

Miranda Lichtenstein. *Anechoic Chamber*, 2005. From the series *The Searchers*.

## How Do You Choose an Image?

by Miranda Lichtenstein

I used to think my best work started with a title. I would have words in my mind, and the words acted as a frame, which gave me a structure. The best example is a series I titled *The Searchers*. Following a year of hypnosis sessions aimed at dispelling my fear of flying (I was in a crash landing and have had difficulty in planes ever since), I began to stage photographs of subjects on attempted voyages of secular enlightenment. The emergence of a broadly defined spirituality since the 1960s provided a basis for these pictures, which represent the ways people try to seek a wholeness in a spiritually deficient society—the aftermath of fitness and mindfulness merging into yoga, drum circles, solstice celebrations, transcendental meditation, flotation tanks, and more.

I now wonder if it's best to start with a question: How do you choose an image? This has been on my mind because the work I have been making over the past few years pulls from the 6,000-plus pictures I have in a library on my desktop. I am not on social media and I was late to smartphones; I shot Polaroid on my 4x5 until there was no more film left. In 2019 I got an iPhone 10 before a trip to Italy, and it changed the way I make pictures. I felt as though I was sixteen again, walking the streets with my 35mm, imagining myself a Cartier-Bresson at every shadow that aligned uncannily with another shape. It's a renewed pleasure to observe the world like this again.

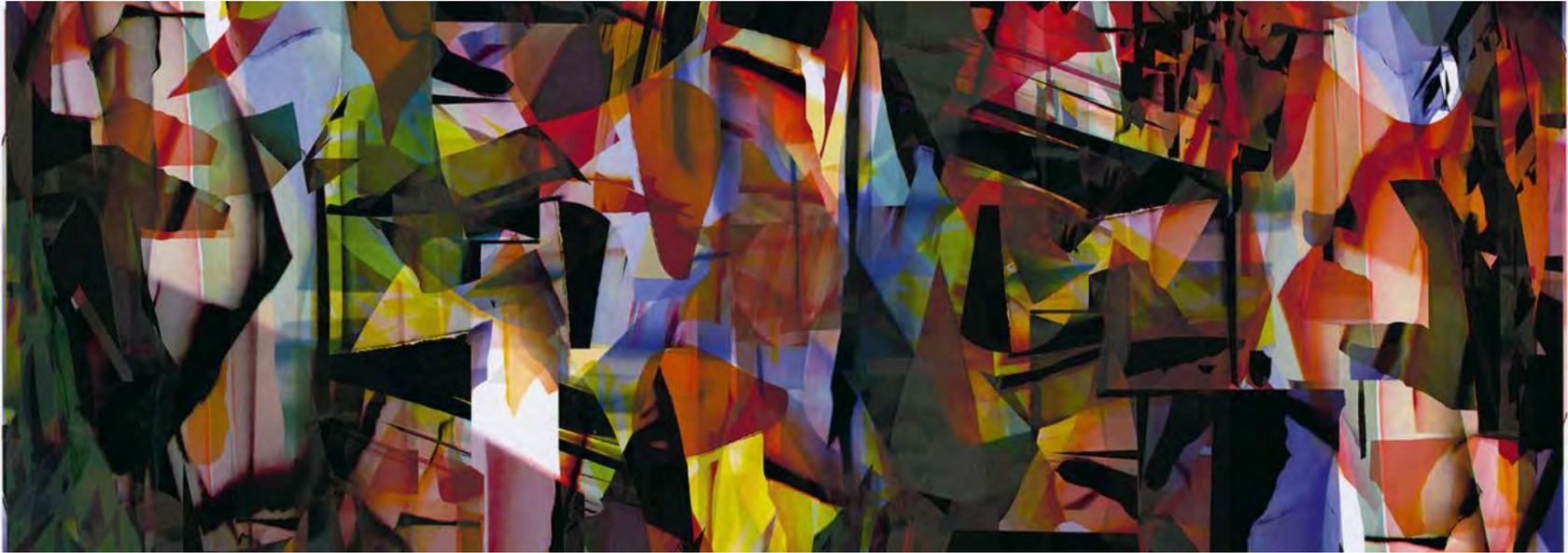
# maharam

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"Circles." Images are submitted to a process of layering, cropping, printing, scanning, cutting and pasting, and running the paper through the printer multiple times until the layers of ink create tone and depth that sit both in and on the surface. Among other things, my current work involves a layering and compression of analog and digital processes. Perhaps this amalgam ties the work to montage if one considers the screen as both a physical and a social space, a site in which fragments are used to constitute something approximating a whole.

I want to push photography to a limit, to where the physical surface is integral to building the space of the image. Someone once asked if a digital printer is more like a loom, and this resonated with me. Which brings me to another question: What more can images do?

Generator by Miranda Lichtenstein is the Brooklyn-based artist's second contribution to Maharam Digital Projects.



## Between Image and Abstraction: an Interview with Miranda Lichtenstein

July 1, 2021 / by Eugenie Shinkle

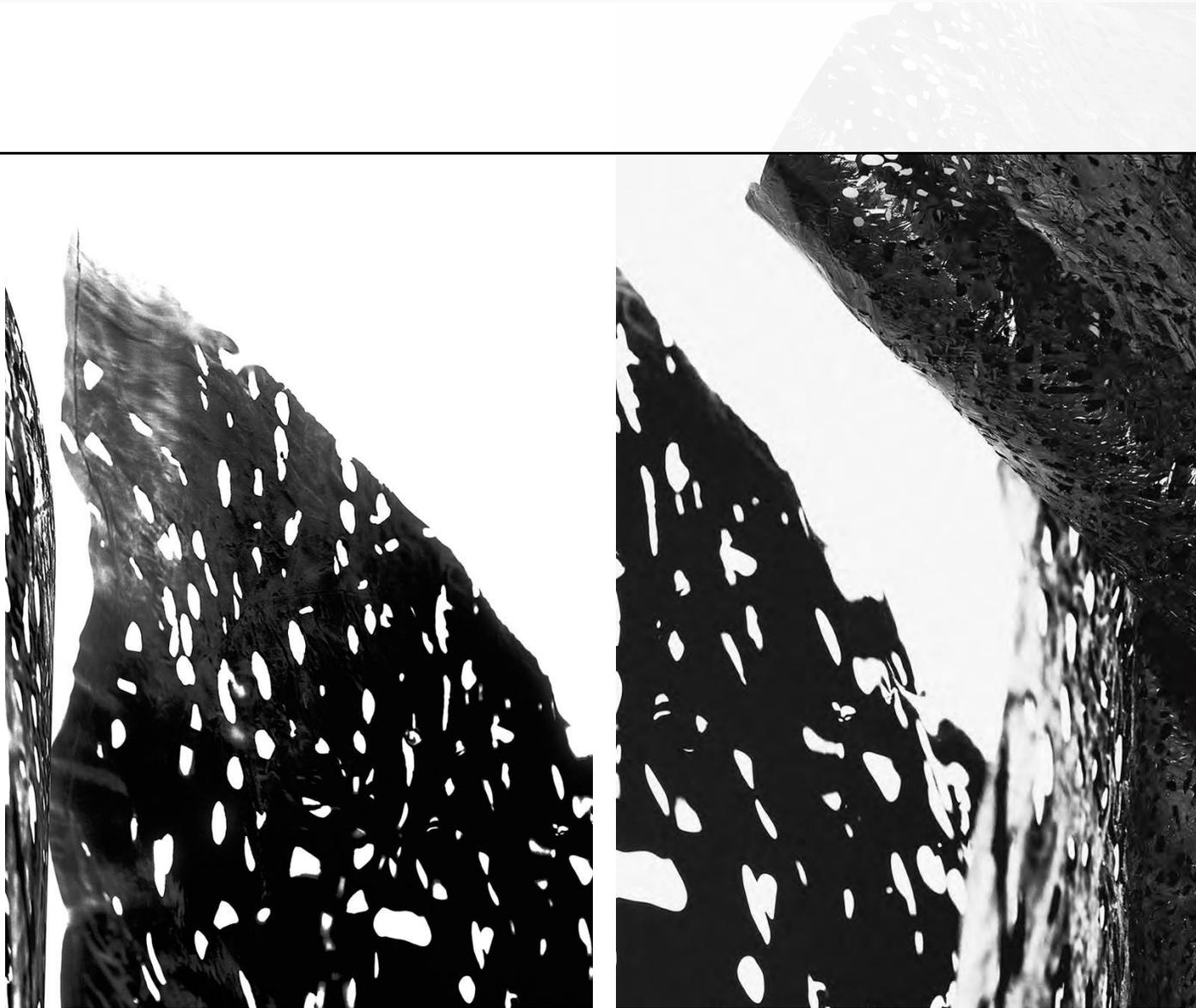
Based in New York, photographic artist Miranda Lichtenstein has spent almost two decades exploring the dialogue between image and abstraction. Although she studied under American documentary photographer Joel Sternfeld, Lichtenstein soon began pushing the boundaries of traditional photography, using varied techniques such as collage and abstraction to interrogate the material properties of the medium. Lichtenstein's new publication with Loose Joints, *Recorder*, draws together three bodies of work

hat began with a collaborative exhibition, and developed into an extended series of experimental images based in feedback loops of scanning, printing and rephotographing. Miranda and I spoke in March 2021.

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ES: Your collaborative exhibition with J Stoner Blackwell was a turning point in your practice. There are so many things going on in this work: there's a collaborative practice, a dialogue between production and reproduction, between images on the page and objects in the real world, and between the various technologies that were used to make the work. Can you tell me a bit about this exhibition, how this body of work began?

ML: It started when J asked if I would photograph their work as it was re-purposed in a fashion show. Their series of painting objects called "Neveruses" are comprised of recovered plastic bags and colored fibers such as wool yarn, silk thread, and patterned cloth. J describes them as neither useful nor redundant, though both are implied. I never photographed the fashion show, but when I went to the studio, I had the impulse to pick up my camera to photograph the sea of material I saw there. The work was everywhere! It was all over the floor, in the kitchen, and on every wall. I likened the space of the studio at the time to a giant tableau. I asked if I could come back and photograph their work. We had been friends for years, but that was the beginning of a two-year dialogue. I began bringing their work to my studio to photograph it in the same manner that I had shot previous still lifes, working with reflection and a destabilizing depth of field.



I also wanted to produce a decidedly collaborative piece, so we scanned the objects, in order to create a more direct reproduction. I made prints from these scans at various dimensions, enlarging the surface and detail so that when I combined the images and laid them on the ground they looked like an oversized carpet. At first I had them on the wall, but when I was cutting them out on the floor – and this is often how

I work, I discover something, accidentally, by doing it – I recognized that there was a logic to the images, which were created using light passing over them while lying flat, for them to be viewed from above

There is a complicated though often overlooked history of photography's relationship to sculpture.

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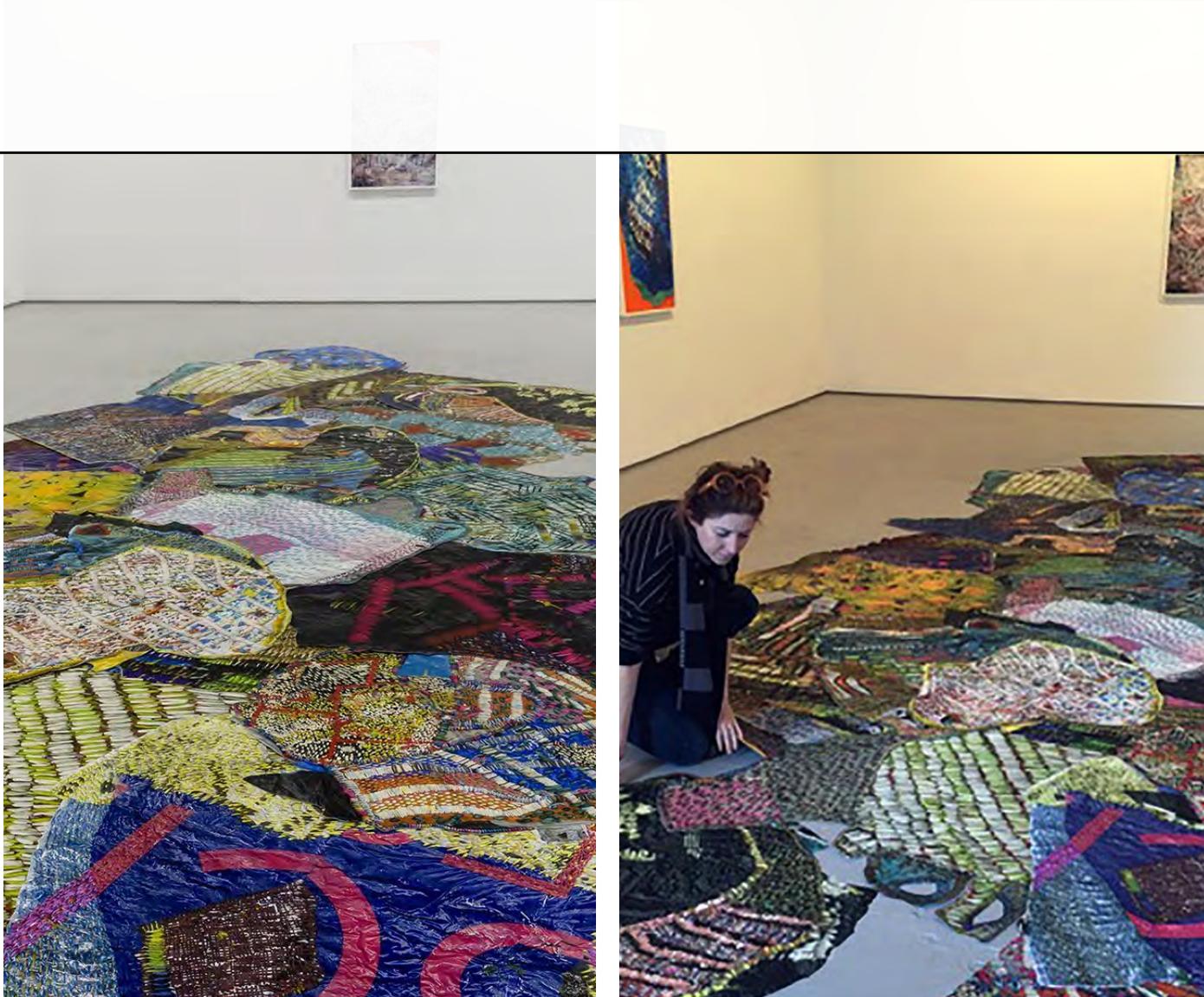
specifically that of artists photographing other artist's works. I was thinking about Man Ray's photograph *Dust Breeding*, a long exposure of dust gathered on Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass* in his New York apartment as being fundamental to this – it's an instance in which the photographic representation divorces itself from the parameters of the work it depicts and yet Duchamp was solicitous of this work. Come to think of it, the title could also refer to one work "breeding" another.

ES: It's hard, in the photographs of the installation, to get a sense of exactly what you're looking at.

ML: What you're seeing are ink jet prints made from scans of the surface of the embellished plastic bags.

The shapes are faithful to the original objects, because I cut each image out following its irregular borders. They're fairly illusionistic. People would look at the work and think they were seeing a woven tapestry. I'm not invested in the trickery; what I am interested in is how the scanner functions, and malfunctions, as a copying device. It's the twenty-first century version of a facsimile – it makes mistakes and has glitches akin to a Xerox machine. It raises the question: at what point does an artwork become a copy, a subject, or an object?





Above: J Stoner Blackwell with 'Neveruses'; Below: Installation of *Welcome Water* at Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York, 2015

ES: The installation piece that you created with these scans – *Welcome Water* – has a real dimensionality to it. When I first saw the installation shots, I thought that you had piled up actual textiles so that it had a contour like a little hill. But it sits flat on the floor?

ML: Yes, it's flat on the floor, although the prints are piled on top of one another. Parts of it are deeper than others, maybe four prints are overlapping here, and two there...

ES: Does it have a preordained layout, or is it adapted every time?

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ML: No, not at all. In fact, I went back to the gallery a couple of times and moved it around! It was a liberating project, not only because the collaboration was a blurring of authorship, but the piece was also so unfixed. The obvious analogy, environmentally, is to flotsam in the sea. Like the slippery intentions of J's hybrid objects, I wanted the flotsam to move, so I never stitched the photos together.

**I am interested in how the scanner functions, and malfunctions, as a copying device. It's the twenty-first century version of a facsimile – it makes mistakes and has glitches akin to a Xerox machine. It raises the question: at what point does an artwork become a copy, a subject, or an object?**

ES: The pieces on the wall are made from the remainders – the white outlines that were left over when you cut out the scans of the bag works. In the gallery, they were created by pinning individual outline sections to the wall to create these sort of low-relief paper sculptures. These then became the basis of the work in the book. But the photographs of these pieces in the book are very deceptive – these strange, diaphanous things that look like veils that have been burned through in the middle.

ML: I ended up calling these works '*Grounds*', but at first I was referring to them as remainders, because as you said, they were made from leftover paper from the cut-out prints. The gaps and spaces that I created when I pinned them to the wall – that physical space between the collage and the wall – is necessary to give the work dimensionality. The photographs in the book are deceptive because they are anything but flat when you see them in person. This was intentional of course, because they have an entirely different function in the book. The one thing the original and the reproduction has in common is that you can see through the paper we used in the book, the same way you can see through the hole at the centre of the collage



[\[https://c4journal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Grounds-Study-in-Studio-resized-lightenedES.jpg\]](https://c4journal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Grounds-Study-in-Studio-resized-lightenedES.jpg)

'Grounds' installed on gallery wall



[\[https://c4journal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Ground-13\\_MoCA-Tucson-EScrop.jpg\]](https://c4journal.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Ground-13_MoCA-Tucson-EScrop.jpg)

ES: What are these traces that look like burn marks?

ML: That is where the scanner bed didn't perfectly fit on top of the bag. It's a mistake, an aberration, a light leak. It was this discovery that pushed me to start working with these images. I was intrigued that a light

leak would leave a trace on the paper that literally looked like a burn. I was thinking about the functionality of light, the mechanism of it, that it's burning a mark onto the image, if you will.

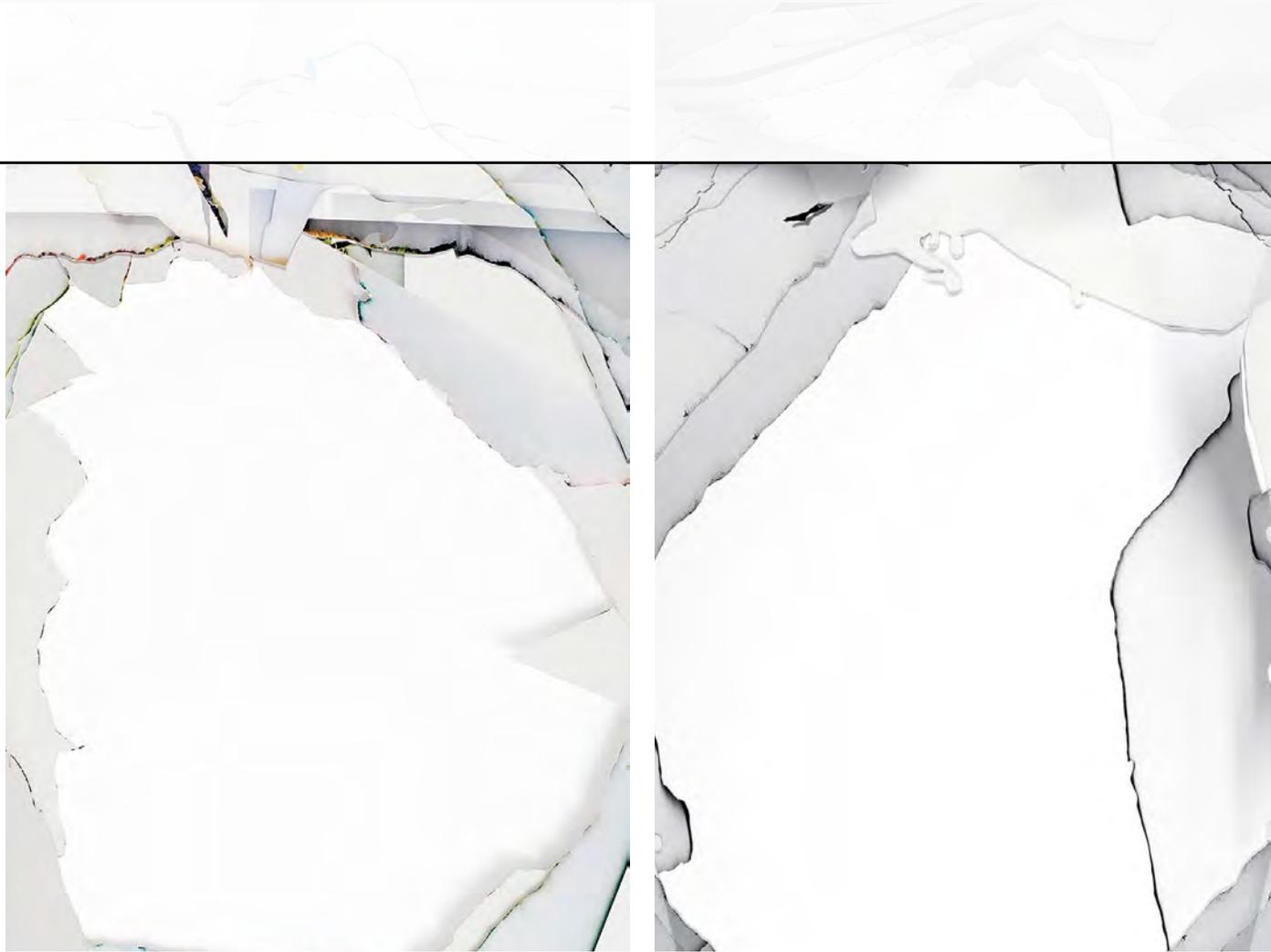
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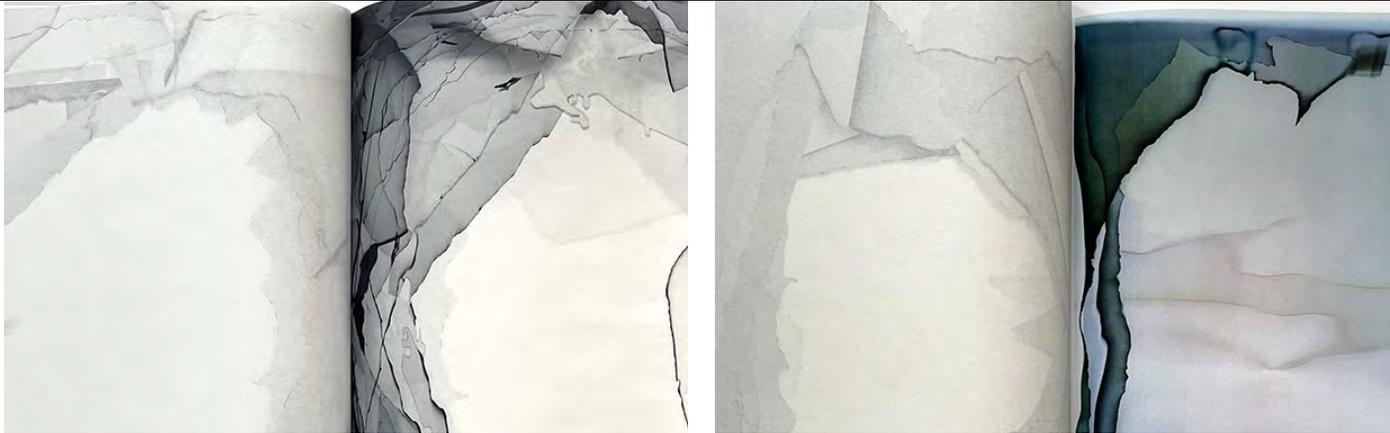
ES: Tell me about the colour cast in these images of the *Grounds*. As they appear on the wall, the *Grounds* are obviously monochrome. But in the book, the first few have this blue cast to them, these hints of tonality that are very subtle. Then as we move into the book, you get much more obviously tinted ones. What are you doing to create these colour casts?

ML: When I started printing images specifically to make the *Grounds*, I would raise the levels sometimes, so that the greys would be deeper, or the blue tone would be bluer. It also had to do with the quality of the light, and the paper that I laid over the bag when I scanned it. So these purplish tones, that's a product of bringing out the tone in the file before I print it.

ES: The physical pieces were layered on the wall, but I'm curious how these reproductions have been created for the book. Have they been created on a scanner?

ML: No, they were photographed for the book. The space between the layers of the paper and the flatbed scanner created a different kind of depth, and I wanted the flat surface of the prints represented in the book because the vellum paper we used has a palimpsest quality, which bookends the rest of the work. When they are pinned to the wall, the prints I am layering are not always the exact same size, so I'm building it as I install. Once they are lit in the gallery, the space around the hole in the centre can cast a shadow around the edges which gives the work greater depth.





ES: So that transformation to something that lives on a page is a really profound one, filled with all of this deception. In the book, it's quite difficult to work out exactly what it is that you're looking at, and how it's been created.

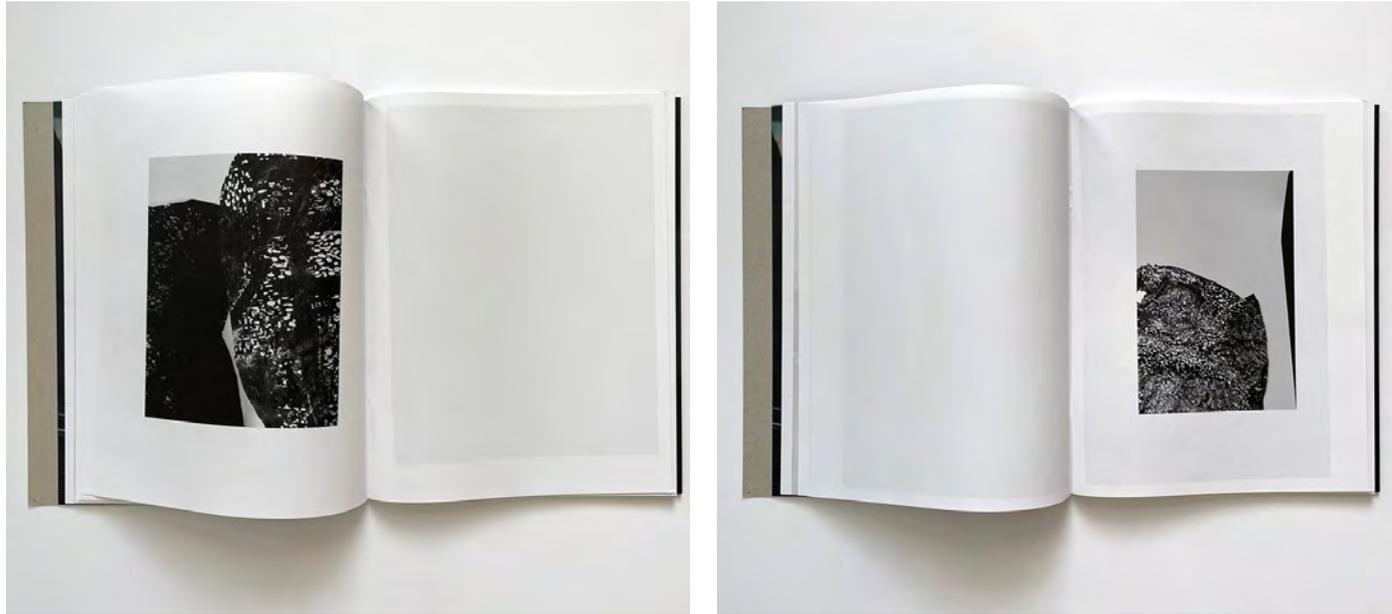
ML: Do you find that frustrating?

ES: No, definitely not! I don't know if others might, but I personally love the mystery of it. I love the fact that there is this interchange between technologies, between processes that are very tactile and involved with the material, and full of imperfections – and then scans, which are quite clinical in the kind of information they record, but which have their own kind of mistakes and glitches. As works in the gallery, they have a completely different identity than they do in the book. That complexity, and the idea that the book is something totally different, is really interesting to me.

ML: It's very typical of the way I work, where I start with one thing, and it morphs into another thing, and then I get an idea and build upon it.

ES: Tell me about the black and white images in the book.

ML: They are photographs of black plastic deli bags, which were ubiquitous in NYC, punctured with holes created by a laser cutter. They were also part of J's *Neveruses* series. I was making these pictures at the same time that I was making the *Grounds*, so there are correspondences: between positive and negative space, their ambiguous dimensionality, and the recycling of materials which appear simultaneously meeting and disposable, as well as monolithic in their permanence and recurrence.



ES: The book also contains another set of images, from a subsequent stage of the work.

ML: After I showed *Welcome Water*, the floor piece made from the scans, and produced the *Grounds*, which were made by layering the left over paper from *Welcome Water*, I began photographing the recycled paper I used to make the *Grounds*, and I thought, 'Well, I'm working with this process of layering the prints physically, with the cut-outs, why don't I see if I can actually create these layers on a single page using different versions of the same image?' I wanted to work with the same material, but to create a different iteration. I started playing with opacity, and hue, and composition, to alter them slightly and I'd make ten or twenty files of the same picture, or different portions of it.

ES: So you're not building up these layers in Photoshop?

ML: Not at all. This is all done in the printer. I only use Photoshop to create different files of the same image, but I never create the layering on screen. It's a chance operation – often it's mis-registered, and I don't always know where the ink is going to stick, and where it's not. I have now got a sense of what happens with certain colours overlaying, but things change all the time. That's the magic of it for me. when I run it through the printer again, I don't entirely know how it's going to look. The image itself is built up with layers of ink, it's an additive process.

ES: So the print becomes a sort of low-relief sculpture made of ink.

ML: Absolutely. It's determined by the substrate, and the way that the paper absorbs the ink or binds to it. Like many other artists, I am using the machine against its own logic. So that's where all these glitches and accidents and contingencies lie, because I don't know what I'm going to get.

**I don't know how conscious or unconscious it is, but so much of my work is a response to the flattening and superficiality of the way we see images when we see them on a screen. There's no longer an experience of the haptic, it's getting less and less frequent.**

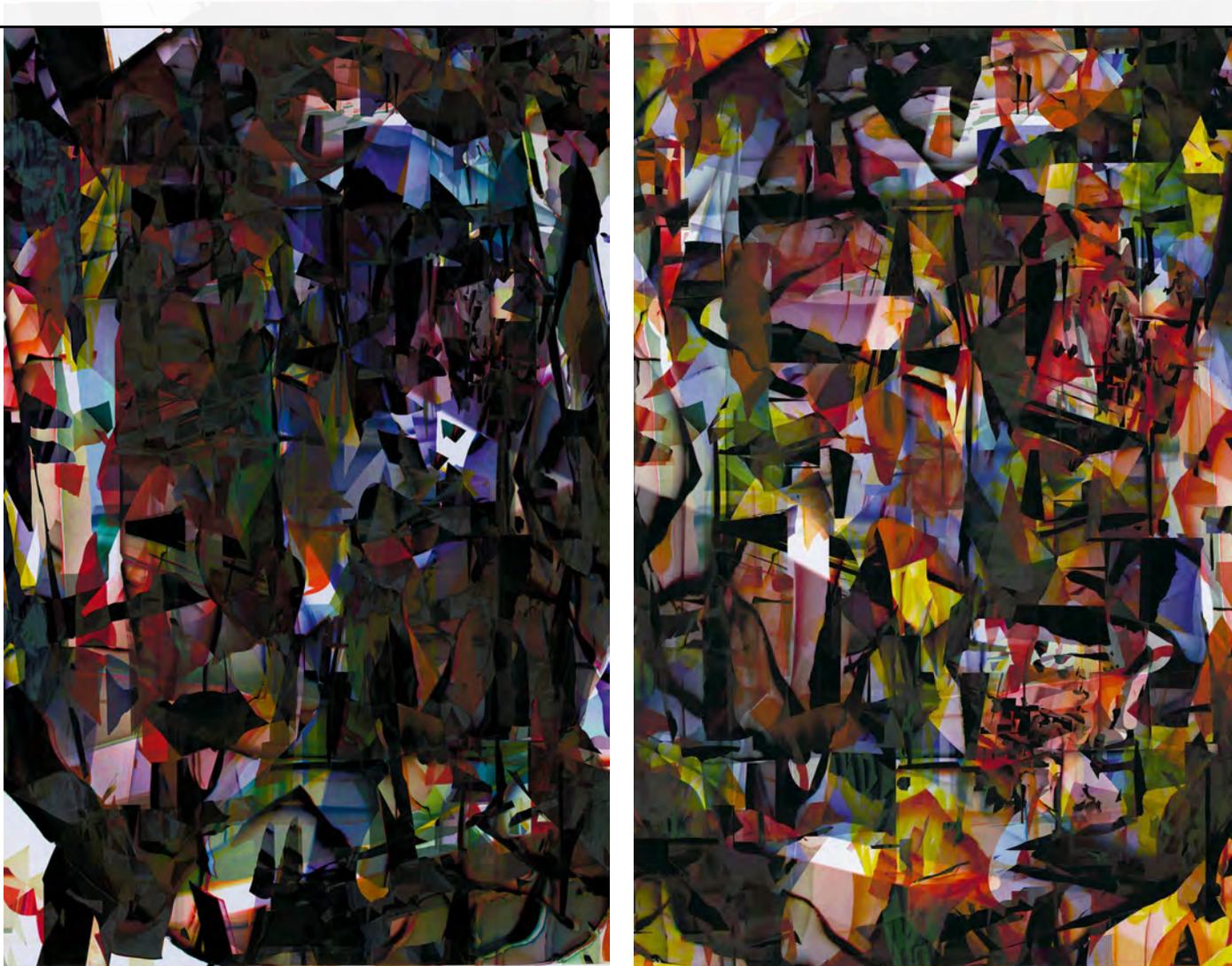
ES: I'm very interested in the interplay between what happens on the screen, what you're able to do there, and at what point you feel 'No, actually this needs to take place in real life.'

ML: People have asked me 'Why don't you map it out on the screen first, you could then see what the layers would look like?', and I think, no, I couldn't because it's not about how the layers look on the screen. It's about how the layers look on the surface of the paper when they are built with ink.

ES: The further you go into the book, the denser the images seem to get. They remind me of paintings, there's an incredible energy, they feel really gestural. I can see where the temptation is to just keep pushing and seeing at what point you need to stop, at what point you reach this kind of end game, where you feel like you've taken it as far as you can.

ML: I began pushing it further and layering it more and more, so that the image really breaks down. I took a turn, at a certain point, where any interest in a certain faithfulness to the original, or reference to the

material itself, was less interesting to me, than what I could do with the various layers and tones, and the ink. It really became an entirely different image/object from what I started with.



ES: I love the sense of confusion that develops: What are your eyes doing with this? Are they seeking depth, the way that we're used to doing with photographs? Or are they being confronted with something that's entirely superficial, literally, living on the surface of the paper?

ML: I don't know how conscious or unconscious it is, but so much of my work is a response to the flattening and superficiality of the way we see images when we see them on a screen. There's no longer an experience of the haptic, it's getting less and less frequent. I remember years ago when my art dealer started sending out jpegs to prospective buyers. I thought 'Really? People will buy something just from a jpeg? They have to see the surface, they have to see it to scale, they have to get a sense of the paper and the framing ...' I was so naïve! These are concerns that many artists have, at least of my generation. But that's just gone. So in some ways this may be a response, using the machine against itself to think about the space and depth and surface of an object. I'm not necessarily interested in confounding people, but I like situations where you're not totally sure what you're looking at. I want to see how far I can push the surface of an image.

ES: The decisions that you're making are very much like the decisions that a painter would make when working on a composition.

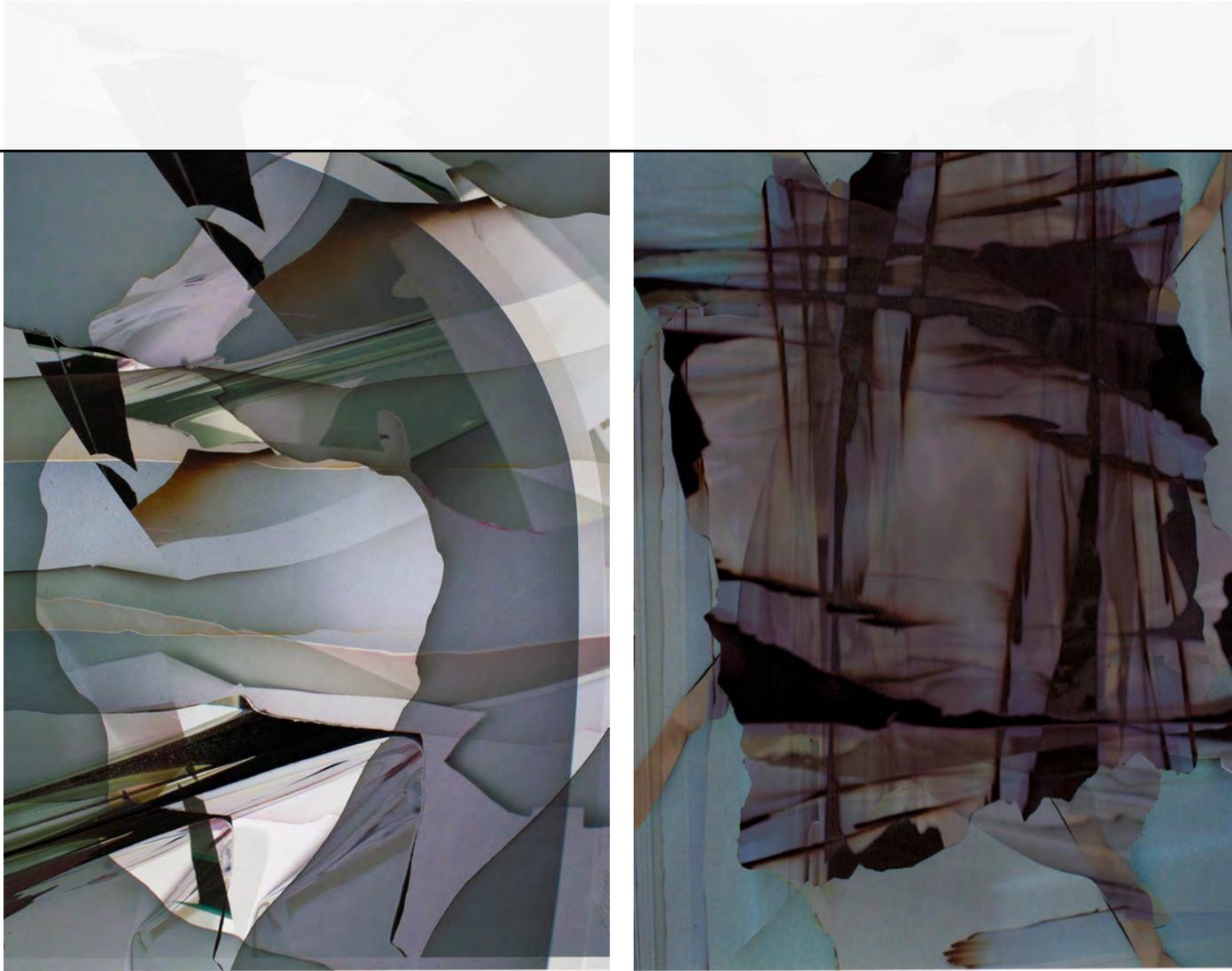
ML: Yes, they are. Before. when people would say 'Oh, your photographs are so painterly,' that was a description that I never wanted to be affiliated with. But it's more accurate with these works – many of the decisions I'm making are aligned, or at least adjacent, to painting decisions. I will put a print on the wall, and think 'Okay, I need to open up some space there', and I'll look at another file of that image, and say 'Okay, let's print that section on top...'

ES: How do you know when to stop?

ML: That's a good question. I think it's when I recognise that the ink is the material that's finally forming the image, when it doesn't look like a digitally composed work. There are a lot of artists who use Photoshop and digital manipulation to form an image; the gesture is recognizable. I've chosen to do something different, in that the gesture is not embedded in the software, it's embedded in the layers of the ink, and what happens with depth and space and colour and opacity, is determined by how the inks are interacting.

ES: So the act of photographing itself is not really an important part of the equation or the process any more.

ML: It hasn't been. Recently, things are shifting a little bit, but for this body of work, apart from the black-and-white still lives, I've really just been using the scanner and the printer to make everything.



ES: I wanted to end by asking you about the political dimensions of this work. There's obviously a particular ecological sensibility that shapes the project from the start, but that's not what the work is about, as such.

ML: No, not at all. I'm interested in what I can do here with form and process, and with an economy of means, because that lends itself to a politics that I'm invested in and thinking about. The plastic bags

could be more obvious in these terms, but that's not the only subject.

ES: I've always struggled with a desire to make work that doesn't necessarily have an obvious political narrative, but that is motivated by a politics – by a stance on the world, and on the way that

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technology mediates our relationship to it. Is that something you've ever struggled with? Have you ever had a kind of guilt that your work isn't more directly engaged with politics?

ML: No. Maybe that sounds indulgent. I fundraise, and I go to marches, and I argue for what I believe in, but that's a different kind of labour. I have very strong beliefs, and that's going to make its way into the work, but I'm not interested in my work illustrating these beliefs. Even just to be an artist, and to push back and try to make meaning in other ways, is a type of political activity. I think also because typically, overtly political art is not what I gravitate towards. If I'm going to look at something, I want to be seduced by it, I want to think about how it was made and what it's doing spatially, physically, how it reflects on technology and its boundless impact, but also on colour and material and reproduction. This said, the work we've been discussing is perhaps the most overtly political work I've made, so maybe there is a struggle after all!

**Miranda Lichtenstein** [<https://mirandalichtenstein.com/>]  
**Loose Joints 2021** [<https://loosejoints.biz/products/miranda-lichtenstein>]



*From Copy to Original*  
A.L. Steiner

*For every inconsistency on the surface, there is a subterranean consistency.*  
- Reza Negarestani<sup>1</sup>

The studio represents one method of perceived and concentrated isolation, a current reflection of life connected to the unraveling of our species under the cudgel of a capitalocentric misanthropocene. How we use life — manifested by our relationship to the notion of work — and make things surely falls into question. Especially now, inside of the paradigm-shifting essential / non-essential divide, housed neatly in the accelerated, crumbling, fractured facade of crapitalist realism. What we do or see in it, this or them is a form of theoretical ontological inquiry. But it's also the beginnings of the integral inquiry into what we've considered and framed as art making.

Without much fanfare, large-brained humyn hominids spiral in a flameout, a post-primordial sludge of newly-used-with-nowhere-to-go detritus, the evil of our extractive deeds foreseen. Through small windows, the omniscidal spiral in which they reside and recoil against in togetherness will continue to parlay into flowery terms about their selves. *Oh consciousness, intelligence, beauty enlightenment* (chorally). Collectively, simultaneously — allegedly, brilliantly — the hominids innovate their infinitely uncute selves in the warm company of ammosexuals and psychopaths. The forests and soils successfully disappear as unevolved assholes are wiped clean and oceans suffocated in order to fill needy stomachs. Carbon-based life forms stamped out like political enemies of no-one-in-particular.



Joseph Nicéphore Niépce *View from the Window at Le Gras*, c. 1826

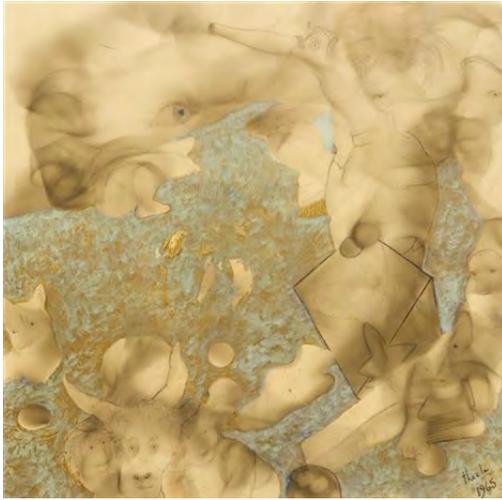
Invisible hands behind a brilliantly colored curtain, making and doing, breeding and settling, producing and reproducing. What we call life. Why even bother, as the world melts into an unrecognizable mound of delightful death goop. Maybe, still, because of the majik of the photo-graphic arts. A printed, developed or inked image(s); one smoked, burned, cut or frayed. This still, allowing us to see things. Can we revert back to a framework when we had less to capture, shoot, kill, dodge, sell and destroy? *An ecology of images*<sup>2</sup>, where the social contract dismissed us from its confines because we wouldn't need to exactly *take every fucking thing*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (2008), p.53

<sup>2</sup> Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (1979), p. 180

The Artist, now heretofore referred as such, poked a hole to uncover strata. The underlayment revealed, a careful tear with the thumb and forefinger, tracing around the edge. A burnt edge. Nothing surgical, just a thing or it might have been a bunch of things, felt. Invisible disorder revealed for no one's sake, just there to be viewed, observed, manipulated, layered, arranged, scanned. Not too much, just a little bit of something turned into every thing, somewhat bigger or variously smaller. Then much, much more. A much that is more than too much or not enough. Pictures made by isolating in isolation, in order to isolate.



Julia Thecla, *On A Blue Hillside*, 1965, fumage & mixed media on masonite

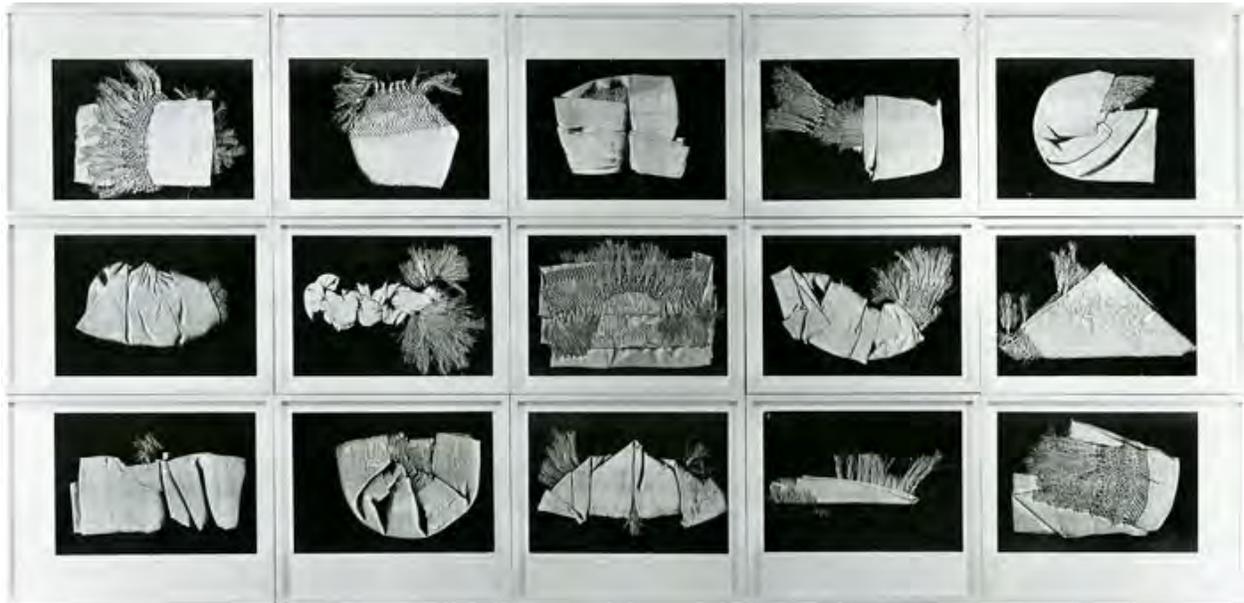
In this order of things (and thingmaking), what is to be observed about the trap of stability? Opposition to confining the image as an image, to radically extract, meaning — to root out. To allow images to reveal their rhizomatic natures, multiplied into much more than a thousand images and a million pixels, at once the same, alike and different. It is infinite, that image, or those images. No longer unique, no longer a world of many unique and distanced images. Iconophobic mashup produces infinity. An unstable conjuring here for your viewing pleasure, like the multiverse. Against uni-verse. Don't be deceived and don't believe what you believe.

To form, or shape, in order to become a picture, an image, a photograph is a sticky proposition, a mouthful of effervescence in a saturated landscape of fossilized fumes:

copy (13th c)  
counterfeit (14th c.)  
imprint (14th c.)  
original (14th c.)  
scan (14th c.)  
appropriate (15th c.)  
duplicate (15th c)  
edition (15th c.)  
replicate (15th c.)  
forgery (16th c.)  
reproduce (16th c.)  
reprint (16th c.)  
facsimile (17th c.)  
multiple (17th c.)

simulate (17th c.)  
plagiarize (18th c.)  
carbon-copy (19th c.)  
mimeograph (19th c.)  
photograph (19th c.)  
clone (20th c.)  
knockoff (20th c.)  
photocopy (20th c.)  
photostat (20th c.)  
risograph (20th c.)  
xerox (20th c.)

A word you cannot spell for a picture you cannot see, but that you feel, or know or understand the meaning of; one that you can make up, and then sound out. A synesthetic synthetic, a modular formation that is perfect like a sound is perfect. Perfect pictures are unnecessary when everything wrong. Deep listening to the picture allows for a possible deep looking. That which is there but we just couldn't see before, because we couldn't feel it or touch it, otherwise, without your help.



Pati Hill, *Understanding Your Chinese scarf*, 1983, 15 black & white copier prints

## *In Formation*

One of Miranda Lichtenstein's earliest art epiphanies was seeing a sculpture by Lee Bontecou in high school. She remembers being completely enamored with the futuristic shape of its canvas-wrapped frame, and how the black void at its center was "empty and full at the same time." Even in Bontecou's prints, space was not fixed, and shapes had properties that exceeded what you could readily see. Bontecou's work recently resurfaced for Lichtenstein as an important if unexpected touchstone for her photography, though perhaps it was always an underlying guide for how she's approached image making.

How is a photograph a form? This is a question Lichtenstein's work seems to mull over, now more than ever, even as it acknowledges a certain irony in this line of inquiry. Photography, that most illusory of mediums, denatures form as a matter of course—by transforming it into a flat surface of standard dimensions and infinite reproducibility, an echo of its presence rather than the thing itself. Lichtenstein's process of photographing is always one step ahead of this truth, deliberately skewing representation before the finished photograph can: she's melted still life tableaus into backgrounds, miscast shadows onto landscapes, and layered light over mirrors and screens so that depth and scale become difficult if impossible to discern. Her photographs slowly and steadily make their way through the dilemma that photography poses for objects in space and time.

The works in this book are the most abstract images that Lichtenstein has ever made. Instead of acknowledging and then emphasizing that what photography takes from the world is not exactly what it gives back, as her earlier photographs do, these new works begin to present an alternative idea. A photograph doesn't have to follow its own conventions. It doesn't have to hold its appetite for forms within the picture plane (though some of the most beautiful of Lichtenstein's photos here represent more than thirty runs through the printer, aggregating cast off scraps of other photos in their stained-glass color, challenging the paper to hold that much ink). A photograph can imagine form not in its potential for endless reproduction but in its potential for endless reinvention—to be seen as new rather than as identical. And a photograph can seek form outside of its impression on paper. It can, for instance, imagine itself as a sculpture, "empty and full at the same time."

In 2015, Lichtenstein made *Welcome Water*, a collaboration with the artist J. Stoner Blackwell). Flatbed scans of Blackwell's delicate sculptures derived from plastic takeout and deli bags were inkjet printed, cut out, and laid on top of each other to form a large floor piece. *Welcome Water* records several cycles of material life: an object with Lichtenstein's images of Blackwell's objects, which are in turn recycled from objects that connote one of the planet's most dire environmental crises. All of the works in *Recorder* are sourced in some way from this "mothership," as Lichtenstein calls it. *Welcome Water* was a breakthrough for Lichtenstein. It released photography from a typical form, the rectangular wall print, allowing it to settle into an oblong shape on the floor.

If Lichtenstein's earlier work "pull[ed] from the environment," as she once described,<sup>1</sup> her most recent photographs are tied to the world only inasmuch as they all originated from those ubiquitous (now sometimes legislated) plastic bags and their connection to urban landscapes.

Meditating on the waste of one-off plastic bags led Lichtenstein to a reckoning with the inherent waste in photography's chemicals and printing, and the arbitrary editioning of photographs—another kind of material proliferation. (Most of the works here are unique prints; Lichtenstein even joked that she sometimes refers to them as monoprints, and in their labor intensiveness they are not so far removed from printmaking).

“Why take another picture?” Lichtenstein asked herself. “I was no longer interested with what I could do or say with the medium out in the street.” Instead, she turned photography's insatiable appetite for absorbing form back on herself, “cannibalizing my own work” as she puts it. The materials came from a box of remainder cutouts from *Welcome Water* that she had intuitively saved, from test prints, and from manipulated photographs of Blackwell's bags. New imagery would have to come from process, not from subject.

The images here are divided into three groups. In *Holes*, we've left behind any obvious referent to a plastic bag (though we are looking at one of Blackwell's laser-cut and ironed deli bags). These works seem to be samples of still-cooling igneous rock, slippery and black. They are at once heavy and diaphanous—veils of stone. Her *Ground* series goes the furthest in terms of its actual dimensionality: pieces of photographs are roughly torn, layered, and pinned together with little nails, framing a central void on the wall. The burnt-edge effects on many of the gray strands are from light leaks recorded as Lichtenstein scanned, and a certain violent beauty and sense of loss is introduced by the way they have been manipulated to take an aggregate shape. (This is especially so, I think, because we've come to expect clever digital maneuvering and accumulation in Lichtenstein's work. The literal blankness is jarring.) The unique *Untitled* prints combine properties of *Holes* and *Grounds*. Many of the compositions retain the central vortex of the *Grounds*, without the actual hole, around which layers of curled paper and shadows accumulate, or deep blacks that cross over planes of light like caverns but never fully coalesce into a single shape. Prisms of color and smudged bands contribute to a sense of movement—and not just of light over the surface, but of something trying to emerge from a great depth.

Bontecou aimed to give her early void sculptures an uncertain gravitational pull. She, too, is an avid recycler; the thick canvas that she stretched over welded wire frames to make her wall reliefs in the late 1950s and '60s were discards from the steam laundry below her New York City studio. She would pick up old airplane parts, screws, and grommets on Canal Street to construct sculptures that were weighted in postwar American politics and, relatedly, the futurism implied by outer space and black holes (which were named by scientists during this period). Bontecou's own breakthrough came in Rome just before she moved to New York City in 1958, when she began making drawings on paper with her welding torch. Back in New York, these soot drawings, many of which resembled bleak moonscapes, extended to the protruding voids of her sculptures, which she lined in that welding soot and black velvet so that they might disappear or be as boundless as possible. The effect is impossible to fix—a singularity, as the mysterious, unknown interior space of a black hole is called.

Last year, the first image of a black hole was revealed to great fanfare, a coordinated effort between hundreds of scientists operating nine observatory telescopes around the world. “We have seen what we thought was unseeable,” one astronomer said of the glowing orange ring and

pitch-black center captured as a digital image.<sup>2</sup> If you stare at the picture too long, it seems to vibrate—the ultimate unstable image, working backward to undo any form or light.

Though all three sets of Lichtenstein's photos in this book are distinct, all are destabilized compositions, whether within the picture itself (*Holes* and the unique *Untitleds*) or as the photograph's overall shape (*Grounds*). Their forms are still in formation. This is no small effect—and suggests a new development in Lichtenstein's unflagging exploration of photography's pull toward composing and confounding reality.

*Prudence Peiffer is an art historian and writer and managing editor of the Creative Team at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

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Unless otherwise cited, all quotes from Miranda Lichtenstein from a conversation with the author on May 7, 2020.

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Richard Conway, "Beautiful Lies at Giverny: Vibrant Polaroids of Miranda Lichtenstein," *Time* magazine, April 10, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Nadia Drake, "First Ever Picture of a Black Hole Revealed," *National Geographic*, April 10, 2019.

aperture

225



# On Feminism

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**ON**

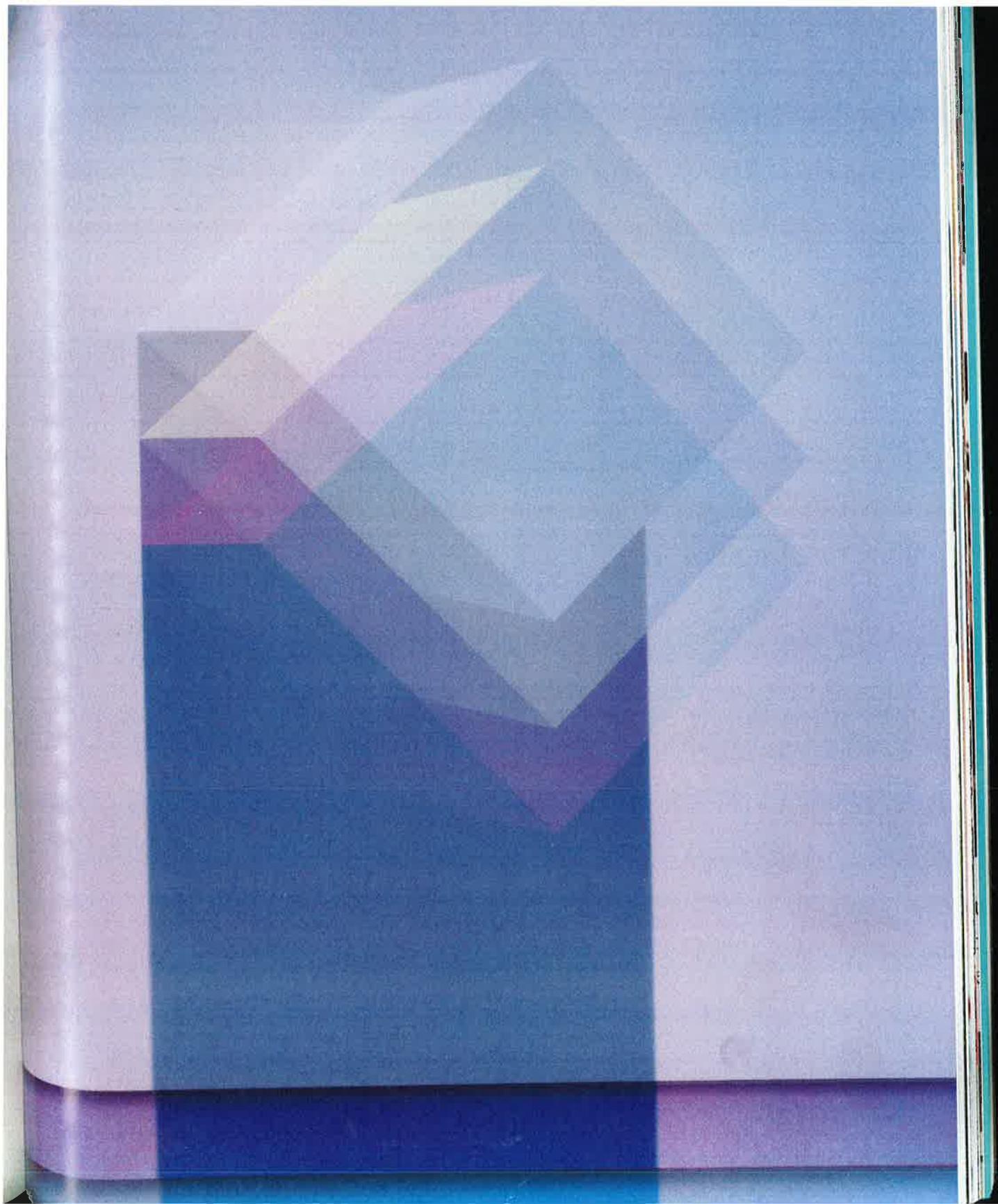
Eva Respini

**DEFIANCE**

**Experimentation as resistance**

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

APERTURE 100



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

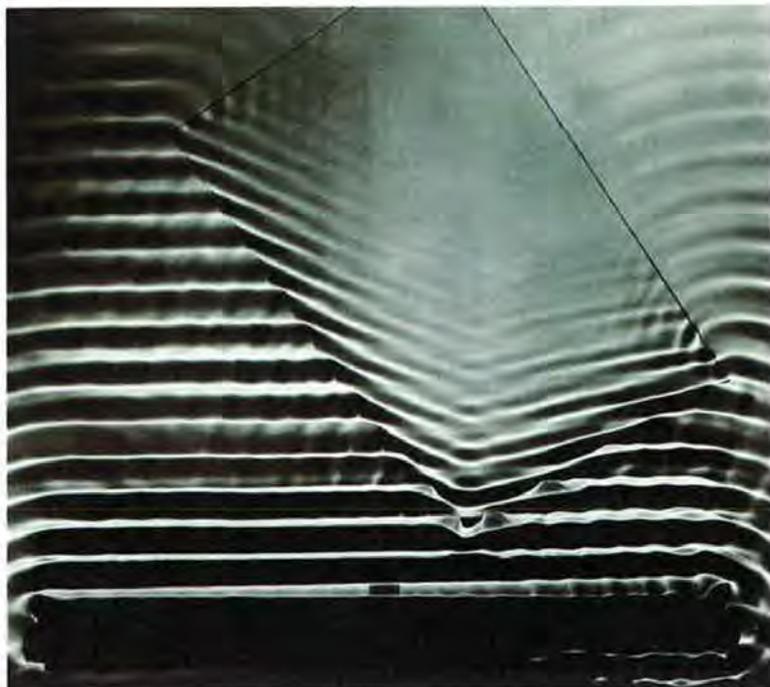
Below, right:  
Berenice Abbott, *Water  
waves change direction*,  
1958-61  
© Berenice Abbott/  
Getty Images



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*.



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, *Convallaria 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.

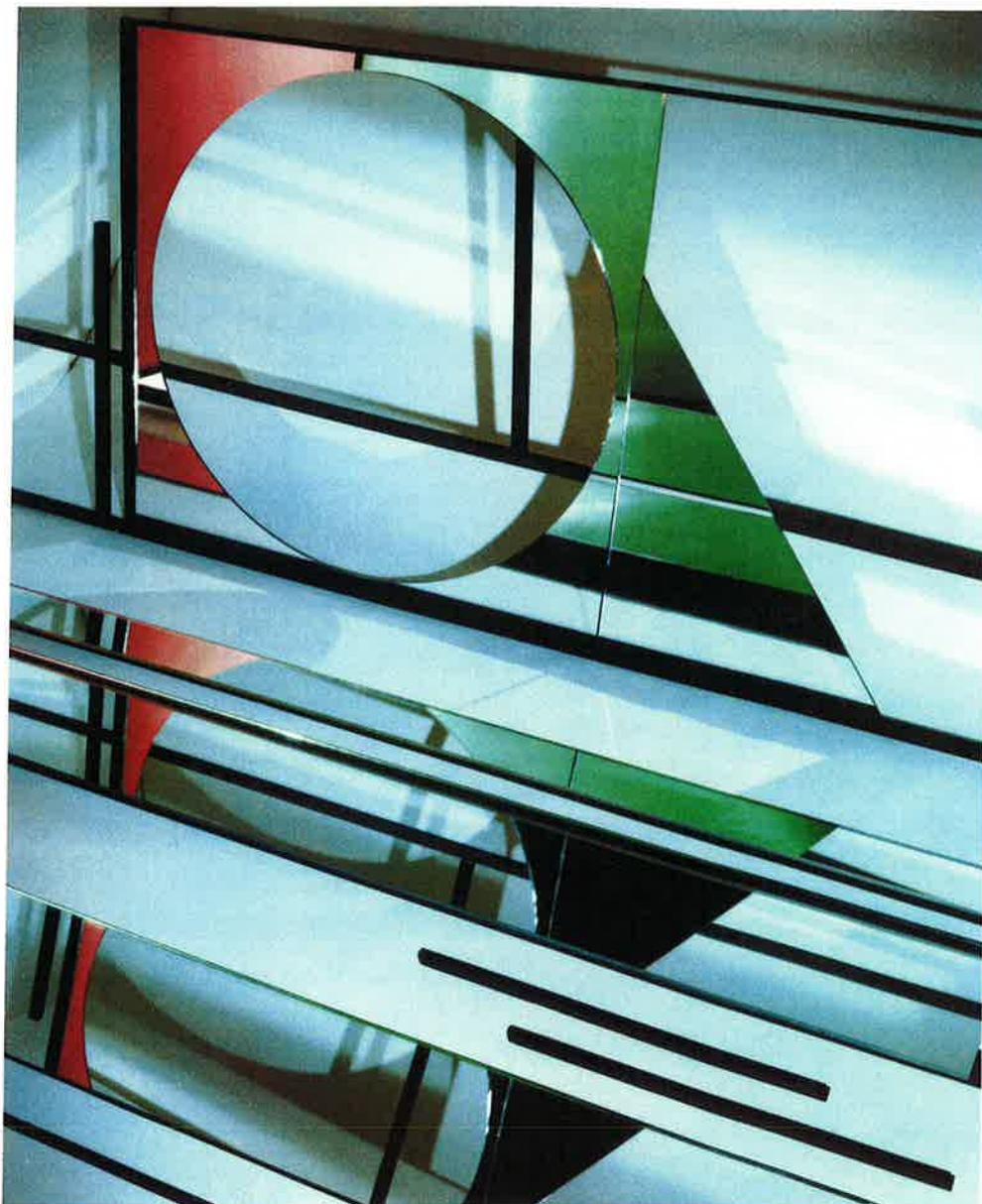
Recent years have witnessed a generation of women exploring new ground in the photographic medium. I spoke with several of them for this article. Liz Deschenes, whose work sits at the intersection of photography, sculpture, and architecture, is central to current conversations around nonrepresentational 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 Kruger,**  
*Construct XI A, 1981*  
Courtesy the artist;  
Borlòlami, 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



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.

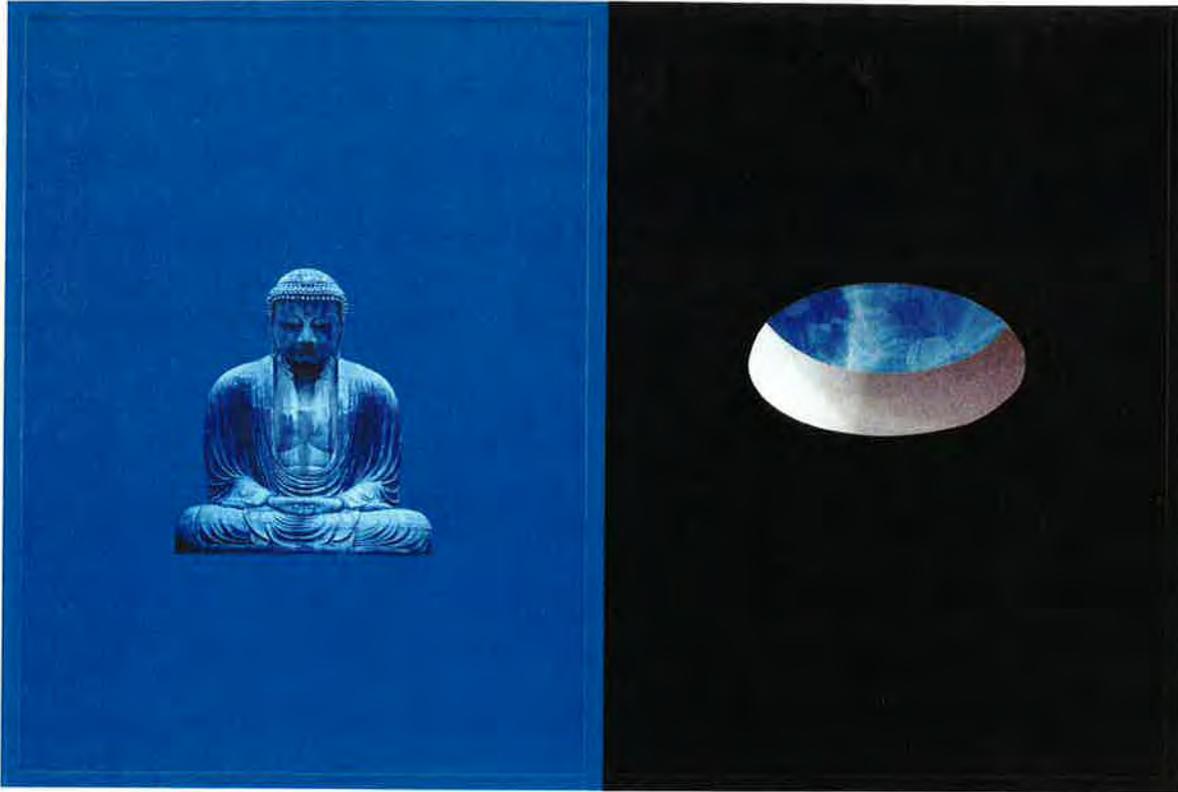
Eileen Quinlan, whose photographs are grounded in material culture, the history of abstraction, feminist history, and, most lately, the ubiquity of screens, cites the predominance of conventional photography curriculums as fomenting a type of resistance:

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,

This page:  
Liz Deschenes, *Gallery 4.1.1*, installation at MASS MoCA, 2016. 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

**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

# ARTFORUM

MARCH 2016

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## 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.



### REVIEWS



Miranda Lichtenstein,  
*Thank You (orange)*,  
2015, ink-jet print,  
40 × 26 1/2".

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 flat-bed 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.)

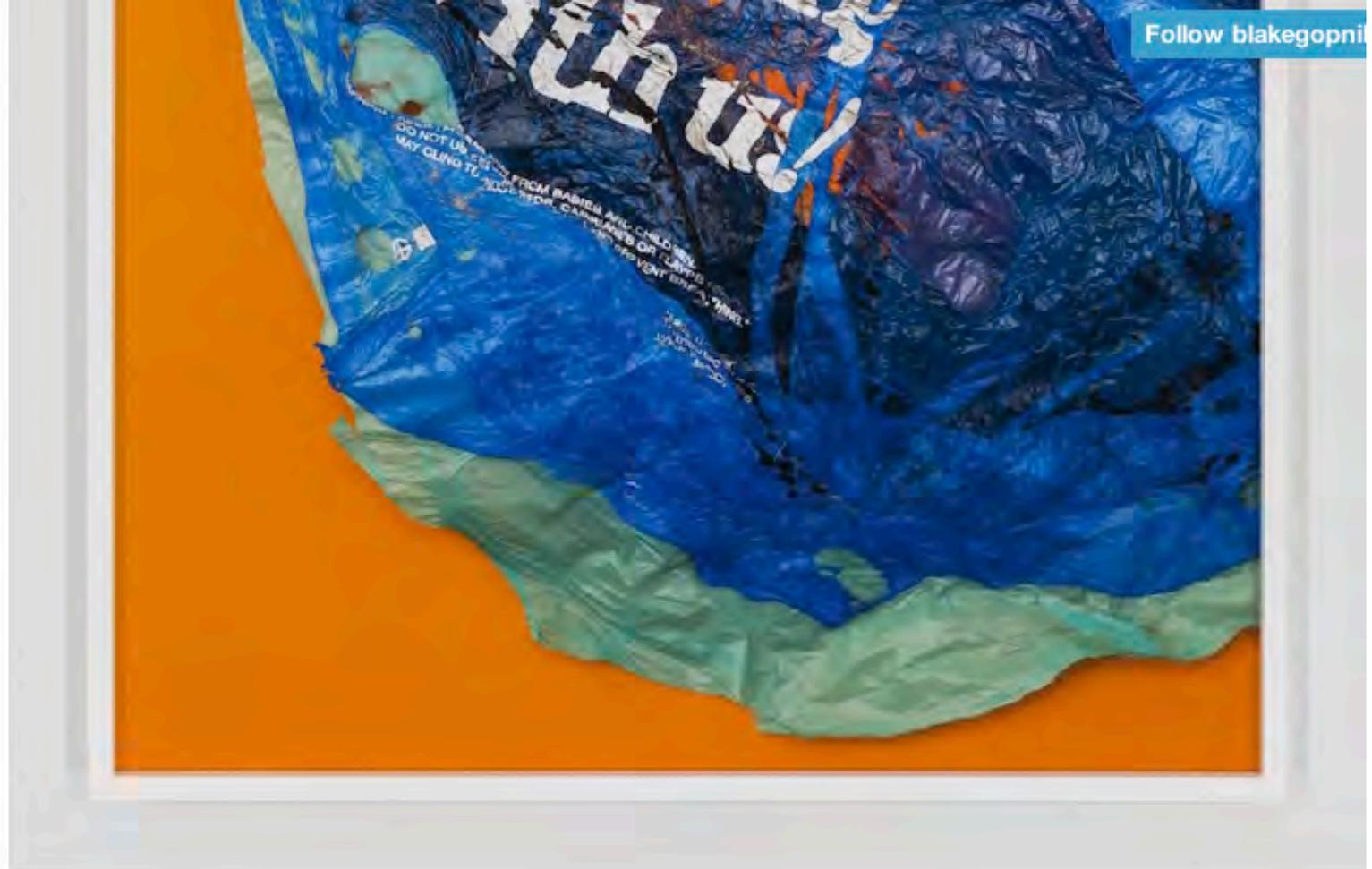
The commitment of Blackwell's project is reflected by Lichtenstein's: To take two years to do anything in the art world today feels like an eternity, let alone to focus on someone else's work. This restraint doesn't sacrifice self. The original bags' text and material point to a subject that recedes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

—Prudence Peiffer

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**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*



# THE NEW YORKER



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ART

## “THE ACTUAL”

December 11 2014 - February 15 2015

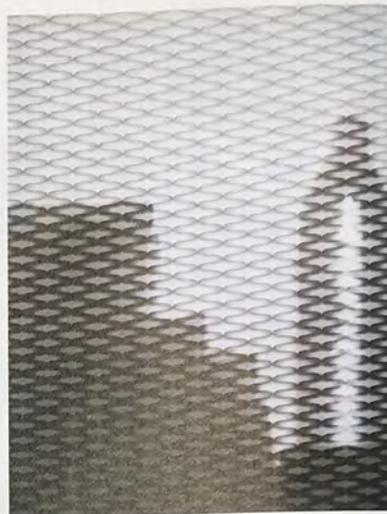
Beauty isn't necessarily a priority for photographers working in process-driven abstraction these days, but it's one of the attractions in this smart show of work by six contemporaries. Even the most restrained pieces here pulse with energy, including John Houck's sharply creased prints and Jason Kalogiros's 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

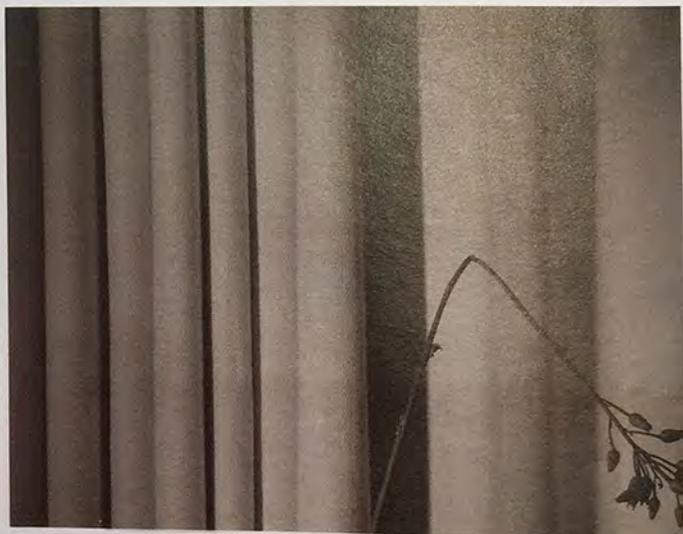
THE PHOTO ARTIST PUTS A SURREAL SPIN ON THE INSTAMATIC IMAGE

*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 orange-ish 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



# THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

## MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

Resisting the inflated scale of so much contemporary photography, Lichtenstein shows a group of small Polaroids, including a number of flower studies made during a residency at Monet's garden in Giverny. Lichtenstein often shoots still-lives through a textured scrim or in graphic silhouette, and the resulting images slip effortlessly between representation and abstraction. Some of the best works here tap into the experimental vein of mid-century modernism; others echo the late Jan Groover's artful arrangements of vases and pitchers. Lichtenstein nods to the history of still-life photography, but she's far too inventive to get bogged down in it. Through June 4, 2014.

April 11 – June 4, **GALLERY AT HERMÈS** 691 Madison Ave.,  
at 62nd St., New York, NY 212-751-3181  
[en.fondationdentreprisehermes.org](http://en.fondationdentreprisehermes.org)

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

←

→

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 known 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.

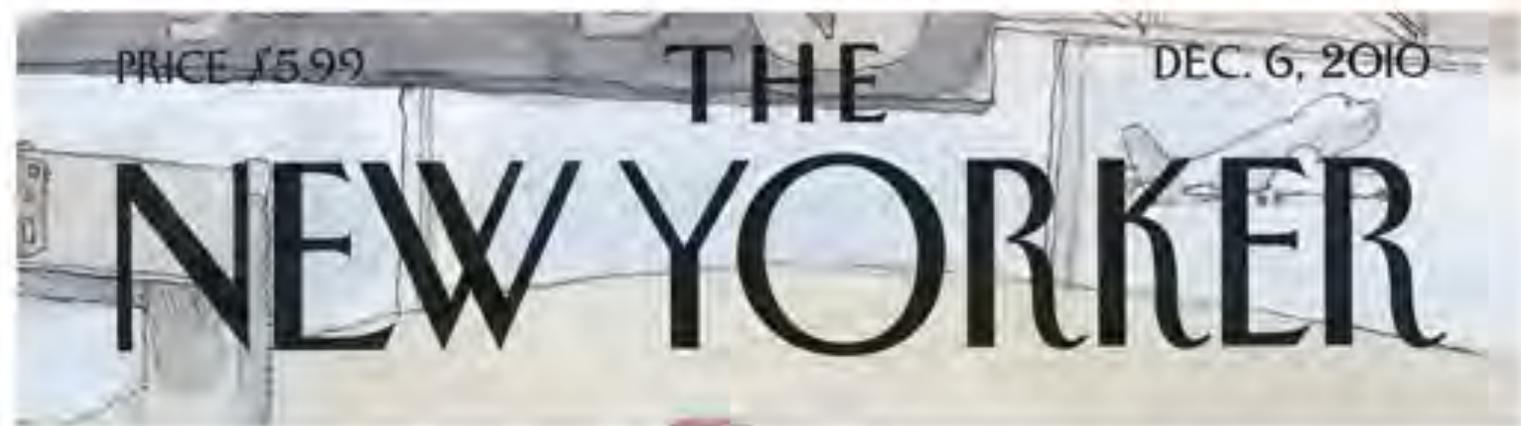
A: It must have been a long editing process, going over eleven years of work. What is it like to see all this work in one place?

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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5 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4

### 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*

Read more: [Beautiful Lies at Giverny: Vibrant Polaroids by Miranda Lichtenstein - LightBox](http://lightbox.time.com/2014/04/10/miranda-lichtensteins-vibrant-colorful-polaroids/#ixzz31hbLxHuc) <http://lightbox.time.com/2014/04/10/miranda-lichtensteins-vibrant-colorful-polaroids/#ixzz31hbLxHuc>

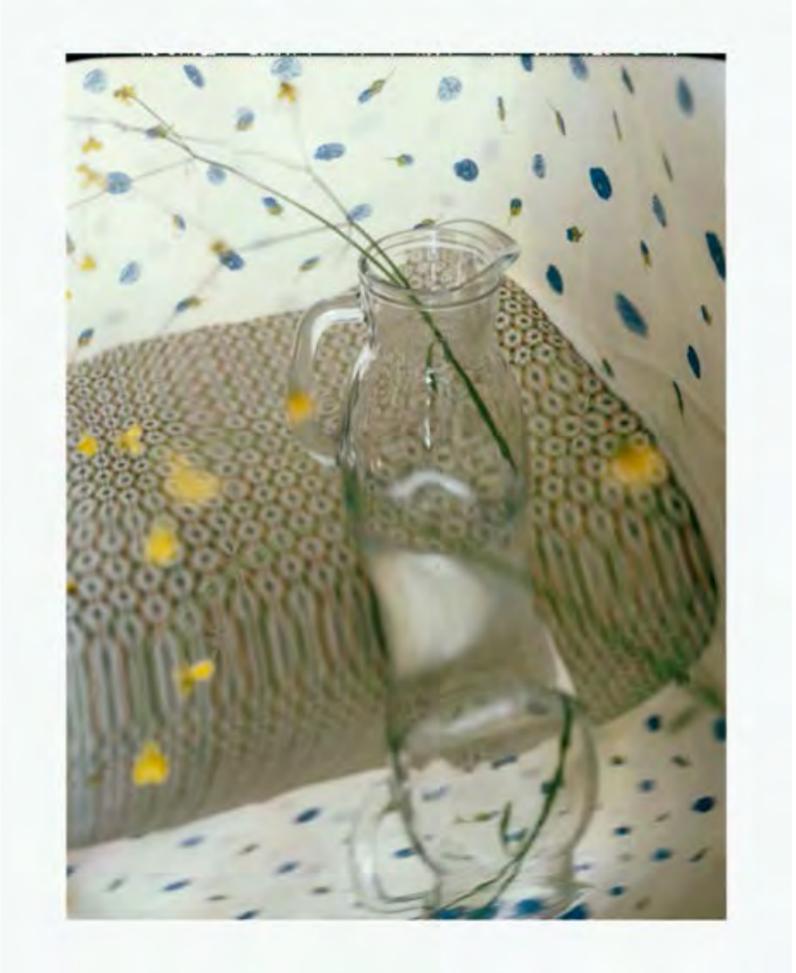
# Miranda Lichtenstein's Memento Mori

*Art* Miranda Lichtenstein

Through the instantaneous lens of the Polaroid camera, Miranda Lichtenstein captures contemporary flowering still-lives 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 Hermès, includes 46 works spanning the last 10 years of Lichtenstein'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.







ARTIST PROJECTS FASHION CULTURE LITERATURE  
ARCHITECTURE COVERS ORDER ISSUE NO. 4

# MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN: POLAROIDS AT THE GALLERY AT HERMÈS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN  
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.



**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 Folies-Bergère 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](http://OutwithMary.com).

## 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.

## 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 Philip 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 Lühring 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,



Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

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

bandanna, and casino-themed scarf—creates a kind of well-lit, post-New Age surrealism.

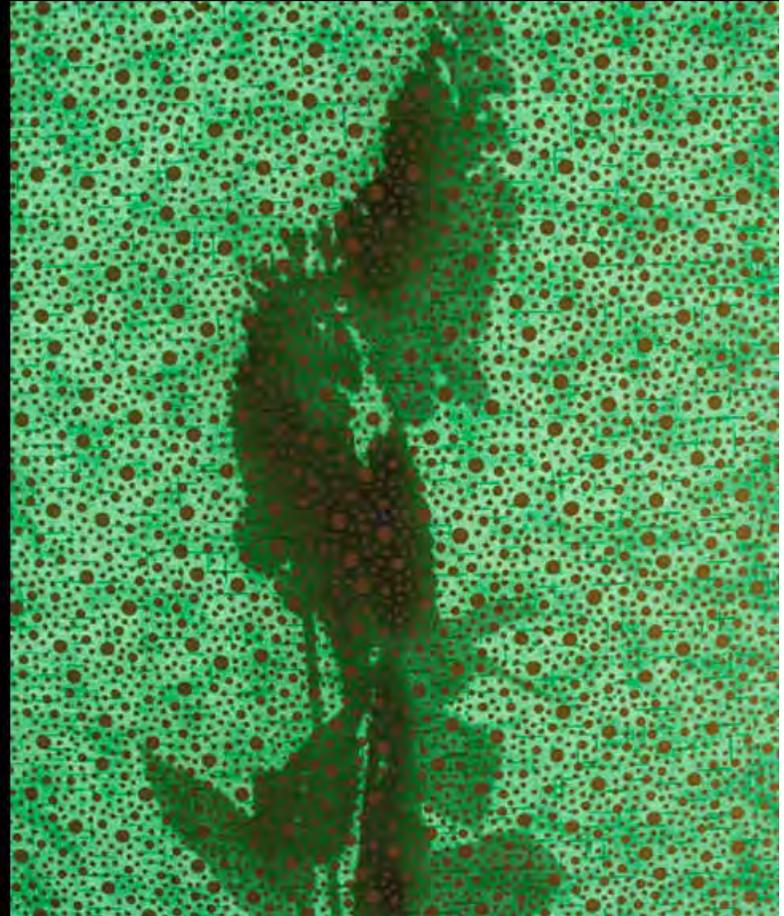
Collier Schorr is the elder stateswoman of this round-up, but her current offering at 303 (547 West 21st Street, through December 4) is notable for its turn away from the conceptual-essay format into autobiographical mining. Like virtually everyone mentioned here, she's eschewing seriality: The installation 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.

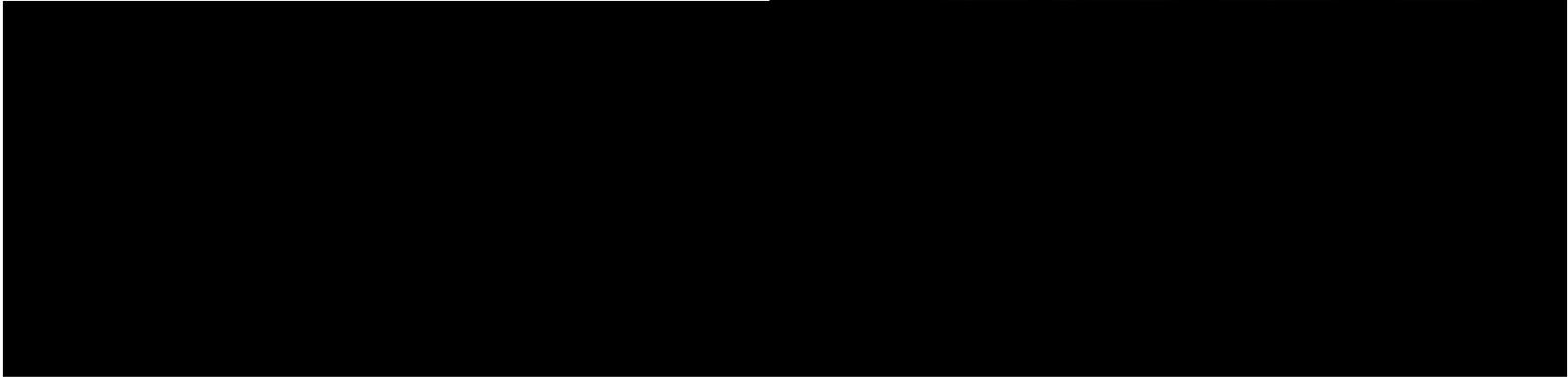
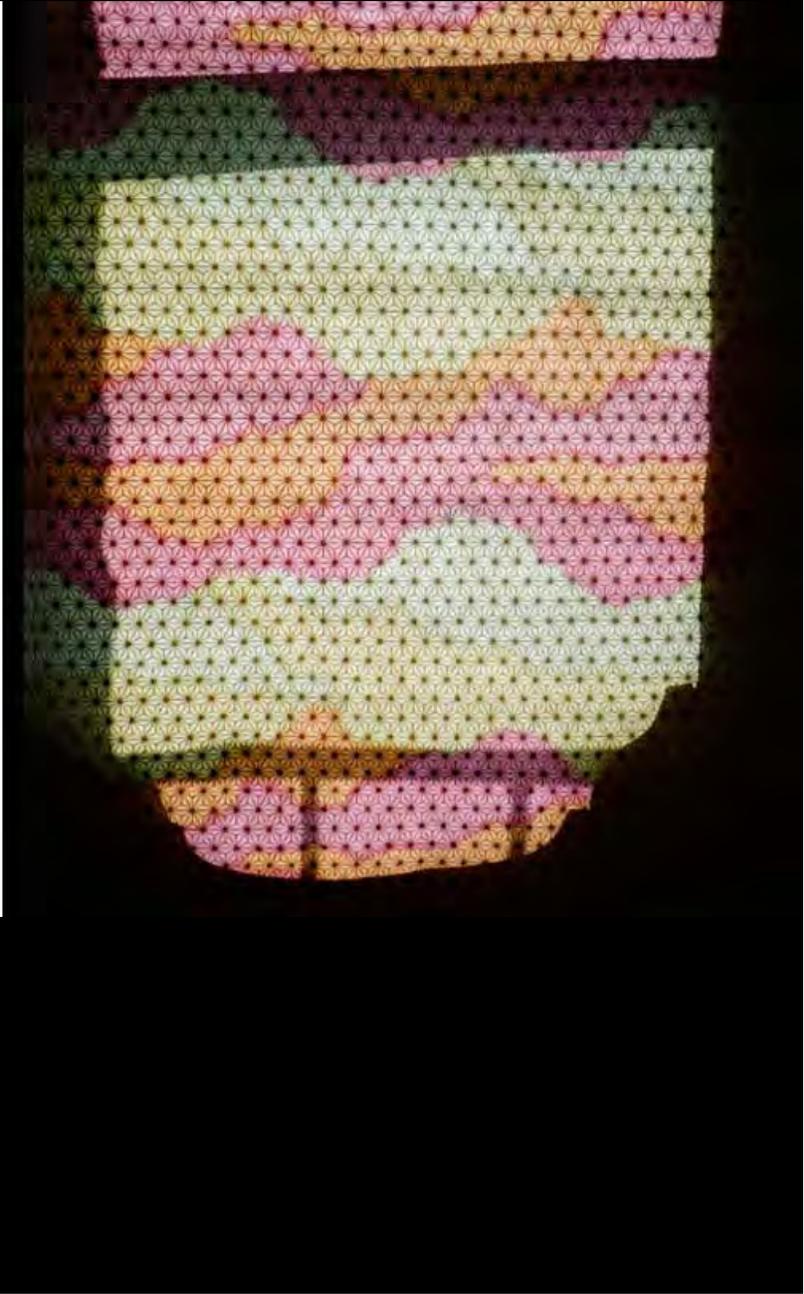
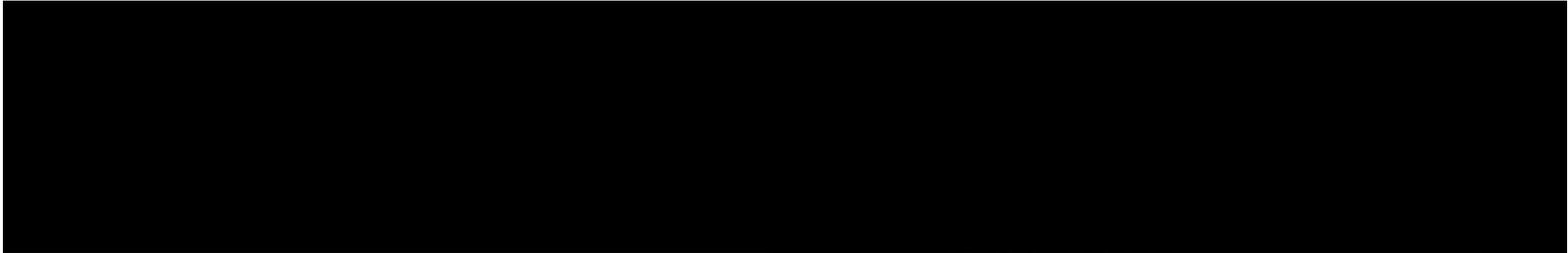
Expression is captured and distilled by Miranda Lichtenstein at Elizabeth Dee (545 West 20th Street, through December 18). There's singing, dancing, decaying flowers, allusions to early film and modern aesthetic utopias—all compressed through the post-postmodern filter, which is to say, effectively refracted 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.

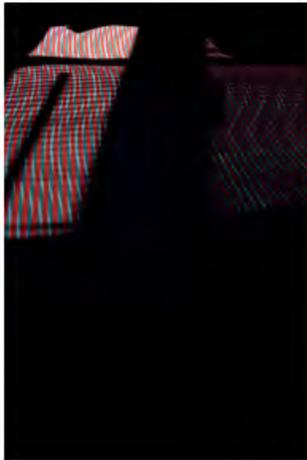
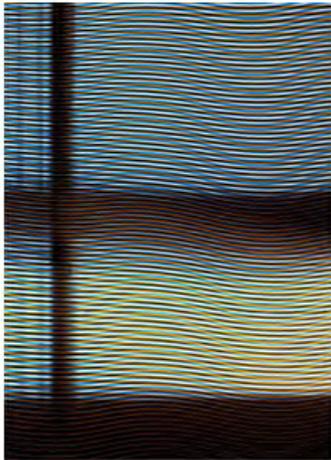
**AMERICA**  
**PART FOURTEEN**  
**MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN**  
**BY DANA OSPINA**  
**PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF**  
**ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY**











*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 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.

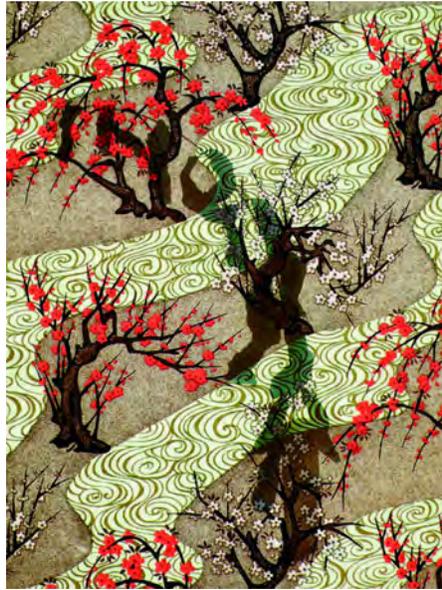
The series of still lifes occupies a space between intention and discovery, for both the artist and the spectator. *Arrangement*, for example, presents the viewer with what appears at first glance to be a beautifully composed image of a loose bouquet of flowers and their reflected image. The flowers 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.

# 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](http://elizabethdeegallery.com)

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FIND THIS BLOG ENTRY: <http://www.interviewmagazine.com/blogs/art/2010-11-02/wild-flowers/>

PRICE \$5.99

DEC. 6, 2010

# THE NEW YORKER

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. (Dec, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545.)

# 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

REVIEWS MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN

## 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-lives 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



## 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

NOV. 19, 2007

# THE NEW YORKER

## 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.)

## 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



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

## “Strange Powers”

★★★★★

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 Eley 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

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

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.”

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.*

# Women in Photography

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## *Miranda Lichtenstein*



*9 Planes, 5 Unrealized, 2007* | All images courtesy of the Elizabeth Dee Gallery

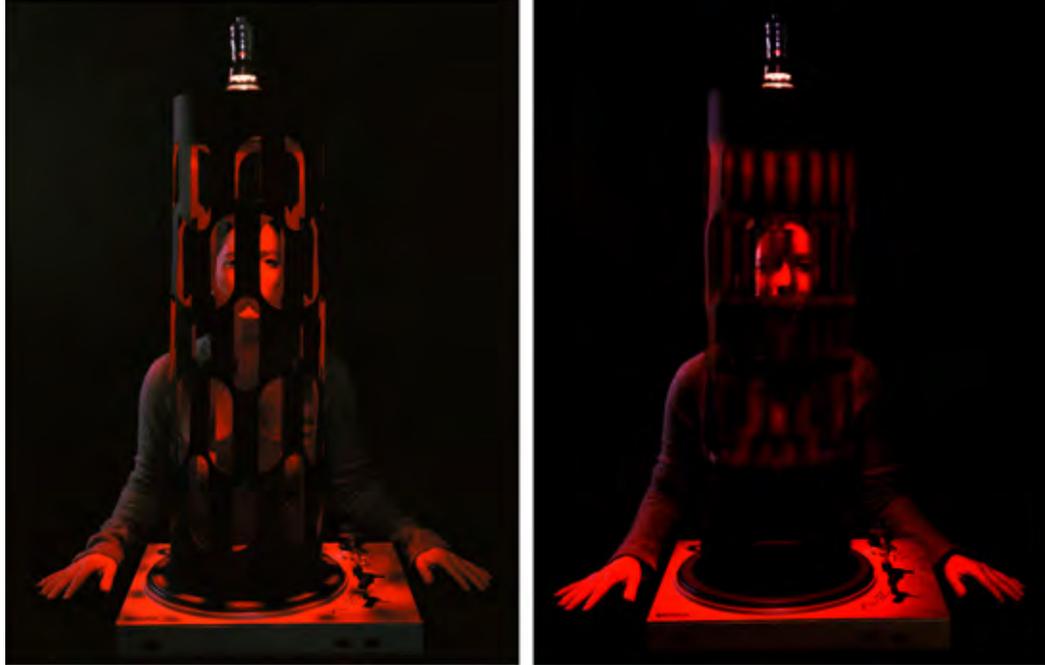
## **Statement**

Searching, misrepresentation, failure, and our troubled relationship to the natural world are components of my work. For this reason, living at Monet's garden on a residency in Giverny a number of years ago had a tremendous impact on me. Recognizing the garden as a giant tableaux staged by a painter, I decided to take the discarded flowers and create still life images in the studio, as a response to the challenge of making an original photograph of the most photographed garden in the world. On my route to the garden, I would pass through the tool shed, which had shadows painted on the wall to designate where each tool should be hung. More often than not, the tools would be hung upon the wrong shadow. It struck me as a perfect example of a failed system. This image prompted me to draw the shadows of flowers and plants clipped in the garden. I started out by photographing the flower against a misaligned shadow drawing, but eventually the shadow drawings grew more elaborate. Because they are made from projected light, they look like a photogram. I view them as a send-up of Henry Fox Talbot's "Pencil of Nature." They appear to be a mirror of the original but are in fact produced by my own hand. Eventually, I ventured back outside of the studio, photographing trees that I then misaligned. The diptychs (*Two Trees, After the Storm*) refer back to the shadow – a shadow is at once nothing and a double of something.

I usually work on a few projects at once, so at the same time I was working with still subjects, I was making pictures that responded to a trend I'd recognized, of an increasing number of secular outlets

for seekers of the spiritual. I called the project "The Searchers," and I photographed people in various altered states. For the first time I used myself as a model in my pictures (Untitled (A self-portrait as a member of Heaven's Gate), Dream Machine, Self-portrait as a Shaman). I wanted to locate my own connection to the desire for a transcendental experience. Recently, I have used photographs of airplanes (9 Planes, 5 Unrealized) to engage my interest in the sublime and failed utopias. Although they deal with the subject of representation, they are also deeply personal.

In 1996 I was in a crash landing and have since only known air travel as an experience of unspeakable fear. The pictures appropriate painted images of airplanes mostly from the 60s and 70s. When I exhibited them, they were shown with the images you see here – misrepresented shadows, fallen trees, and dreamlike quests for enlightenment. They represent a conflict between a fantasy of escape and a loss of control. Sigmar Polke asked: "Does meaning create relationships or do relationships create meaning?" I hope to pose this question and create a task of decoding for the viewer, by showing a broader range of work rather than a single series.



*The Dream Machine, 2007*



*Self-Portrait as a Shaman, 2007*

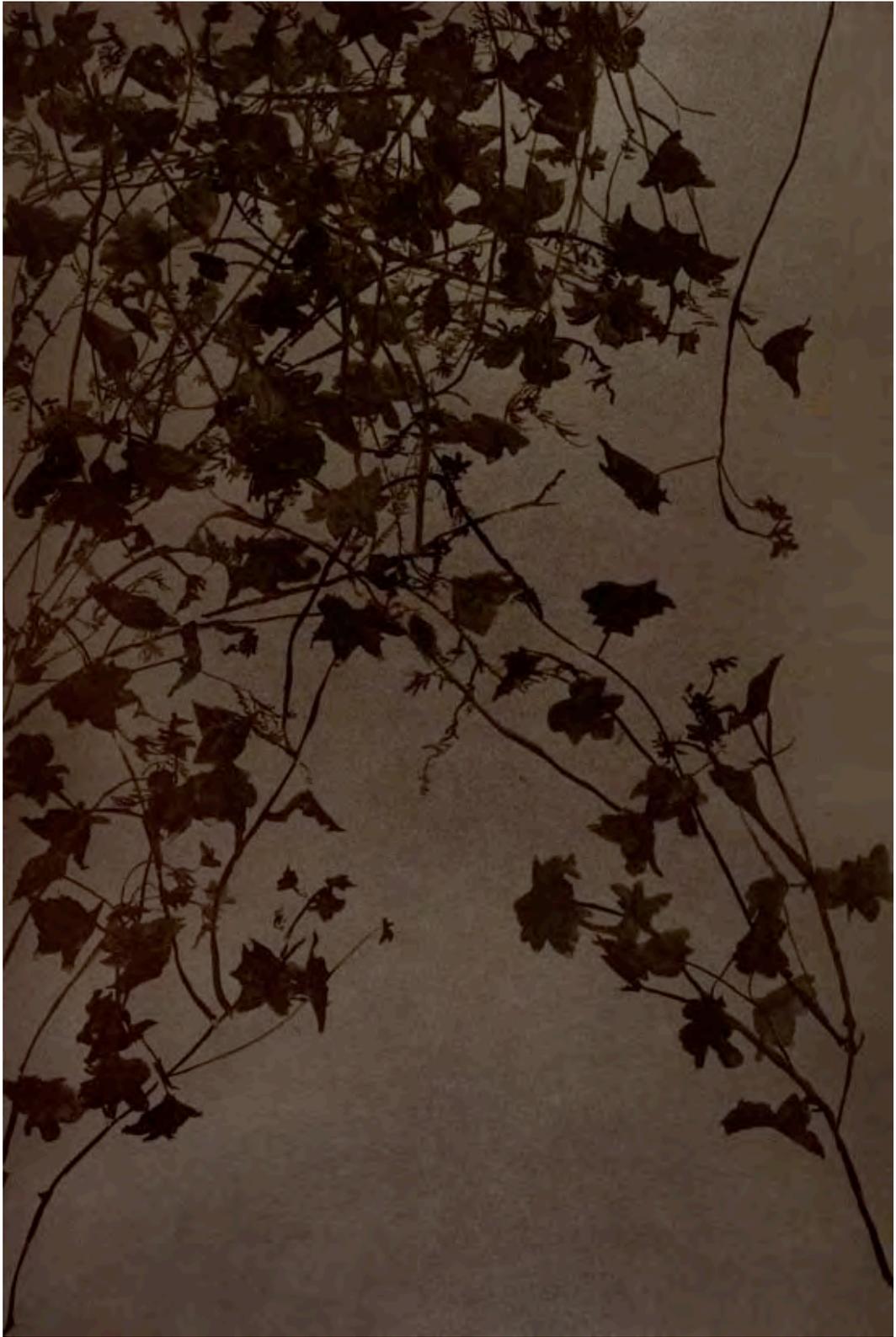


*Untitled, 2007*

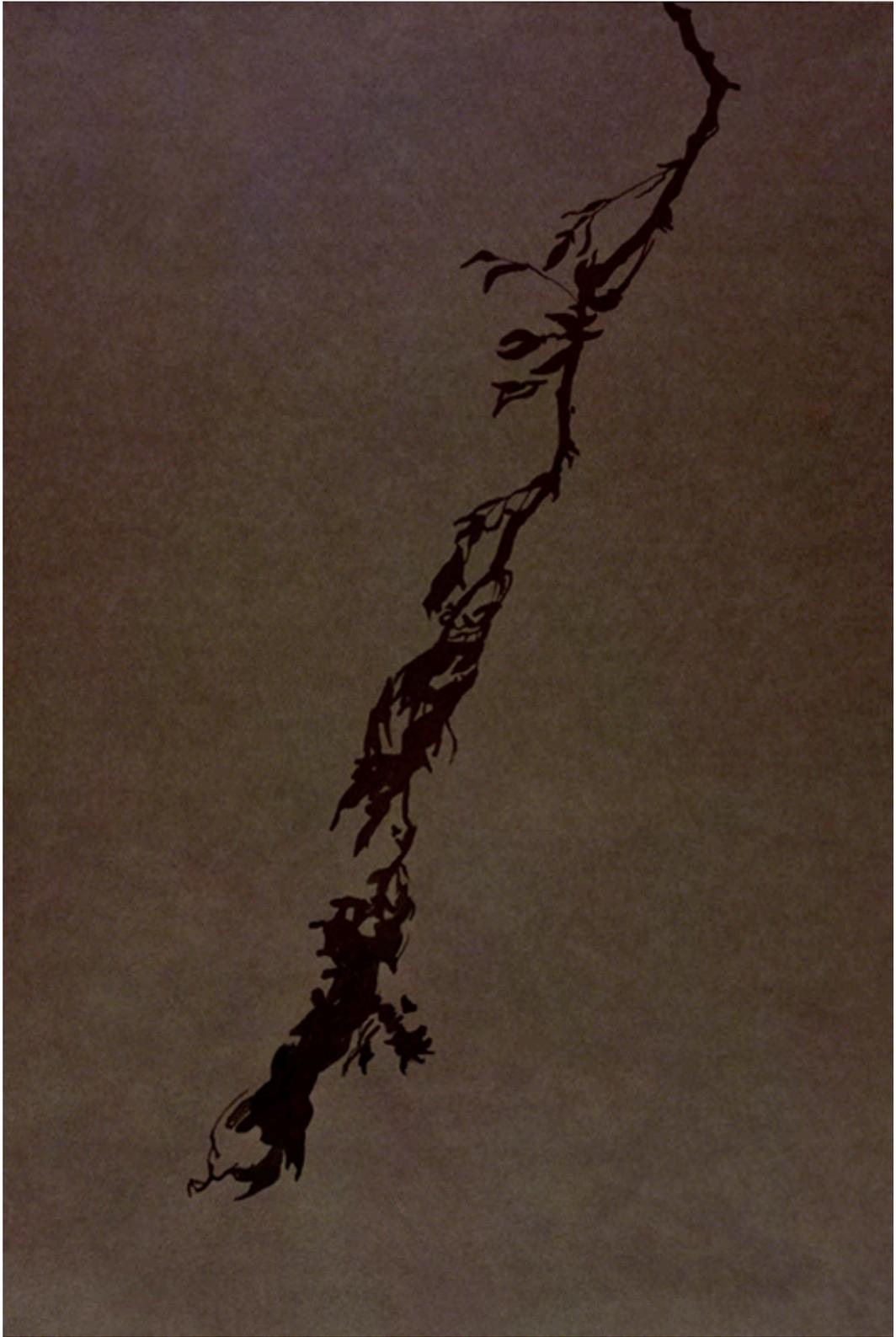




*After the Storm (Diptych), 2007*



*Untitled #1 (Shadow), 2007*



*Untitled #6 (Shadow), 2007*

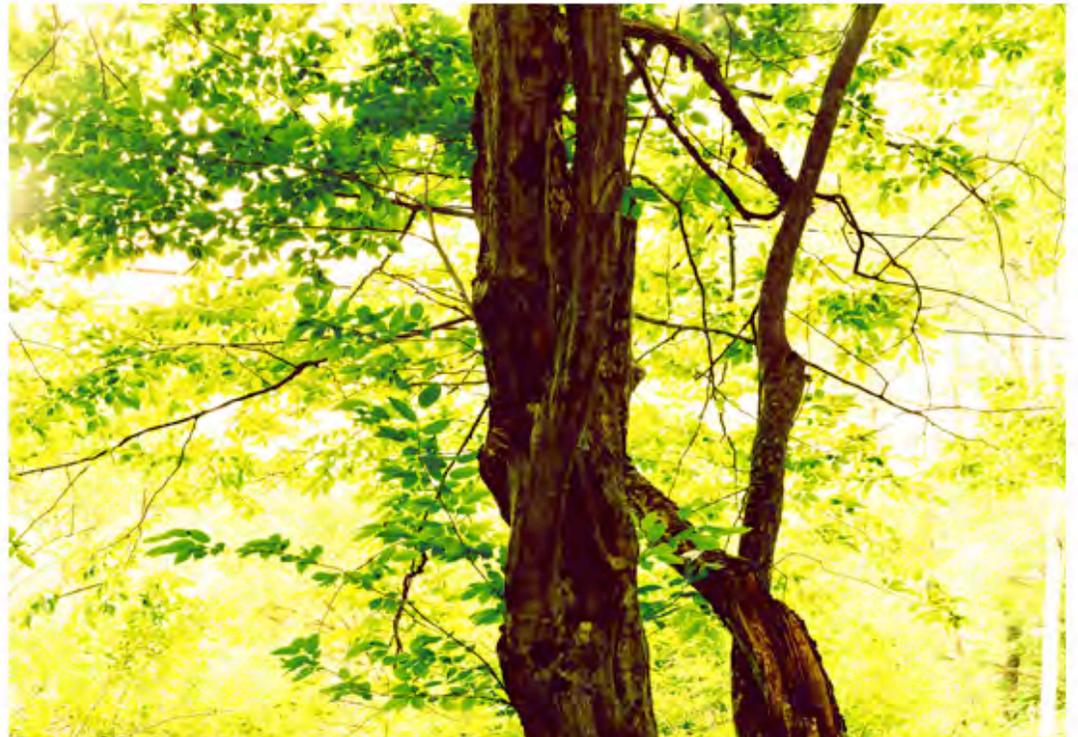


*Untitled #41, 2007*



*Untitled #43, 2007*







*Two Tress (Diptych), 2007*

## **Bio**

Miranda

Lichtenstein received her MFA from the California Institute of the Arts. She has exhibited in numerous museums and galleries in the U.S. and abroad, including the UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, New York; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; the Renaissance Society, Chicago; the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C; Stadthaus Ulm, Germany; Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York; Gallery Min Min, Tokyo; and Mary Goldman Gallery, Los Angeles. She was a recipient of The Giverny Residency Program and Fellowship, Claude Monet Foundation, Giverny, France. Lichtenstein lives and works in New York. [www.elizabethdeegallery.com](http://www.elizabethdeegallery.com)

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Art F City (<http://artfcity.com>)

## Untitled

by Miranda Lichtenstein (<http://artfcity.com/author/miranda-lichtenstein/>) on [August 13, 2008 \(2008-08-13\)](http://artfcity.com/2008/08/13/) · 0 comments (<http://artfcity.com/2008/08/13/img-mgmt-untitled/#comments>) [IMG MGMT](http://artfcity.com/category/img-mgmt/) (<http://artfcity.com/category/img-mgmt/>)

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Peruvian Shamans surround a photo of JFK Jr. and Caroline Bessette Kennedy

[Editors note: [IMG MGMT](http://www.artfcity.com/2008/07/20/upcoming-img-mgmt-an-image-essay-series-by-contemporary-artists/) (<http://www.artfcity.com/2008/07/20/upcoming-img-mgmt-an-image-essay-series-by-contemporary-artists/>) is an artist essay series highlighting the diversity of curatorial processes within the art making practice. Today's invited artist, Miranda Lichtenstein, shows at Elizabeth Dee Gallery (<http://www.elizabethdeegallery.com/>). Her exhibition at Gallery Min Min (<http://www.galleryminmin.com/index.html>), Tokyo will open January 13th, 2009.]



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Weegee, *Couple in Voodoo Trance*, ca. 1956,



([http://static.artfagcity.com/wordpress\\_core/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/blumenfeld-facesfinal.jpg](http://static.artfagcity.com/wordpress_core/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/blumenfeld-facesfinal.jpg))

*Erwin Blumenfeld, ca. 1948*



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*Ganzfeld Experiment*



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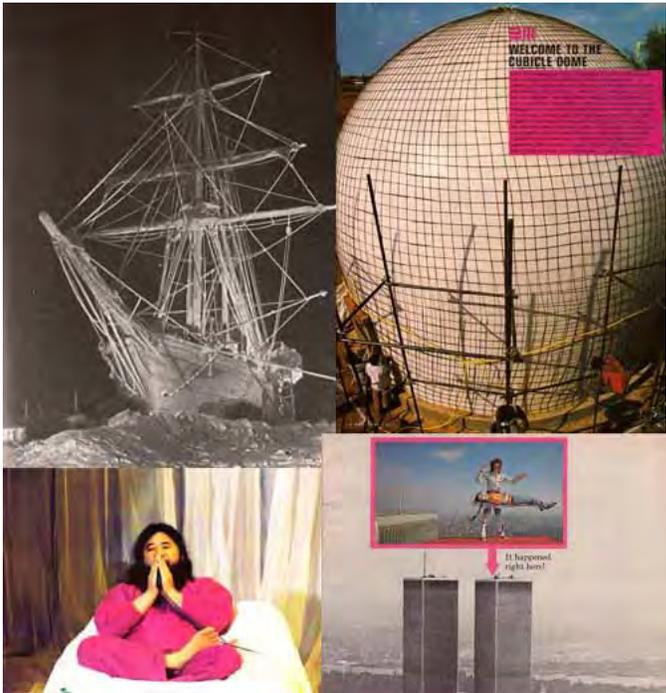
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Heaven's Gate member, 1997



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Andrea Mantegna, *Dead Christ*, ca. 1480



([http://static.artfagcity.com/wordpress\\_core/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/collage.jpg](http://static.artfagcity.com/wordpress_core/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/collage.jpg))

Clockwise from top left: Shackleton's Endurance, New Oroville, Shinrikiyo Aum, DougHenning



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From *Dancing with Cats*



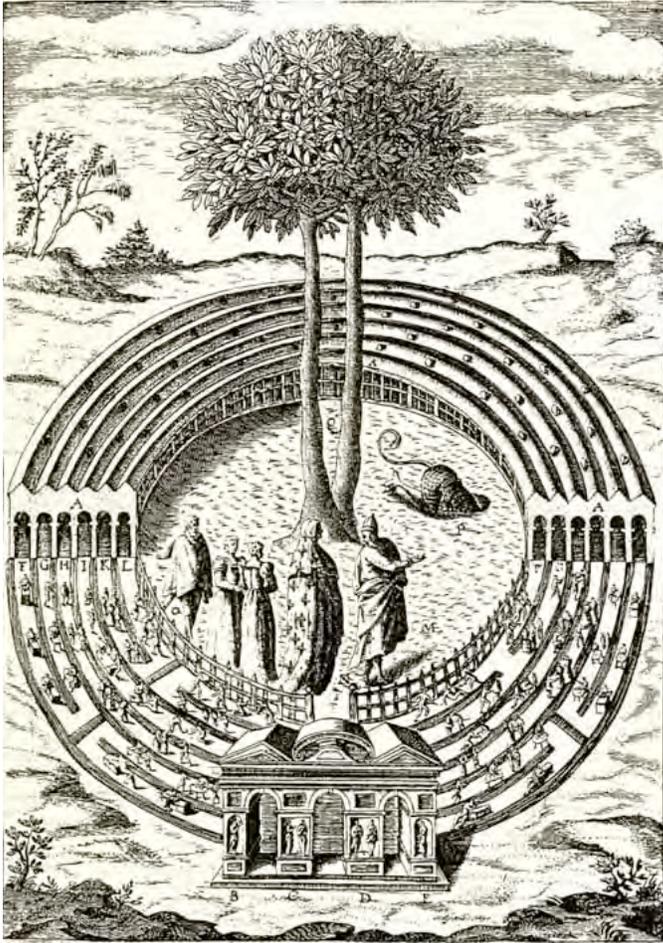
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Maurice Denis, *Ladder in the leaves*, 1892



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Still from *Picnic at Hanging Rock*



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*The Labyrinth of Avarice*



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**Nino Mascardi**, still from *Satyricon*



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**Carlton E. Watkins**, *The Yosemite Falls*, ca.1865



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**From left to right:** Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Dr. Ralph Metzner, 1966



([http://static.artfagcity.com/wordpress\\_core/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/manonwirefinal.jpg](http://static.artfagcity.com/wordpress_core/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/manonwirefinal.jpg))

Still from *Man on Wire*



([http://static.artfagcity.com/wordpress\\_core/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/handandduncanfinal.jpg](http://static.artfagcity.com/wordpress_core/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/handandduncanfinal.jpg))

**From left to right:** Amelia Earhart's handprint (1933), Isadora Duncan double exposure

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# 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-lives 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.

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.



**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.

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

## '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](http://www.hammer.ucla.edu)

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

TALK BACK (0 messages)



*Shaman, 2005.*

# ARTFORUM

SEPTEMBER 2005

I N T E R N A T I O N A L



Miranda Lichtenstein, *Untitled*, 2005, color photograph, 10% x 13%.

## 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.

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,



**Miranda Lichtenstein, Floater, 2004.**

*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

# 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 in-

terested 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*

### ART

50 Don't miss...

50 Museums & Institutions

51 Fluxus retrospective

53 Galleries

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# AROUND THE GALLERIES

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By **HOLLY MYERS**  
*Special to The Times*

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## 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.

# NEW YORK The Sun

K CITY

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2003

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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

OCT. 27, 2003

# THE NEW YORKER



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## 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

contemporaryart

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 prom-

ised 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.

# Art On Paper

June 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, twilight 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

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



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

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

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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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# artext

THE World FROM L.A.

*Cigarette girl Valie Export plays head games with  
VIENNESE ACTIONISTS*

*SIGMUND FREUD takes the rap for yet another Nightmare on Elm Street*

*Peter Lunenfeld eyes info Design post-net*

*Norman Bryson on Sharon Lockhart's  
Teatro Amazonas*

*Haluk AKAKÇE braves the world of ornamental,  
future-garden blemishes & weird Lady of Shallot-like illusions of decay*

*Tim Griffin conjures new art's INTANGIBLE & ECONOMY*



by MALIK GAINES

MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN:  
*Scenes from Lovers' Lane*

Suddenly, there's a slew of young photographers, all rather photographic 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 onerous 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 prearranged 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 unangling ivy. For the sake of investigation, let us, nevertheless, try. Take, for example, *Untitled #6 (Bennett 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 synecopation, 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 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 *Noferatu* 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 consis-

tently 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 canon 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). Valerie 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.

# the village VOICE FREE

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❖ **MIRANDA LICHTENSTEIN:**

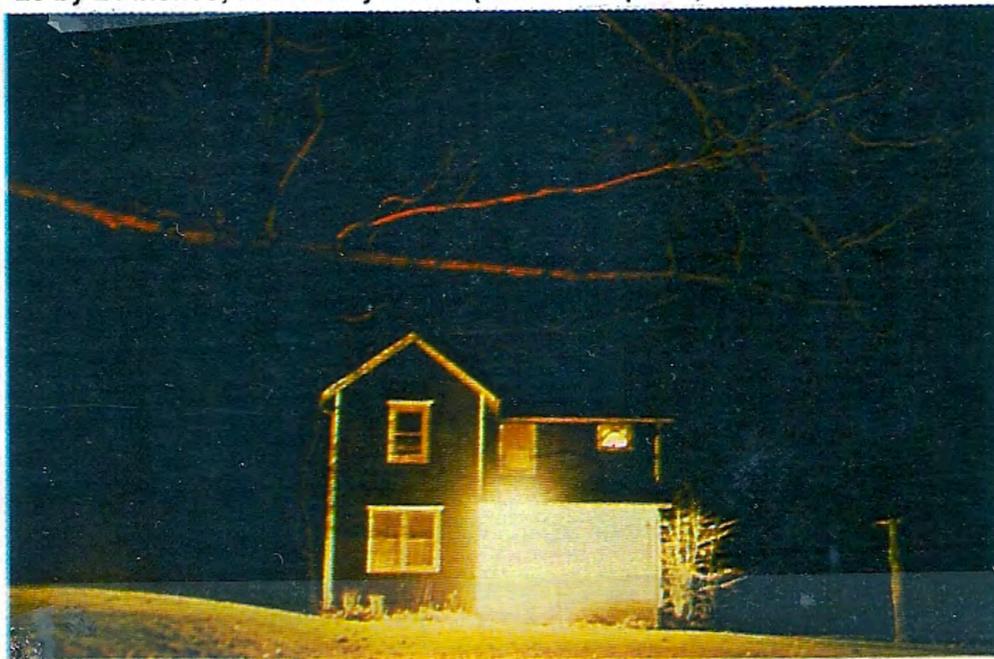
Lichtenstein's color photos of suburban houses or streets at night are long exposures made with available light, including the headlights and taillights of her car. The effect is often pure haunted house—a big clapboard affair so flooded by lights that its shadows are terrifying—but she's also capable 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.

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# 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

# ARTFORUM

MAY 1999 \$7.00

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## REVIEWS

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

### 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



Manuel Neri, *Untitled II*, 1998,  
marble, 81 1/2 x 25 x 16 1/2".



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

of large-scale night photographs of mostly upscale suburban Connecticut dwellings, reminded me of those Bat forums. 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 *Colmes*. Otnes's imaginings of phantoms, angels, and other apparitions also seem to bear an oblique relation to today's fixation with the paranormal.