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VanDerBeek's conundrums

By Kenneth Baker
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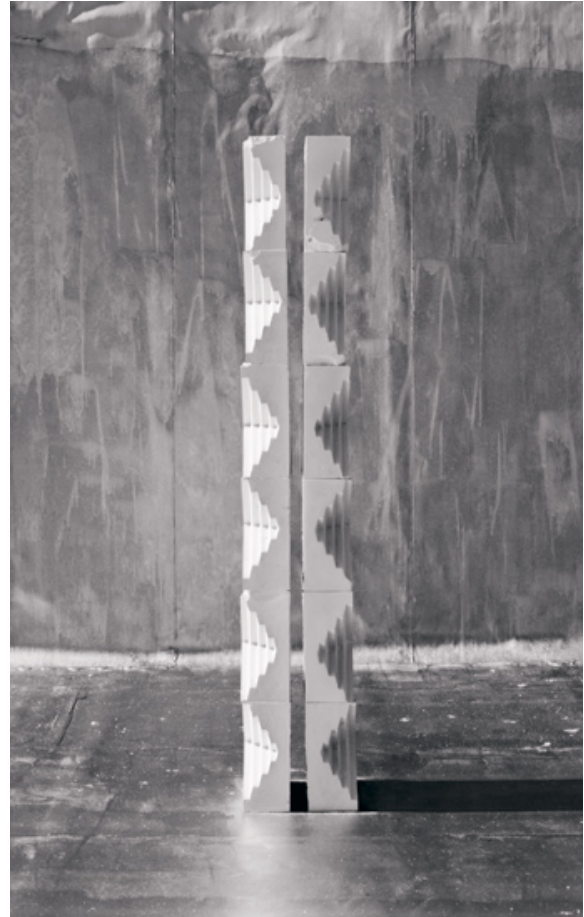
In recent pictures at Altman Siegel, New Yorker Sara VanDerBeek sharpens the viewer's eye for photographic information by undermining trust in it.

The double columns of abstract sculpture in "Caryatid II" (2010) at first looks about the size of the 6-foot-tall print itself. But study more closely the light and shadow in the picture, the details of the surfaces behind and beneath the object, and its presence turns from that of a monument to that of a miniature, as if carved from sugar cubes.

In fact, VanDerBeek makes sculptures of various sizes and materials merely to serve as subjects for her camera.

The ambiguity of "Caryatid II" and others has the effect of making full-scale realities, such as those in "Treme School Window" (2010), look simulated and diminished. VanDerBeek brings to the surface a sort of unconscious cross-referencing that informs our reading of photographic images, no matter what we tell ourselves about their veracity.

Sara VanDerBeek: Of Ruins and Light:
Photographs. Through Dec. 23. Altman Siegel
Gallery, 49 Geary St., S.F. (415) 576-9300.
<http://www.altmansiegel.com>



"Caryatid II" (2010), C-print by Sara VanDerBeek, is part of her "Of Ruins and Light" show.

Photo: Sara VanDerBeek / Altman Siegel Gallery SF