

photograph

Helfand, Glen. "Feature," *Photograph Magazine*, July/August 2019: 32-37.



Sara VanDerBeek, *Roman Woman XVII*, 2019.

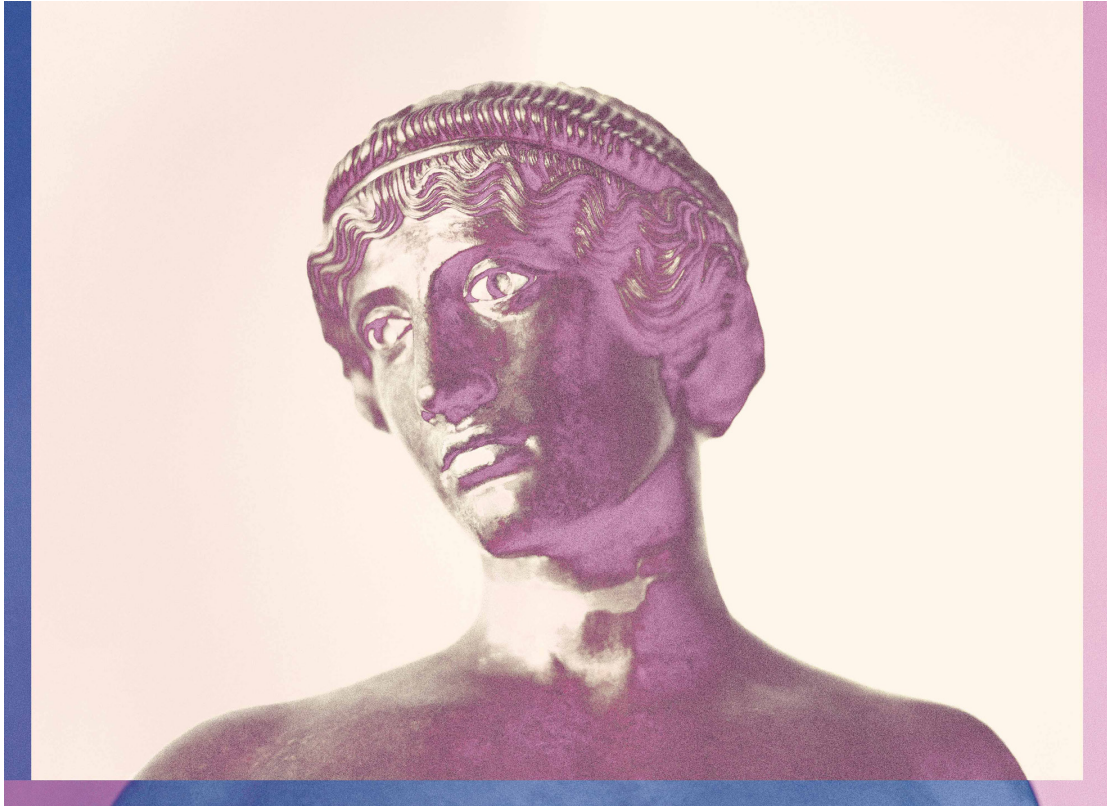
As the divisions between mediums increasingly blur, and museums move towards less hierarchical department models, artists' allegiance to one way of making art is becoming similarly elastic. Three notable shows in Northern California this summer provide examples of how sculpture, and the idea of sculpture, are explored in photo-based work: Erin Shirreff, Sara VanDerBeek, and Catherine Wagner each make photo-based art and objects that are deeply informed by sculptural concerns. All three artists create images and objects that explore art history, art, and its circulation and reception.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Sara VanDerBeek, *Roman Woman XVIII*, 2019.

Sara VanDerBeek, whose recent work is on view at Altman Siegel in San Francisco through August 31, also engages in a dialogue with photography and sculpture. She cuts, grafts, tints, and superimposes elements within her photographs to address the complexity of dimensionality. Like Shirreff's work, VanDerBeek's photographic work has often included images of sculptures of her own making. Early on, in works shown at Altman Siegel in 2010, she built totemic sculptures that brought to mind tall, vertical works by Brancusi (noted as well for the photographs he took of his 3D pieces), but also architectural decoration. Some were photographed, others displayed in the gallery.

More recently VanDerBeek has turned her eye to museological objects, particularly ones related to women – Greek and Roman statuary, vessels, and textiles that she mines from museum archives. This exploration, fostered by a 2012 residency at Fondazione Memmo in Rome, is evident in her *Women & Museums* exhibition, on view through July 28 at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, which includes her own work along with resonant objects and photographs she selected from the museum's archives, with an eye to representations of women and their cultural power.

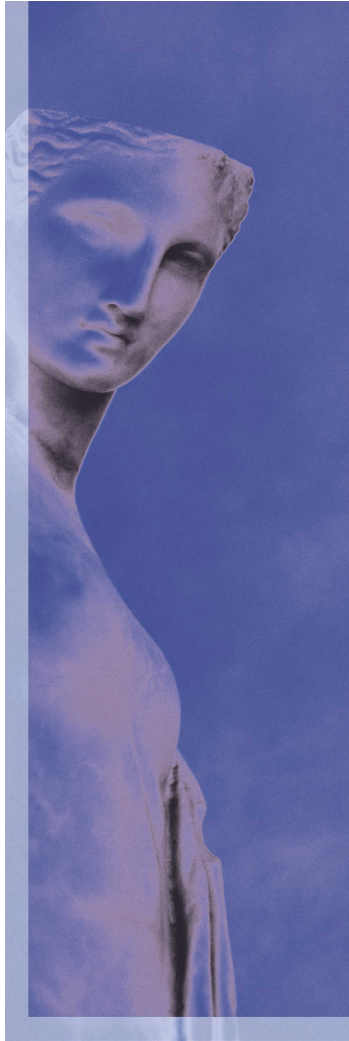
In an artist statement for the exhibition, VanDerBeek wrote eloquently of her process: "I approach most objects with an earnest reverence and am often entranced by the object as I am photographing it." After shooting many frames of film to get every possible angle of the object, she adds, she composes the final image, "with an aim to connect divergent forms and views in which to present a multiplicity of cultural and temporal perspectives."

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Sara VanDerBeek, *Roman Woman X*, 2019.

VanDerBeek then engages in acts of “mediation, cutting and cropping” that result in images in which the subjects’ colors are adjusted to take on preternatural tints and prints that can take geometric shapes beyond the square – works arrived at through Photoshop layering and a lot of color manipulation (she gives credit to her printer, Julie Pochron, with whom she works closely). For example, the dye-sublimation print, *Women & Museums*, 2019, features multiple images, including, in the lower left, one of a pale marble figurative sculpture that takes on a subtle lavender tone. This cropped image contrasts with two separate repeating images of a circular ceramic vessel tweaked to an otherworldly ultramarine. She describes her approach to color as “complex and somewhat alchemical in nature.” For works like the aforementioned, VanDerBeek was inspired by the original polychromatic state of now-pristine white Greek sculptures. The idea that so many ancient forms were polychromed, but faded over the centuries alludes to the way that photographs promise to preserve the memory of objects past. The unique, fugitive color tones of Polaroids, which many museum archives use to document objects in storage, have also inspired her approach to color, which she says is “about emotional state.”