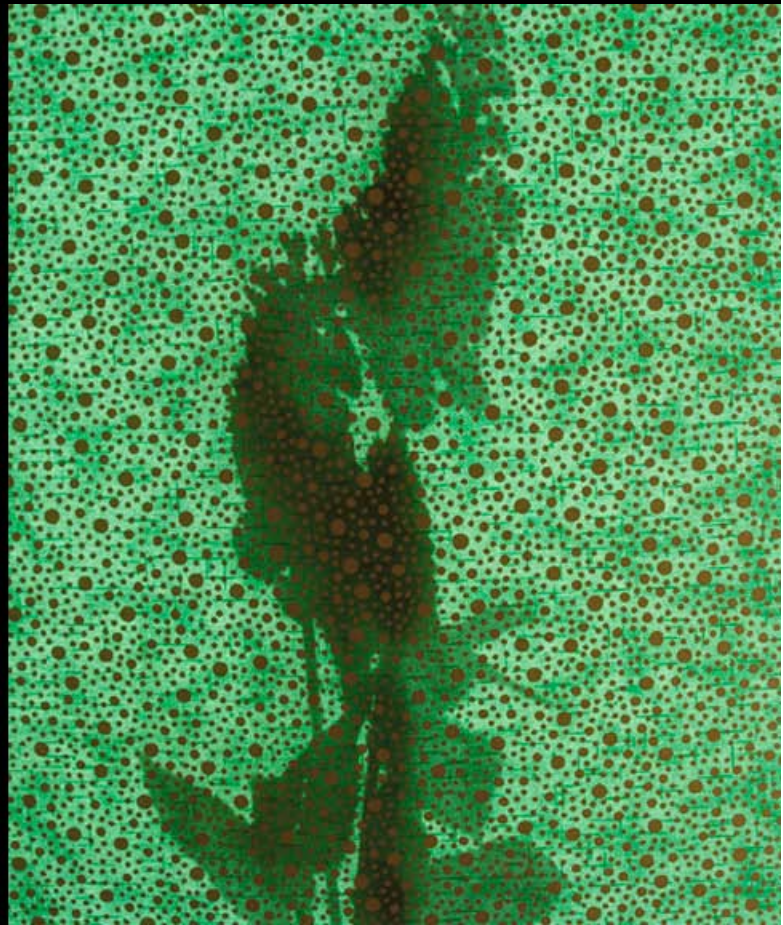


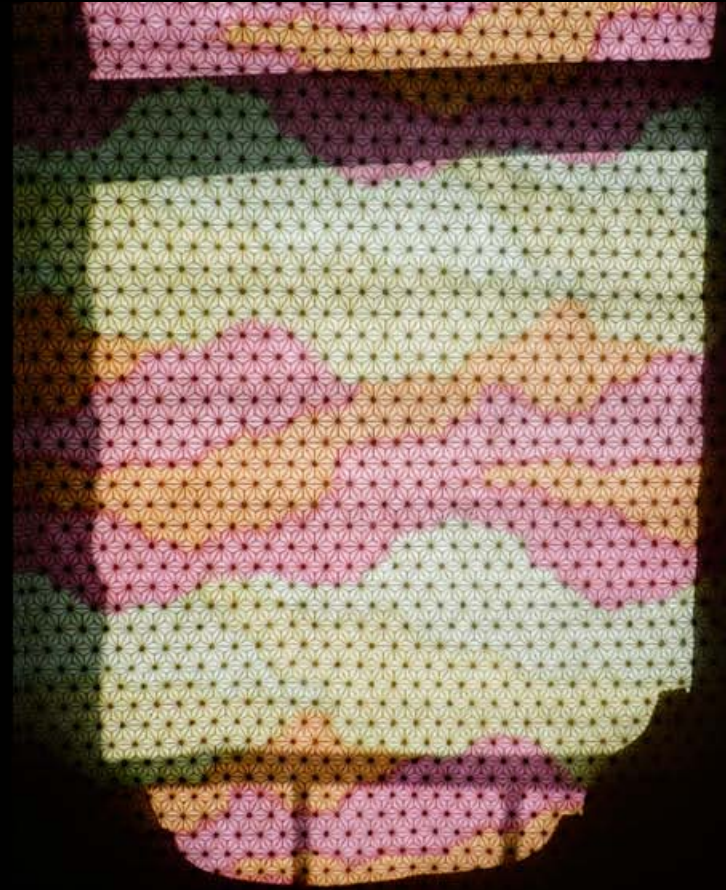
**AMERICA**  
**PART FOURTEEN**  
**MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN**  
**BY DANA OSPINA**  
**PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF**  
**ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY**

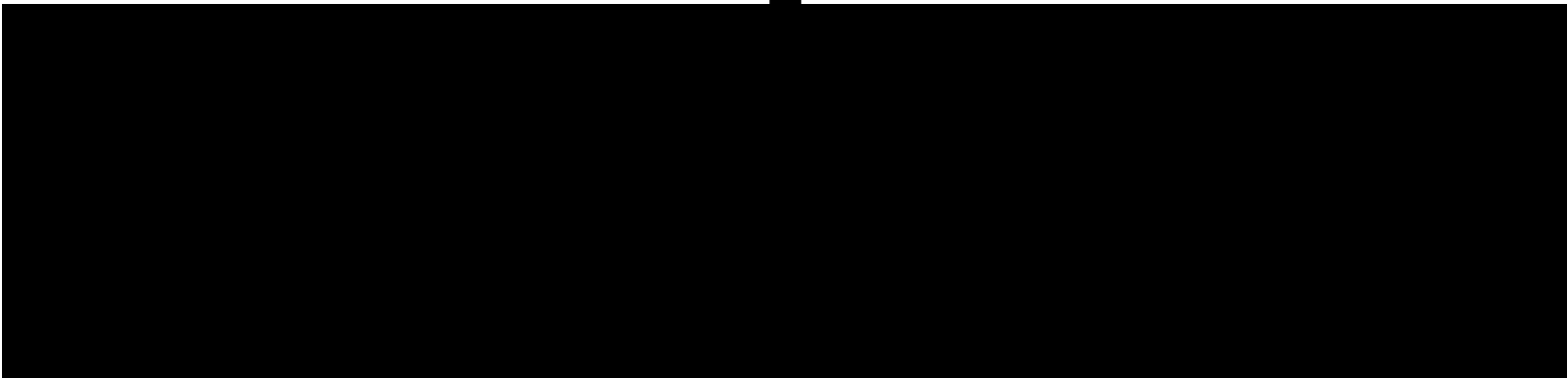
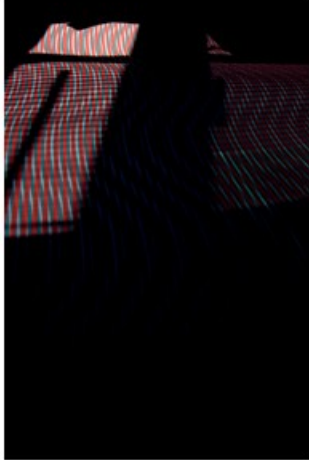
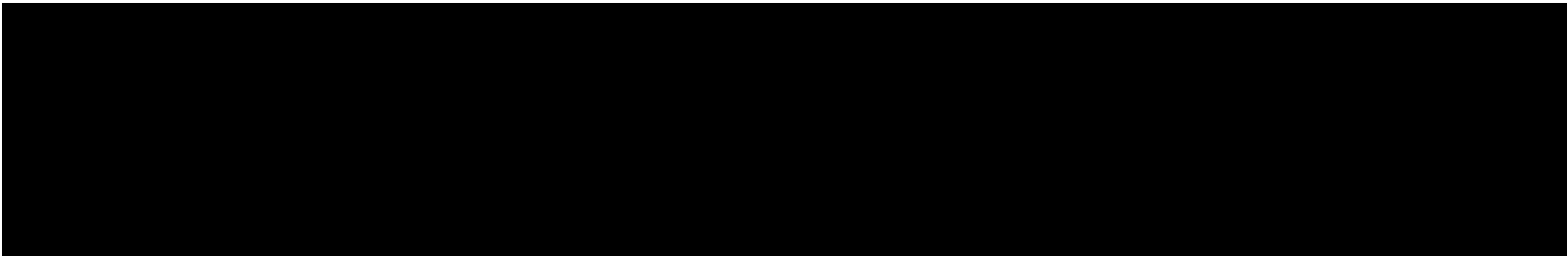












*Miranda Lichtenstein by Dana Ospina*

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 prestidigitary 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, wash 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 vocalicity 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, wash 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.