

ARTFORUM

Churner, Rachel, "Sara VanDerBeek: Metro Pictures," *Artforum*, December 2016



View of "Sara VanDerBeek," 2016. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

Sara VanDerBeek

METRO PICTURES

"Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms" may have marked the first exhibition Sara VanDerBeek has explicitly devoted to her research on textiles, but the metaphor of weaving has shaped her practice for the past decade. The seductive C-prints that were on view in the show, most often images of objects built specifically for the camera, deftly interlace image and object, analogue and digital technologies, historical precedents and contemporary production, and easily consumed beauty and labored research. Even as the sense of transgression that may have once motivated such combinations has waned—we are, after all, accustomed to a simultaneity of categories that may once have been oppositional but no longer function as such, just as we are comfortable with photos shot on film and printed digitally, just as we know that pretty things can also be smart—we are still entranced, and maybe even consoled, by the optimism inherent to such an inclusive project.

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Big and bright, the C-prints traffic in pattern and repetition, doubling the image of a chevron to form a diptych with tonal inversions or sandwiching multiple photographs within a single frame. With a range of pinks and purples, from salmon to fuchsia to lilac to aubergine, the photographs skirt the threshold of the saccharine, but their hard edges and crisp lines keep them from crossing over.

The cold perfection of the images kept the body at bay, but the collection of sculptures in the gallery's back room encouraged a more intimate viewing experience. More than a dozen columns, nested cubes, stacked shapes, and cylinders filled the skylit gallery. (These objects are similar to the smaller-scale objects used in her photographs.) Swaths of printed fabric pierced the whiteness of these props. Near the space's entrance, a rectangular block lay on the floor, wrapped in a length of fabric diaphanous enough that the white color of the encased pillar seeped through the blues and purples of the printed design. Elsewhere, fabric was stretched across an L-shaped form, reiterating the object's physical shape with its pattern of lilac and mauve right angles. These subtle interventions had a welcome and unexpected freshness, and countered the referential density of the sculptures, which, like the photographs, could come across as overdetermined. Constantin Brancusi and Robert Morris leapt readily to mind, yet the artist's allusions to many other figures and traditions—from pre-Columbian textiles to the American quilting tradition and the Bauhaus weaving workshop—were hardly apparent at all.

Two smaller wrapped sculptures stole the show. In the best one, a sheet of pink diagonal stripes was loosely and gingerly draped around an object. Here, too, were careful allusions to modernist icons (Man Ray's *Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, 1920, is only the most obvious). The irregular folds contrasted starkly with the taut flawlessness of the photographs, yet the point was not to highlight once again the difference between the photographic image and physical object, nor to remind us of the ways in which they have long been intertwined; rather, VanDerBeek is saying something about the unattainability of perfection. Setting the hidden moment aside the elucidated one, the artist has, to our good fortune, managed to find new material for her loom.

—*Rachel Churner*