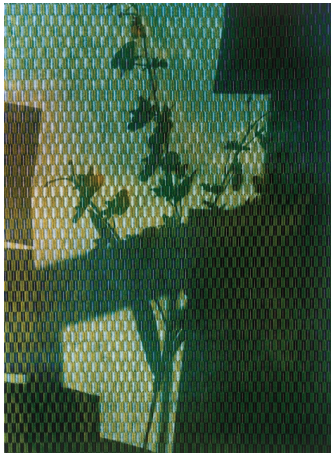


MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

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.