summer of 2002. It's a picture installed in Elizabeth Dee's office of a spindly tree rising from the center of a cluster of red and yellow flowers. The absurdly symmetrical scene, simultaneously stark and lush, was shot at a facsimile of Monet's grounds that Lichtenstein tracked down in Japan, and it cuts to the core of her project. Just as the Japanese garden is a horticultural *tableau vivant,* Lichtenstein sees Giverny itself as "a staged Eden that Monet created in order to paint from a living still life."

The phrase *still life* may refer to a genre of painting, but it's also an apt description of photography, which stills life to a single, frozen moment. It's an inherently dramatic process, one that Lichtenstein heightens masterfully with lighting. All the works on view combine available light at dusk or dawn with artificial illumination, lending the images a radiance straight out of Vermeer.

Don't look for water lilies. Lichtenstein is more interested in revealing the mechanics of the garden—cold frames, ladders, fences—than in reveling in a tourist attraction. In one striking picture, a coil of yellow garden hose takes on the seductive menace of a serpent in paradise. There is one shot of the famous Japanese Bridge, but it's shrouded in shadow, barely visible in the background. The image is remarkable less for the landmark it depicts than for the glassy stillness of the water, which lends it the uncanny look of a diorama.—*Andrea Scott*

LOS ANGELES TIMES FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2003

AROUND THE GALLERIES

By HOLLY MYERS
Special to The Times

Capturing the wonder of a place

Miranda Lichtenstein photographs spaces with an eye to capturing what cannot be seen — those shades of impression, like apprehension, delight, awe, comfort and fear, that evade the senses yet color our experience. Her subject in a new body of work at Mary Goldman Gallery — a shrine garden atop a mountain in northern Thailand — is more geographically specific than much of her past work. It draws her toward more traditional landscape photography.

By focusing less on the land itself, however, than on the pale green mist that envelopes it, Lichtenstein cultivates a stirring, almost tactile sense of wonder. Of the seven photographs on display, four depict the garden from a distance, presenting the strange intermingling of form and mist with an artistic reverence. Three draw viewers into the embrace of the trees. All are gentle but exquisite images.

Mary Goldman Gallery, 932 Chung King Road, Chinatown, (213) 617-8217, through Nov. 22. Closed Sundays through Tuesdays.

The New York Sun

RK CITY THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2003 ★★★

By ALEX MAR

Photographer Miranda Lichtenstein lived at Monet's former Giverny home as part of a residency during the summer of 2002, exactly 75 years after the death of Claude Monet and 25 after Gérald Van Der Kemp undertook the decade-long task of recreating the grounds as they were during his life. She became fascinated with the behind-the-scenes labor necessary to sustain the intensely romanticized scenery. The resultant series, "Landmark" (2002–03), is on view at Elizabeth Dee Gallery.

Miranda Lichtenstein's use of artificial lighting embellishes the colors of the plant life with a ghostly breath.

To complicate things, Ms. Lichtenstein also photographed a re-creation of the Giverny garden constructed in the village of Kitagawa in Nahari in southern Japan. (An appropriate place, when you recall the aesthetic influence of Japanese prints on the Impressionists.) The viewer is given no indication as to which shots were taken where. Is this the site of Monet's inspiration? Or are we in Asia?

In "Coil" (2002), a pale yellow rubber hose sits in a clearing near a drain and two lopsided concrete paving stones. In the background you can see the tall, lush, green hedges on either side of the grassy path tourists are meant to travel along. At the edges of the photo, the viewer can make out the stubs of hundreds of small tree branches, crudely cut away for a gardener's station. "Japanese Bridge" (2002) is composed in the same way: in the foreground, a set of shoddy boats loaded with dirty white plastic buckets; in the background, weeping trees and a slim footbridge.

The artist's use of artificial lighting — her only concession to the romantic — embellishes the colors of the plant life with a ghostly breath. And Ms. Lichtenstein's work is as much about her palette as her concepts. In "Afternoon" (2002), a cross section of pale green, almost yellowed branches intertwine, their leaves waxy in the strange half-dusk.

Ms. Lichtenstein's series intends to call into question the authenticity of our experiences in Giverny and other fetishized "natural" sites. But wasn't Monet himself creating something artificial, keeping his grounds pristine and in line with his aesthetic?

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

Miranda Lichtenstein, 'Coil' (2002).

PRICE $3.95

THE NEW YORKER

OCT. 27, 2003

PHOTOGRAPHY

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

The gardens at Claude Monet's home in Giverny need no description, and one would think that they need not be another artist's muse. That said, Lichtenstein's new work, entitled "Landmark," is neither derivative nor ironic. Unlike earlier camera-carrying visitors (most notably Stephen Shore, and many people from Japan), she photographs the garden—and its double, in southern Japan—at dusk and dawn, and often takes advantage of flash and ambient light. The act of returning light to this Impressionist heartland is a fine idea, and unusually successful. Through Nov. 8. (Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

tema celeste
contemporary art
November - December 2001

Miranda Lichtenstein

Goldman Tevis, Los Angeles

As a photographer who uses a conceptual framework to treat romantic subjects, Miranda Lichtenstein illuminates a contemporary paradox. In her "Wild Child" series, Lichtenstein climbs the high mountain of aesthetic abandon, but she does it with the tools of rational analysis, ultimately insisting that this enchanting peak, boundless as it may appear at first glance, is nothing more than the product of a culturally conditioned gaze, artificial through and through.

In her Los Angeles show, which ran concurrently with her exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Phillip Morris in New York, Lichtenstein further elaborates her earlier appropriations of wild child legends, those fictive accounts of human children raised by feral beasts. The exhibition presents an animated menagerie in a series of color photographs: nesting geese squawking at an unseen menace, an angry wolf snarling at a sprig of holly, a prancing shadow of a horse. At first glance, these works seem to closely follow Lichtenstein's previous explorations of dark and eerie natural settings, but upon closer inspection the animal subjects reveal themselves as fakes. The feathers are a bit too perfect, the sky is too consistent, the proportions are all askew. A ten-foot vinyl tarp obstructing the doorway of the gallery has been screen-printed with a giant collage of running hens, a steadfast ram, a maternally indignant bear, an agile gazelle, and other creatures drawn from the wild child mythologies of multiple cultures. The collage looks like something a child might make to plot her own social system, yet its sheer scale and presence bestow an iconic authority upon the dubious narrative. As is clear in the example of Romulus and Remus, who were said to have founded Rome after a childhood of suckling a she-wolf, we humans often claim ultranatural origins for our most contrived structures. Lichtenstein delves into the dynamics of this impulse to bury the conceptual within the earthy—a valiant but ultimately impossible attempt to represent body as dominant over mind. The symbiotic relationship of fantasy and history, of natural bounty and manufactured product, suggests that we who consider ourselves civilized have gone too far to return to the succor of our fierce mother, the animal.

Malik Gaines

MALAYSIA

CYBERJAYA

Since its inauguration in 1999, Cyberjaya, which rests in the heart of Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor, has billed itself as the first fully networked "intelligent garden city". But in reality it's more like a fantastical mammoth idea that just can't seem to get on its feet. Imagine Silicon Valley's low-slung office parks perched atop rolling landscaped terraces and winding paths flanked by gazebos and man-made fountains and you have some idea of the horticultural wonderland promised by Cyberjaya's website, aptly named, The Nucleus. While similarly utopian planned communities like Celebration and Brasilia embrace a gentle nostalgia for Rockwellian innocence or retro-Modern rationality, Cyberjaya is aggressively middle-future, with an excessive number of blinking kiosks and universal "smart" credit cards.

The city hopes to collapse communication breakdowns by connecting each of its citizens from their homes, laptops, and via those "smart" credit cards. In other words, it would like to make total transparency its hallmark. Basically, Cyberjaya is a giant pan-optical commons where email suggestions to the website's "Command Center" are encouraged as much as spending one's "virtual redemption points" at the many bricks-and-mortar boutiques. Never before has a resort mindset — kayaking, fishing, rollerblading, and midnight strolls — been packaged in such technocratic rhetoric. But a nascent city needs more than clever marketing.

Although the name "Jaya", in Malay, means "success", the photographer Miranda Lichtenstein, who's twice photographed the $5.3 billion site, is more skeptical. What she encountered there was "the shell of a future city: the concrete base for the bullet train to Kuala Lumpur, an over designed garden at the foot of an incomplete bridge, a well-lit but empty apartment complex." There has recently been some forward movement; a single mini-mall with a few restaurants, she reports, "and DHL and Shell have arrived in the form of modular glass buildings with deserted parking lots." Still, the utopian dream that is Cyberjaya remains a futuristic work in progress.

DAVID HUNT

Time Out New York

September 6–13, 2001 Issue No. 311 $2.99

Miranda Lichtenstein,
Sanctuary for a Wild Child
Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, through Sept 21
(see Museums).

For her latest installation, Miranda Lichtenstein focuses on the phenomenon known as "wild children"—human beings in both history and legend who were raised in the wild, often by animals. Beginning with Romulus and Remus, and spanning from Tarzan to Donnie in Nickelodeon's *The Wild Thornberrys*, the idea of these children has always fascinated and troubled people who wonder how human psychology develops without the guidance or strictures of civilization. Lichtenstein explores how these kids might construct their unique realities, and how we in turn might construct our ideas of them.

Lichtenstein darkens the gallery and projects a series of elegant photographic images (here on DVD) that present the children's inner lives against one wall. *Lost Beyond Telling* and *The Color of Distance* evoke home-sweet-homes out in nature, secure enclaves that are bound by twigs and sticks. Similarly, *Elsewhere* depicts a tree supporting four bird's nests, which could be, in effect, a dreamy memory of a wild child's hometown. In *Legend*, an eerie shadow of a gazelle—one wild child's conception of mother—resembles a cave-dweller's hallucination. Like James Casebere and Gregory Crewdson before her, Lichtenstein actually constructs these scenes as small dioramas in her studio, so that the photographs are deftly poised on a double-edged sword of constructed consciousness. While wonderfully able to conjure the mysterious imprints of experience on a wild child's mind, their very artificiality pulls the rug out from under any idea of a wild child's supposed "natural state."

Lichtenstein also hangs drawings in a smaller, round, well-lit space that she has built within the gallery. Recalling a number of actual wild children, these read like exercises in Critical Theory 101, as they refer to typology and classification. A drawing representing the Karpfen bear-girl, for example, shows the name of the child paired with an illustration of a diapered infant. The interplay between exotic subject and everyday image suggests that the line between nature and civilized life is a fine one. But the strategy feels academic when compared to the evocative images that appear in the darkness outside.—*Robert Mahoney*

Miranda Lichtenstein, *There are no words to describe it*, 2001.

Miranda Lichtenstein, "Lover's Lane." Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York.

Only ten prints comprised this, Miranda Lichtenstein's second New York solo show, yet together they seemed to tell a story (albeit an open-ended one). For whatever narrative or meaning viewers ascribe to these scenes, they are based as much upon what Lichtenstein chooses to leave out as upon what she depicts. Lichtenstein photographs only at night, using the headlights (or, at times, the brake lights) of her car as the sole source of illumination, imbuing the work with either bold, simple contrasts or a murky, twilit air. Her pretty mundane subject matter (underbrush, a fallen fence, dead leaves on a field) gets a certain juice from her nocturnal, scene-of-the-crime style. In one oddly compelling image, a sliver of pale blue sky opens a narrow crevasse within a dark silhouette of trees; in another, scrappy weeds and a chain-link fence form a tangled jungle, with just a bit of a clearing, or maybe a dirt path, visible in the distance. A statement that accompanied the exhibition informed viewers that Lichtenstein chooses these sites because they're used by suburban teenagers as private spots for romantic trysts, parties, and the like. That's interesting, but not very, given photography's preoccupation of late with all things adolescent.

Better are the images, which stand up, purely formally, as powerful mixtures of natural and ambient light. (Indeed, it's their abstract, enigmatic qualities that tease the imagination.) *Untitled (Bennett's Farm)* (1999) is ostensibly just a suburban lake glimpsed on a dark night, with a few shrubs on the far shore, yet the water has an iridescent, moonlit quality, like flowing strands of glowing hair, and the headlight beam takes on an almost existential presence—a stand-in, if you will, for us. If she snapped that headlight off, would the whole scene disappear into nothingness, as if it were all a weird dream—or would it go on, somehow, without us? Lichtenstein's previous photographic series, entitled *Danbury Road* (1997–98) (shot similarly at night in Danbury, Connecticut), was more successful overall, but in a way, it was more simple. Every image in *Danbury* focused on a specific subject (most often a house or structure) that seemed to emit an almost cinematographically perfect ambient light. Here Lichtenstein's focus is less pinpointed, more vague, yet all these nearly abstract shots of scrub brush and fences also seem more experimental, more risky. If such scenes can convince us that mystery and drama are to be found most anywhere, we have no choice, then, but to follow Lichtenstein down her dark paths.

—Sarah Schmerler

The Ingrao Collection. Galleria Comunale d'Arte di Cagliari, Sardinia, Italy.

An exhibition this winter at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte di Cagliari (the Municipal Art Gallery of Cagliari) showed some 250 works from

THE NEW YORKER

JANUARY 29, 2001

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

For suburban adolescents, the moderately picturesque, dimly lit locations known as lovers' lanes are sites of rites of passage—first kiss, first beer, and then some. Using only her car's headlights, Lichtenstein has made ten large color landscapes of those places, from the empty stands of a high-school football field to the back nine of a golf course. Her images are devoid of people and full of paranoia—it seems as if something might be groping in the shadows, or watching you. Through Feb. 10. (Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 255-8450.)

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THE World FROM L.A.

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by Malik Gaines

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN: *Scenes from Lovers' Lane*

Suddenly, there's a slew of young photographers, all rather photogenic themselves, who use the old magic of the captured image to position themselves along one or another side of realism. These artists are united by material, a tendency to have gone to the same school, and a moment of media attention. The descendants of Sherman, Goldin, and Opie, they constitute a movement du jour.

It is unfortunate for Miranda Lichtenstein that her oneiric landscapes may be mistakenly taken as an offshoot of this new, youth-oriented realism. Lichtenstein (not related to Roy) uses found environments as her subjects, partly lit night scenes of natural overgrowth encroaching upon and overwhelming delicate traces of architecture. These scenes are inhabited by a supernatural potentiality, suggesting the spaces' dark histories and dangerous futures while preserving their elusive presents. Lichtenstein's photographs present realism inasmuch as they represent certain aspects of a found reality. Yet Lichtenstein draws her work into that place realism cannot reach by means of its own steady momentum: the alluring world of fantasy.

Lichtenstein's greatest strength is her ability to manipulate photography's precarious placement between painting and cinema. The conflation of these two forms brings each medium's particular circumstances into mutual play, pointing at once to Casper David Friedrich and Wes Craven, Kant's romanticism and Eisenstein's modernity. All of this is located in the never-ending instant of the photograph, and separating these elements is like untangling ivy. For the sake of investigation, let us, nevertheless, try. Take, for example, *Untitled #6 (Bennett's Farm)* from Lichtenstein's recent show of new photographs at L.A.'s Goldman Tevis Gallery. This seething piece captures a lake surrounded by woods. The water reflects the direct light in such a way that it appears to be painted, like Monet's famous lily ponds. Above the surface, the trees and other growth stand flatly in the light, presenting themselves clearly while alluding to the acres of dark wilderness of which they are only the beginning. In the distance, partially obscured by teeming plant life, stands an old wooden house with a light on. While the photograph maintains its composure as deliberately and beautifully as a well-painted image, hints of dramatic tension are also in place, opening the possibility of the life surrounding this moment.

Questions arise: Where are the house's inhabitants? Are they inside? Perhaps they're sleeping. Perhaps they're haunted by their natural environment. Perhaps they've been murdered in their beds with no one to hear their screams. Or are the murderers lurking in the woods, or just behind us, waiting to strike? There is no one present to hear our cries; there is only the indifference of shrubs, the lake, the dark night. Or, as the series' title, "Lovers' Lane," suggests, perhaps it is not the awesome sense of death which fills the air, but desire, death's distant cousin. Perhaps the rustling we hear in the bushes is not an approaching killer, but instead, two love-struck kids having forbidden sex in their own dark wilderness. All of this is, of course, typical conjecture. It is what Gertrude Stein described as a strange syncopation, the inherent element of dramatic linearity by which an audience is constantly slightly behind or slightly ahead of the unfolding story.

(LEFT TO RIGHT)
Miranda Lichtenstein, *Untitled #4 (Richardson Park)*, 1999, C-print, 30 x 40 in.;
Untitled #24 (Martin Park), 2000, C-print, 30 x 40 in.;
Untitled #6 (Bennett's Farm), 1999, C-print, 30 x 40 in.
Courtesy Goldman Tevis, Los Angeles.

The sense of narrative cinema is especially present in the horror tropes the work dutifully reconfigures. Lichtenstein uses only the light that is present plus her harsh car headlights to set these scenes, much like the careful concealing and revealing that creates the terror in *Nosferatu* or *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, or dare I say, *The Blair Witch Project*. Lichtenstein's choice of remote make-out spots as subjects in the "Lovers' Lane" series heightens her work's relationship to the horror genre and that genre's priorities of the last two decades: the supernatural terror that surrounds teenagers and their monstrous sexualities. Were I more compelled by psychoanalysis, I'd probably find it to be a comfortable resting place in the work. The myriad clingy vines that tie sex to death find fertile ground in the fields of the unconscious. There is, as always, a political element involved: the sex/death continuum tends to move from the dark recesses of the mind into the harsh light of "modern" American culture, weaving together everything from the atomic bikini to the AIDS epidemic. It is no coincidence that Hollywood has pumped new blood into the sexy horror flicks of the AIDS era, a conservative move that ultimately, through metaphor, reaffirms cultural fear. What Lichtenstein does with this sex/death relationship is to cleverly re-articulate a trope that is troubling to begin with. Fortunately, however, that framework does not dominate the work.

Using familiar tropes is a necessity in work that relies in some part on pastiche. As vividly as these pieces recall the specifics of horror cinema, so do they refer to one of that genre's inspirations, Romantic painting. The work of Friedrich comes to mind consistently, as gnarled branches and shards of shadow frame each carefully placed view. As if cueing her observers to consider the work in nineteenth-century terms, each bit of endangered architecture within Lichtenstein's photographs is old-fashioned. *Untitled #24 (Martin Park)* contains a dilapidated wooden fence that may well have been built in the nineteenth century. *Untitled #16 (Cannon)* focuses the gaze on a cannon that is perfectly colonial. Even the more contemporary built objects (a chain-link fence, metal bleachers) are simple and industrial. Yet more than simply representing anachronisms, Lichtenstein's process calls her to actually perform a Romantic role. Friedrich would place an observer in the foreground, his back turned to us as he stands before whatever awesome scene presents itself; here, the photographer occupies precisely this latter role. Lichtenstein selects her sites through daytime interviews and explorations, but treks at night, alone, into the dark woods to take pictures. She becomes the Romantic hero, the individual challenging nature for the sake of transcendence, for the opportunity to reckon with the grand, unknowable sublime.

Yet if Lichtenstein were merely trying to reproduce nineteenth-century universality, the work would constitute a hopeless waste of film. She is successful because she applies her own shades of awe over what, in a different light, might constitute a view of realism. She invents her own subjective sublime by filtering her material through disjunctive art traditions, arriving finally at a familiar, if still elusive, fantasy. As for the other young photographers of the day, Lichtenstein hasn't necessarily gone out on a limb. Justine Kurland's photographs of Caucasian girls in the forest also refer to Romanticism through the quotation of old paintings (though they don't do much else). Malerie Marder's dramatic photos are tense, entertaining fragments of filmic language. Deborah Mesa-Pelly expertly inserts the magical into the mundane with her photos of mossy caverns beneath the floorboards of her bedroom. Jin Soo Kim builds dreamy formal settings out of the conventions of daily life. Each of these women is using the camera to reconstruct what is real and what is art, ultimately dissolving at least some of the differences. Lichtenstein's expression of this transformation is particularly succinct. Her simple landscapes slip smoothly beyond the frame of the captured image, shrouding themselves in dark webs of culture, creating something that, in my humble judgment at least, is quite beautiful.

Malik Gaines is a performer and writer based in Los Angeles.

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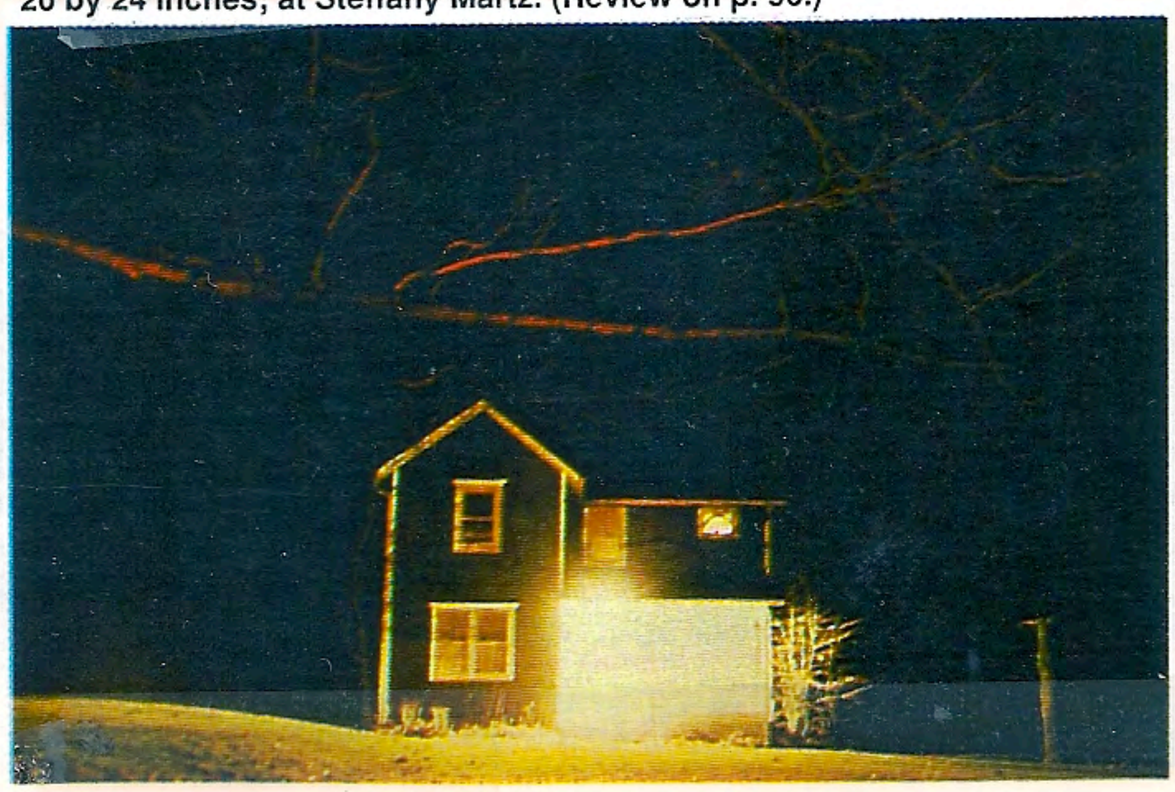
the village VOICE FREE

❖ **MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN:** Lichtenstein's color photos of suburban houses or streets at night are long exposures made with available light, including the headlights and taillights of her car. The effect is often pure haunted house—a big clapboard affair so flooded by lights that its shadows are terrifying—but she's also capable of subtler jolts: a square of yellow light and a few pale tree trunks in the blackness, the orange aura that spreads across an empty yard from a single glowing bulb. They're cool paranoid visions, suggesting not just idle voyeurs but roving psychos. Through 12/19. **Steffany Martz**, 529 W 20th, 206-3686.

Art in America

July 1999

Miranda Lichtenstein: Untitled, 1997-98, C-print, 20 by 24 inches; at Steffany Martz. (Review on p. 96.)



Miranda Lichtenstein at Steffany Martz

Miranda Lichtenstein's New York debut exhibition, "Danbury Road," proffered nocturnal visions of rural Connecticut through nine lurid C-prints from 1997-98. All the images are high-contrast studies that are grounded in modernist formalism in their sense of compositional balance and spatial reductiveness. The colors are otherworldly, evoking infrared photography, digital manipulation or Fauvist vision. Due to the ambient light sources used by the photographer, primary colors dominate. Exacerbated by enlargement, the graininess of the film suggests a humid atmosphere that works well with the nighttime settings.

The roadside foliage of *Untitled (#35)* is bathed by red brake lights that make even the greenest leaves elicit a sense of emergency. The red lights seem to be those of a police car or a paramedic van piercing the country roadway's darkness; this locale could be Pollock's Fireplace Road or the scene of Warhol's *Saturday Disaster*. Rectangles of diffused house-window lights loom in the distance, while a chemical blue sky mixes with the red leaves. *Untitled (#36)* shows a modest house replete with Neo-Classical articulations. In a setting otherwise enveloped in night, the building's walls, pediments and porches are revealed within cones of light emanating from garden spotlights. As if in a suburban variant of Albert Speer's "light architecture" of the 1930s, this exterior illumination makes the structure seem strangely dematerialized.

Lichtenstein's images attain an uncanny power by reminding us that photographic vision is not human vision. Another source of the uncanny is the compositional isolation of the houses that frequently appear in her works. Surrounded by thickets and darkness, these dwellings seem terribly vulnerable to surveillance or to voyeurs. Think *Rear Window* in the backwoods. — *William V. Ganis*

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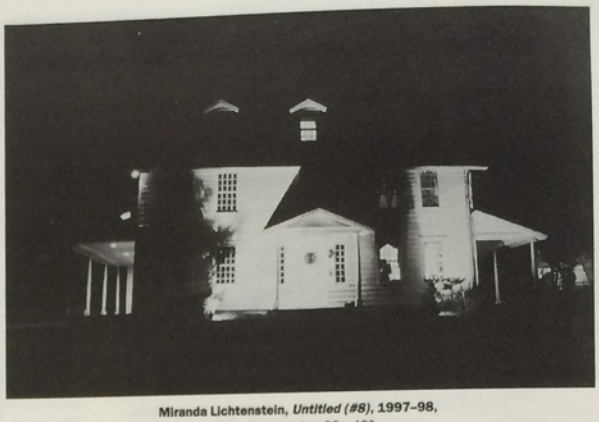
Italy) might be said to subtly update Bay Area figurative painting by removing the figure from its environment. Neri's statues might even be read as altarpieces to the goddess of beauty: Certainly his women—who are always young, fit, shapely, and poised—are ready to be worshiped.

If Neri's subject matter is classical, his process seems timely. His painted sculptures seem to be modeled and carved all at once, and their parts sometimes look like prosthetic devices superior to the originals, as if to signal that beauty is a reconstruction in this age of disbelief. Certain figures look as if they've been fitted together from the remnants of others. One can't help but think of Apelles, who, given the task of making a devotional image of Aphrodite, created an ideal woman out of a composite of different women's body parts. Perhaps there is no single model for Neri's female figure because each is not only the studio product of many observations, but the emotional yield of many experiences. For all their statuesque remoteness, his women have a simmering libidinous quality. Moreover, many are as battered as they are beautiful—their parts knocked about, crudely gesturalized, worked and reworked by the artist's hand. The surface of Neri's nudes has come a long way from the smooth pristine skin of Hiram Powers's *The Greek Slave*, 1843.

Neri is caught on the horns of a dilemma: He wants to give us complete, beautiful female bodies but he has been conditioned to perform, yet again, what psychoanalyst Michael Balint calls the "dissolution of object representation" characteristic of modern art. Dissolution has become de rigueur, even academic, in modernism; wholeness is now revolutionary. Neri is trying to restore a sense of classical unity in a world that has nothing classical about it.

—*Donald Kuspit*

Manuel Neri, *Untitled II*, 1998,
marble, 81⅛ x 25 x 16¼".



Miranda Lichtenstein, *Untitled (#8)*, 1997–98,
Cibachrome print, 30 x 40".

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

STEFFANY MARTZ

When I was eight I would sometimes slip on the Batman suit my mother had made me, steal out into the suburban night, and spy on friends through the windows of their houses. The feeling this gave me was complex: potent detachment from that dull, well-lit life, as well as a longing to be back inside, eating ice cream in the glow of the TV. Looking at Miranda Lichtenstein's "Danbury Road," a series of large-scale night photographs of mostly upscale suburban Connecticut dwellings, reminded me of those Bat forays. Lichtenstein's isolate dream houses elicit an adult version of that same conflicted impression, twisting together the urge to be invited into a home and the desire to violate its sanctity, if only through the cold, potentially predatory gaze of the stranger. It's this outsider's ambivalence, coupled with a formal severity, that prevents Lichtenstein's series from falling into the Suburbs-Are-Actually-Kind-of-Menacing cliché first plumbed by David Lynch in his 1986 *Blue Velvet* and more recently given body in Gregory Crewdson's staged photography.

The finest of Lichtenstein's works (all 1997–98) are suffused with a chilly, almost marmoreal classicism. Part of this restraint is formal and/or conceptual: The artist, treating light as a found object, has used only available illumination. *Untitled (#12)* shows a small, discreetly modern home set against a tree line and lighted by the starry night sky and the porch lights, which primly frame the architecture's austere Bauhaus-ish rectilinearity. Like most of the house lights in the series, these seem to have just come startlingly to life, as if tripped by a motion detector hidden somewhere in the lawn. Lights like this tell us not so much where the house is as where we are—on private property, of course.

If Lichtenstein's attention to the formidable, albeit sepulchral, privacy of these abodes is at times flattering or cowed or nostalgic, in several works she reverses these currents with a simple device: the brake lights of her car occasionally splashing a toasty reddish-orange across the foreground. Suddenly the tight-lipped house in the distance has an air of vulnerability, of being cased. Perhaps it's the ominous blood-warmth of the light, or the implied presence of a car (and hence power) in the viewer's vicinity. In any case, with their rich cinematic-narrative atmosphere—all the more powerful for seeming to define the threshold of a drama—these photographs shift the point of view from supplicant stranger to that of predatory other: burglar, serial killer, extraterrestrial. It's *The Ice Storm* meets *Wolfen* meets *In Cold Blood*. The hint offered by the images lit by taillights of a series-within-a-series infuses the Becheresque Conceptual deadpan of the project with popular cultural life.

Balanced on the edge between familiarity and formalism in this way, Lichtenstein's portrayal of upper-crusty suburbia is kept from tipping over into trite sociological observation, on the one hand, and poker-faced Conceptualism on the other. It's a tightwire act, and Lichtenstein walks it beautifully.

—*Thad Ziolkowski*

FRED OTNES

REECE GALLERIES

Fred Otnes's intricate collage-paintings typically comprise fragments of reproductions of old-master portraits, plans describing ancient temples or Renaissance palaces, handwritten letters and anatomical illustrations, and pages of old books in Latin, Middle German, or English. In this, his fifth New York show (all works 1998), it is clear that the artist seems to share with Joseph Cornell a fascination for metaphysical symbols, including geometrical figures and diagrams, letters of the alphabet, spheres, circles, wheels, and measuring devices. These items are usually arranged in the shape of a fantastical personage (as in *Winged Figure*, *A Little Lady*, and *Man with a Black Heart*), set against a cloudy background painted in brackish, earthy hues that recall the bleak settings of works by Rembrandt or Goya.

The quality of eerie menace in many of these assemblages seems a natural ether for their equally affecting lyrical and nostalgic passages. Especially moving pieces in Otnes's recent show included *The Cage*, in which a small white bird sits atop a flattened birdcage—free—that has been affixed to the canvas; and *Night Fear*, which features a grisly hound cobbled from pieces of a Gray's-style illustration depicting an animal's skeletal and muscular systems.

Aside from a brooding affinity with the paintings of Victor Hugo and the Victorian age generally, the sense of hauntedness that Otnes conjures feels peculiar to our own day. This is due in part to the overall surreal quality of his work, as well as to his willingness to borrow from the styles of many more or less familiar artistic periods, whether it is the Dutch school of landscape evoked by the photo transfers of trees in *Little Kimbal* or the Cubist-portrait style of *Colines*. Otnes's imaginings of phantoms, angels, and other apparitions also seem to bear an oblique relation to today's fixation with the paranormal.