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SARA VANDERBEEK

The conceptual photographer Sara VanDerBeek is known for exploring the relationships between image and object. In earlier works she created sculptural forms that she photographed and then destroyed. She has since moved on to photographing objects in American and European museums, with a focus on artworks and artefacts relating to the female form. 'I wanted to explore figures that are already iconographic,' VanDerBeek told *Aperture* magazine in 2013. 'Although they are three-dimensional, I think of them almost as images.' Through composition, style and scale, her photographs place these historical works in the contemporary image space of the endless scroll. Her work is collage-like in its joining and overlapping of separate images and temporalities, and in its fusion of analogue and digital technologies.

To make her works, VanDerBeek first uses a camera with medium-format roll film and the existing light in a space. She circles each sculpture, carefully capturing all perspectives until she feels she has documented the whole. In the studio, she then digitally edits her images, combining different objects together and manipulating the colours – which are further enhanced through her use of a digital printing process called dye sublimation. She has a fondness for dusk-like hues, which give the figures an otherworldly quality, as seen in works such as the 'Women & Museums' series (2019). *Women & Museums IV* (2019) depicts the mask of a young woman used in Noh, a traditional form of Japanese theatre that dates back to the fourteenth century. Two-thirds of the work show the mask from slightly below, while the other third shows only a slice of the mask – its eye – from slightly above. Here VanDerBeek is adopting the techniques of Noh actors, who tilt the mask up or down to lighten or sadden its famously ambiguous expression. 'The series,' she explained to the *British Journal of Photography* in 2019, 'presents the roles and representations of women as a continuum that is fluid and evolving.' *Future Variations II* (2021) belongs to a development in the artist's practice, in which she presents her photographs as suspended kinetic sculptures. The work is composed of two independent panels that together depict a female torso. Each panel is printed on both sides and hangs from the ceiling by a thread. This presentation allows the viewer to walk around the work as they would the sculpture it depicts. The panels move according to air currents in the gallery – twisting and twirling, and sometimes aligning. The viewer's perception and understanding of the work moves with it, shifting between two dimensions and three dimensions – a single piece or a pair of photographs, a collage of overlapping images that are animated not on a screen, but in real space and time.

EDMEE LEPERCQ

Born 1976, Baltimore, Maryland, USA. Lives in New York, USA.

↑ Future Variations II, 2021, two-sided dye sublimation prints, each: 121.9 × 47 cm (48 × 18 ½ in)
→ Women & Museums IV, 2019, dye sublimation print, 243.8 × 121.9 cm (96 × 48 in); private collect
→→ Women & Museums I, 2019, dye sublimation print, 243.8 × 121.9 cm (96 × 48 in)

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THE BROOKLYN RAIL

"Sara VanDerBeek with Toby Kamps," *Artnet News*, May 2023

Art | In Conversation

Sara VanDerBeek with Toby Kamps

Portrait of Sara VanDerBeek. Pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui

At the heart of Sara VanDerBeek's two-dimensional and installation-based work is a fascination with photography's power as a form of mediation—between past and present, original and reproduction, and perception and thought. Her latest exhibition *Lace Interlace* at The Approach in London draws on her research into the work of early British photographers Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–79) and Isabel Agnes Cowper (1826–1911) at that city's Victoria and Albert Museum. Cowper was the museum's first female in-house photographer, creating its famous "guard books" featuring comprehensive collections of everything in the collection and was known for her skill in documenting lacework, which was a dying art at the onset of the industrial revolution. Cameron was famous for her soft-focus, romantic portraits of women, including Julia Jackson Stephen, mother of writer Virginia Woolf and painter Vanessa Bell.

ON VIEW
The Approach
Lace Interlace
April 21 – May 27, 2023
London

Using digital, film, and mobile-phone cameras, as well as new ultraviolet-light printing technologies, VanDerBeek creates wall-mounted and freestanding photographic works that synthesize the technological and thematic visions of these two pioneering photographers. Mounted in frames and mats recalling both Victorian and museum storage racks, the layered, intricate images, manipulated and straight, reward slow, close study. In them, it is possible to connect photography's earliest days to our current, screen-based era.

The Garden, a pendant exhibition organized by VanDerBeek, features her own work alongside that of three recently deceased artists whom she counts as inspirations. The theme of the garden, as a space for both reflection and creation, unites a photograph by Sarah Charlesworth, a video by Shigeko Kubota, and a drawing by Rosemary Mayer.

Installation view: *Sara VanDerBeek: Lace Interlace*, The Approach, London, 2023. Courtesy the artist and The Approach, London. Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

Toby Kamps (Rail): What do you say to people when they ask you what you do as an artist and as a photographer?

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Sara VanDerBeek: I have increasingly begun to describe myself as an intermedia artist. In my most recent works I've been exploring bridging still and moving images, installation practices and design. My new exhibition *Lace Interlace* at The Approach, in London, combines freestanding sculptural components that incorporate photographic works and wall-based photographic assemblages that reference architecture, design, and both analog and digital interfaces. My practice is still very much centered around photographic capture and a consideration of photography's role in collective perception, memory, and knowledge. I find the way that photography collapses space, time, and experience into an image to be fascinatingly complex and in need of further research and discourse given its increasingly significant role in our lives.

Rail: How would you describe the atmosphere you create in your exhibitions, which are really installations in and of themselves and often contain sculptural forms, freestanding two-sided images and, occasionally, moving elements?

VanDerBeek: I believe the physical experience of viewing art is very important. This gets complicated with photography because it is so screen-based. The elasticity and power of the photo-based image is incredible.

I'm accustomed to thinking about an image's production in relation to my original experience of its creation and that is giving way to a more combinatorial approach in which I'm creating a pictorial space independent from any sense of original scale, color, or space. Color is important for me. It can create a tone or atmosphere that can unify sometimes disconnected images. My color is influenced by the blue light of screens and the transitional light of dusk, a transformational time in between day and night when shadows turn blue and the remaining light is golden or pink. Other colors and tones come from working a lot with the found light where I'm photographing during the initial research process. That can be daylight, or, the existing lights at a site such as various museum settings that have a mixture of daylight and artificial, display light. This combination can create an intermix of colors that I manipulate during the printing process in collaboration wtih Julie Pochron, of Pochron Studios, an incredible artist and master colorist.

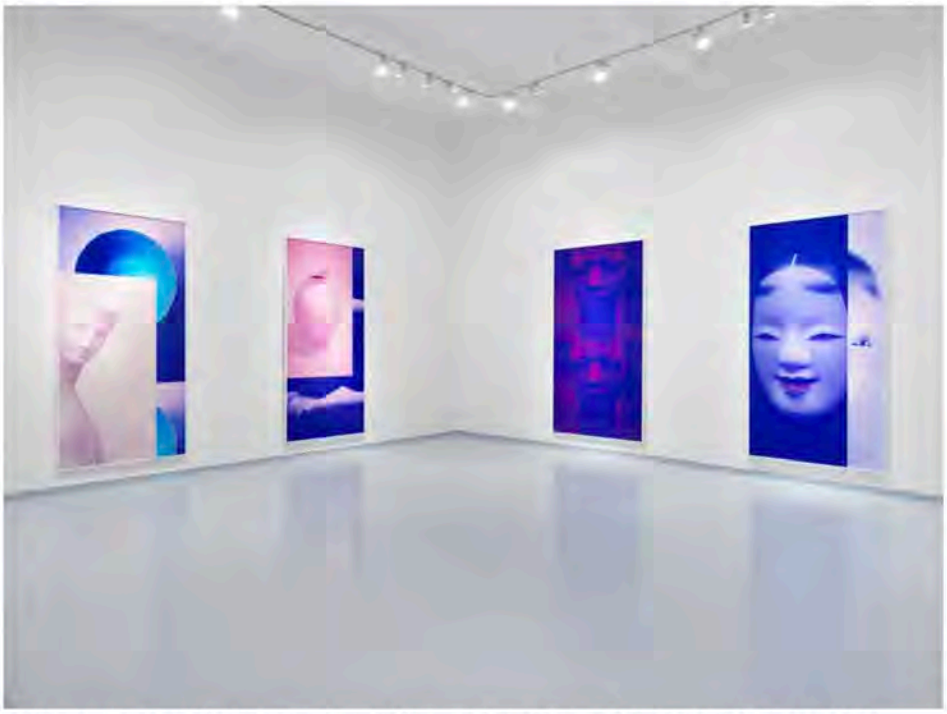
Rail: Can you talk about your journey to becoming an intermedia artist and how that might connect to your family's artistic heritage? Your father, Stan VanDerBeek, was an important experimental filmmaker and multimedia artist; he coined the term "expanded cinema." Your brother Johannes is an artist.

VanDerBeek: I feel grateful and privileged to come from a family that respects art, as a professional endeavor, and one that also believes being an artist comes with a civic responsibility. I also need to emphasize my mother, Louise VanDerBeek's role in my development as an artist because, after my father died when I was seven, my mother, along with his first wife Johanna, was a great carrier of his artistic legacy. My mother was the one that encouraged me to pursue creative endeavors at a young age, in dance and art, and to go to Cooper Union, where I studied and where my father and my brother Johannes also studied.

Rail: Can you talk about the evolution of your new work, *Lace Interlace*?

VanDerBeek: *Lace Interlace* builds off my recent series "Women & Museums" and the kinetic works that I've been exhibiting recently. The kinetic works very much connect to an interest in the ephemerality of dance and performance as an embodied experience. The relationship of performance to the camera's record of it is of particular interest. I am continually working through how that can be reimagined and realized via the creation of works that operate as both form, image and installation. *Lace Interlace* also reaches back to ideas in some of my first works in which I was using artifacts from my family home and images from my family's archive. These new works strive to interweave both the personal and the historical, the institutional, and the ephemeral.

During the development of this new work, I lost my mother. This experience brought forward many older memories of navigating the loss of my father and other important people in my life as a child and younger adult. In this it brought back a consideration of the complex interrelationship of photography and memory and the memorial use of photographic images. Given the collective loss of life during this ongoing pandemic, I have also been thinking about collective memory and its preservation in all its forms.



Installation view: *Sara VanDerBeek: Women & Museums*, Metro Pictures, New York, 2019. Courtesy Metro Pictures. Photo: Genevieve Hansen.

Rail: Was your mother an artist?

VanDerBeek: She was. She also had progressive MS and was a single mother of young children after my father died, so she returned to school and pursued a Master's degree in Instructional system design—early online education. Additionally, she began to lose the ability to live independently, becoming wheelchair-bound in her fifties.

It's challenging at times for me to discuss this significant personal loss but I feel it's important to be open about grief and its role in my work. In the end, though, my new work as it evolves is centering around women, some known and many unknown and their ongoing engagements with emergent technologies from the beginnings of the modern period and on to now.

I feel we're in a situation parallel to the Victorians—a moment in which we're grappling with technology's increasing role within our lives, yet also completely enraptured and influenced by it. The body and the machine are more and more intertwined. And when I think about the body and the machine, I think about my mother, who needed the support of machines to

live and towards the end of her life to stay alive. My sense of the cyborg as a meeting of the body and the machine shifted during my experience of her hospice, from the theoretical remove of art school discussions to a poignant and very personal experience of both appreciation and pathos.

Rail: You've said that you feel an ethical responsibility in your work with the photographic images, moving and still, especially in our screen-based era. And I wonder if you could also trace that back to your mother and father?

VanDerBeek: Yes, it came from my family. It came from our discussions about the responsibilities of the artist. My father very much believed in creating a new, shared visual non-verbal language. That's a significant part of the "Cultural Intercom," which is his manifesto connected to his *Movie-Drome*. It reflected his belief in the importance of artists engaging with technology and with the public, creating a new space for feedback. Today, questions of the ethics of the image continually come up for me, especially when I am dealing with images of the body, which I've begun to use again after working with abstraction for several years. The ethics of image usage of other artist's works in my work is also something I am returning to with this new work.

Rail: Early on, you made sculptures in order to photograph them, and then you would dismantle or reconfigure them and re-use them or throw them away. These were architectural shapes or environments that later started to become actual physical presences in your installations. More recently, you've been photographing works of art from antiquity, from non-Western cultures, or from anonymous or underrecognized makers, such as avant-garde ceramics. Can you talk about that arc from shooting your own creations to something like a Cycladic figurine from four thousand years ago?

VanDerBeek: I returned to looking at these figurative works of art and at encyclopedic museum collections as a form of communion—both with these objects from the past and with the public. Museums are a kind of interstitial space. My relationship with something like a Cycladic figure, which I photographed at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford for my "Women & Museums" series, tries to account for thousands of years of difference and distance. What I think is quite interesting about that example, is that these types of figurines were often depicted in early stages of pregnancy, and they were often buried lying down. But in museums they're always displayed standing up. They were originally polychrome; they're now presented as

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minimal, pristine objects removed from their spiritual use, their original polychromy, and their burial sites. All of these questions around the complicated nature of women's societal roles, both as a symbol and as a shared body, came about in my research for "Women & Museums."

Additionally, "Women & Museums" was informed by the experience of having my child, Lee, and wanting to return to figurative work after experiencing a radical change in my relationship to my own body. I understood and continue to understand that I did not have primary experience with these ancient cultures, nor with the more contemporary indigenous North American, Asian, and African cultures whose artifacts I am also picturing in these works. I worked through a lot of my concerns about how to capture and depict these objects with curators and staff, in particular Juan Lucero, at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts where I initially created and presented "Women & Museums." I wanted to try to present the multiplicity of female experiences, which is why I included objects from different times and cultures. When possible, I also try to speak to the museum site and the way in which these objects were collected, housed, and displayed. I tried to bring forward, in the image's toning and composition, a sense that my compositions are an interpretation and a very personal and subjective view.

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Sara VanDerBeek, *Lace Interlace V*, 2023. UV Print on Plexiglas, Dye Sublimation Print mounted on Aluminium, Valchromat, Zinc Plated Steel. Diptych. Overall dimensions: 75 x 55 15/16 x 1 3/4 inches. Each screen: 75 x 27 x 1 1/2 inches. Courtesy the artist and The Approach, London. Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

Rail: It sounds like you're presenting a counterpoint to the museum gaze, which can be anonymizing, idealizing, or alienating. Do you think about the male gaze?

VanDerBeek: Not exactly, yet somehow I do connect the idea of "society" to a gendered view. But I don't know if I think about it in such binary terms. It's amorphous and changes over time. I do bring up gender and my sense of my own gender as a woman all the time. With the "Roman Woman" series that I showed in San Francisco at Altman Siegel, I began to explore the role of color in ancient sculpture. I pushed some of the colors in some of my images, based on certain fragments of pink and blue pigments that had remained on the original sculptures. Other images, I pushed the tones toward hot pinks and colors that I considered a nineties Day-Glo Body Glove palette. They were reminiscent of that moment in my life when I first began to feel that gaze on myself. When I began to be body-conscious and aware that my so-called worth as a member of this patriarchal society was being evaluated in relationship to how I looked as much as what I achieved or created. That was also when I began to experiment with makeup—with self-idealization and adornment. In 2020 and 2021 I used makeup and paint in some of my pieces to adorn and disrupt images of ancient female sculptures. Makeup is an ancient practice and one that was once shared amongst all. I am fascinated with the contemporary rise of beauty and makeup as a means for expression and self-realization during a time of great disassociation with our bodies due to technology.

Adornment in art and architecture became artifice and decoration in the twentieth century and was often denigrated and feminized as a lesser form of art. I'm happy that movements such as Pattern & Decoration and publications like *Heresies* are being made more and more accessible via exhibitions and the internet. They were very impactful during my research for this new work. Beauty is important to me as a means of engagement and resolution to a work but I know in my want for my work to be beautiful there is also an innate recognition of the want for a larger audience to engage with it. It's reciprocal, this social and individual gaze.

Rail: So some of your work is a manifestation of a sense memory.

VanDerBeek: Yes.

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Sara VanDerBeek, *Lace Interlace V*, (Detail) 2023. UV Print on Plexiglas, Dye Sublimation Print mounted on Aluminium, Valchromat, Zinc Plated Steel. Diptych. 75 x 55 15/16 x 1 3/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and The Approach, London. Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

Rail: I know that you were very close with Sarah Charlesworth and that she and the Pictures Generation artists were big influences for you. Can you talk about that?

VanDerBeek: Sarah is who I always think about when discussing beauty! I was just reading a book about Sarah this morning as preparation for writing about her work in *The Garden* exhibition that I organized to be presented concurrently with *Lace Interlace* at The Approach in their Annexe gallery. The book consists of forty different individuals creating a collective oral biography of Sarah, but it also has her voice in it. She speaks about her conversations with the photographer Lisette Model and the feedback she got from her when she was beginning to develop her own practice. I realized that she mentored me in a similar way, and I'm very grateful for it. I also always had the sense that Sarah was both of the Pictures Generation but then also outside it. She went on from doing her well-known "Objects of Desire" series to developing myriad different ways of working with photography. I really appreciated the fact that she was constantly searching for new ways of working, never staying in the same mode.

Rail: I see a similar restless energy in your work because you're always roving for ideas and adapting and changing things. Is that Sarah Charlesworth's legacy in your work?

VanDerBeek: Well, for me, I think it's less restlessness and more curiosity. Sarah would always talk about throwing ideas up against the wall—considering them deeply and then wanting to follow them through. The other thing I take—as something I aspire to—from Sarah is her generosity to those around her. I felt that in her work too. I think she was about using beauty effectively, and created images that were optically alluring or captivating, or visually vibrant and active, to bring the viewer in, to allow space for them to wonder and meditate on what this image was doing to them and how this act of picturing something impacts a viewer consciously and subconsciously.

Rail: Let's talk about the concept of an archive. You have gone around the world photographing works in the collections of art museums. You are one of the keepers of your father's archive. You also have a curatorial practice and worked for some time as a gallerist. So you have experience marshaling images and materials, not only in your own work but in public or research settings. What do you call your own collection of images, and how do you use it?

VanDerBeek: I'm definitely fascinated by archives but I don't give my own archive much care. I had an amazing experience recently as an Artist Research Fellow working in the Joseph Cornell papers, the Nam June Paik Archive at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the Lucy Lippard papers at the Archives of American Art. To see and work amongst these incredible collections created by these artists and art historians was a privilege and deeply inspiring.

I had a similar experience this summer when working with Erika Lederman and Lisa Springer at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. They opened up the museum's extensive photographic collection of early collection images by Isabel Agnes Cowper and portraits by Julia Margaret Cameron for me to research and photograph for *Lace Interlace*.

Rail: Your *Women & Museums* exhibition seemed drawn largely from your collection of photographs of works of art representing women that you made at museums around the world.

VanDerBeek: Yes, but I would say that it's a mixture of going back into some of my earlier images, like those I made during the residency I did with Fondazione Memmo in Rome in 2012, and then going again at the start of the project in 2018 to the National Archaeological Museum in Naples to re-photograph things specific to the new work. So, often, I'm creating entirely new images for these works rather than drawing from my archive.

Rail: Do you have a name for this store of your own images that we're talking about?

VanDerBeek: No, that's an interesting idea.

Rail: I imagine that using other people's art is hard because it comes with a responsibility to treat the original appropriately. There's also the pitfall that you might end up in an endless art-about-art-about-art corridor. How do you think through using another artist's creation—even one thousands of years old or anonymous—as a springboard for your work?

VanDerBeek: That was the interesting question I had with *Lace Interlace*. I was re-photographing photographs for the first time in a while. I have been photographing other artworks in the round in exhibition displays or in museum storerooms, but I hadn't done much re-photographing photographs since making my assemblages that were a mix of found imagery and objects. That's why Sarah Charlesworth came to mind a lot when I was working there

with the V&A's Cowper and Cameron images. I kept thinking about her and our conversations around the idea of appropriation, a term which neither of us liked. Its use always felt too general. Sarah created a number of works about early photography. So, she's been very present for me as I returned to working with what can feel like direct excerpts from someone else's photographic work. This feels more poignant now, not just in relationship to losing Sarah, but also as I think about other figures that have been influential to me and are no longer here.

Rail: At the Minneapolis Institute of Art, *Women & Museums* included many actual historic, three-dimensional works of art. It puts your work in conversation with the actual things from the museum's collection.

VanDerBeek: Yes. I loved that experience and learned a great deal from working with an exhibition designer for the first time. *Lace Interlace* relates to the images and the design strategies we used for that exhibition, including arranging the collection objects that were on view alongside my photographic works.

In many ways, I feel we've advanced tremendously, and in other ways the perspective and preoccupations of the nascent stages of photography that I am exploring in *Lace Interlace* remain very present now. I try to be conscientious about questions of intellectual property and copyright—things that protect the artist when using someone's else's images. But then I appreciate and want to convey in my use of other artist's works a reverence. There is a collective aspect to any art's realization. This feels particularly resonant in my personal relationship to photographic reproduction since it is often many different people working together with me to help me create my work. In turn I feel much of the media we experience today is created collectively. I think that sense of collaboration via quotation, and via collective realization should be embraced and celebrated.

Rail: Can we talk about the extraordinary atmospheres that you conjure in your work? You've spoken about the early twentieth-century German art historian Aby Warburg's idea of the Mnemosyne as being one of your influences. This is about creating an associative montage of works of art of related styles and themes across world cultures and different eras. He called the connections within these groupings a "Pathosformel"—or kind of a formulation of shared sensibilities. How do your recent kinetic works figure in this vision?

VanDerBeek: In my exhibition, *Chorus*, in 2021, at Altman Siegel Gallery, I had three kinetic pieces. They were double-sided dye sublimation prints, and they were hung from the ceiling. They were not mechanized. They would move in response to the air currents generated by the exhibition's viewers as they moved. And then they became participants in the intermedia performance work *Future Variations*, created in collaboration with Kamau Amu Patton, Alisha B. Wormsley, Jasmine Hearn and Miriam Parker. Miriam, an interdisciplinary artist, made them turn and spin via her dance movements around them, creating at times in the performance, a dynamic collage of image, motion and projection. That project, and *Chorus*, led me to the current free-standing screen works in *Lace Interlace*.

Rail: Can you tell me more about the relationship between these two projects?

VanDerBeek: Yes. *Chorus* involved looking at ancient bodies and forms of adornment. But instead of colorizing the images as I had done with *Roman Woman*, I applied paint and refractive pigments to the images. I was thinking about a bodily gesture, my own, being captured in the work—through the act of painting. I also cut the edges of some of the works in reference to early photographic works that I had begun to look at while developing *Chorus*. For *Lace Interlace*, I built off this and studied nineteenth-century English photographers in more depth. A lot of times early photographs, due to the nature of the glass plate, or the lens's focal capabilities or the paper they were printing on, would have irregular edges, which I found fascinating and beautiful as both expansions and disruptions to the images.

The Victorian era in Europe and America had a great interest in the classical era and the Renaissance but also in the newly emergent scientific discoveries and technological advancements of its time such as photography. The "guard books" I photographed at the Victoria and Albert Museum as part of my research were compiled with images of everything photographed within a certain year of the museum's operation. It was newly forming during the years in which Isabel Agnes Cowper was the official museum photographer. These books included many images of ancient figurative sculptures, textiles, laces, architectural fragments, and decorative objects amongst other things.

Cowper's images were careful and detailed studies but their organization in these books was eclectic and more akin to a hectic computer screen or a scrapbook. These books felt very much like the beginnings of the digital interfaces we're interacting with now, cascades of images and all kinds of known and unknown connections arising from their temporal arrangements.

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Sara VanDerBeek, *Lace Interlace VII*, 2023. UV Print on Plexiglas, Valchromat, Zinc Plated Steel Diptych (floor standing screen) Overall dimensions:75 3/16 x 40 15/16 x 22 13/16 in. Each screen: 75 x 27 x 1 ½ in. Courtesy the artist and The Approach, London. Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

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Installation view: *Sara VanDerBeek: Chorus*, Altman Siegel, San Francisco, 2021. Courtesy Altman Siegel.

Rail: What do you mean?

VanDerBeek: I suppose you could say the guard books were in a sense proto internet. Once photography got beyond its early stages it exploded into the larger public consciousness and became an extraordinarily powerful new medium for capturing attention and sharing information. Yet it was also from its earliest stages highly subjective and frequently manipulated, composited, and de-contextualized.

In America, I've always thought this occurred around the time of the Civil War with its rising industrialization, warfare, and exponential increase in the use of daguerreotypes. Many who were to go to war would make daguerreotype portraits knowing the portrait may possibly become memorial. Codifying photography's mnemonic aura.

Because we now live large parts of our lives through screens, we've come up with new ways to capture attention and convey information but also to explore memory and loss—some of this feels grounded in this foundational photographic relationship and some of this feels machine learned or generated. But it seems like it could be helpful given we struggle in America with mourning to understand further our relationship to imaging and mediation as a means of processing loss. Now I'm just freestyling here—

Rail: Please!

VanDerBeek: *Chorus*, like many of my exhibitions including *Lace Interlace*, was about movement—narratively through its focus on women throughout history and around the world but also a movement between live and mediated experiences.

This is all to say that for me creating an atmosphere in an exhibition and the accompanying meditative space it may encourage is about trying to manifest memories, thoughts, and images that encourage new paths of imagination.

Rail: Can you discuss your thoughts on photography as a tool of mediation, which is a term that comes up often in writings on your work?

VanDerBeek: I think of photography as something like a threshold between you and experience. Most everything now has an element of interpretation and mediation. Whether it's this Zoom conversation or the great industry of self that is being proliferated on social networks. And then I think of it in formal terms as a toning and how I alter my images. These are all forms of mediation and interpretation.

Rail: You also make room for melancholy and loss, which, as Susan Sontag and others have noted, is baked into the photographic medium.

VanDerBeek: Sontag's writing is very important to me, and so are artists dealing with the topics Sontag was addressing in *On Photography*, like Moyra Davey and Liz Deschenes. Their ideas are also tied into my conception of mediation.

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Sara VanDerBeek, *Mother*, 2023. UV Print on Plexiglas, Zinc Plated Steel. 24 x 10 in. Courtesy the artist and The Approach, London. Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

Rail: Mediation seems to be one of your primary subjects.

VanDerBeek: As I layer fragments to create a new whole, what I want to do is not to access any original moment but make something resembling a visual parable for how our memories are organized and how we live and relive things through these networked connections that are physiological as well as computational. Mediation for me goes back to ancient sculptures, and Warburg's idea of the mnemonic, and also goes forward to loosely connected constellations of information and images gathered and generated anew through artificial intelligence or other assistive technologies. I'm striving to realize works in photography that look to its history but also address this current moment of continual mediation.

Rail: Are you yourself a medium? Are you perhaps using the camera to look for the ghosts of culture, somewhat like the spirit photographers who looked for photographic traces of their sitters' psychic energies in the nineteenth century?

VanDerBeek: I grew up in a Victorian house in Baltimore from the 1860s, so that may be why I have an interest in Victorian things. Now, at mid-life, I'd say I'm reopening to the larger cosmos. I do really like the idea that the medium of photography can act as a "medium between past and present." The Victorians truly thought for a time there was a possibility that photography could connect to the spiritual realm.

Rail: Can you tell me more about how you engaged the work of Victorians Isabel Agnes Cowper and Julia Margaret Cameron for your *Lace Interlace* project?

VanDerBeek: Erika Lederman, who works at the Victoria and Albert museum and is currently writing her doctoral thesis on Isabel Agnes Cowper, got in touch with me after reading about "Women & Museums." She proposed that I come look at Isabel Agnes Cowper's work. I have always discussed how women were involved from the onset of photography, but until I learned of Cowper I didn't fully understand the extraordinary professional level at which women were operating. I also learned that Julia Margaret Cameron, another photographer I'm looking at in this project, was working at the museum around the same time as an artist in residence. Cowper was the official museum photographer. Both were mothers and were working with photography at times in their lives similar to mine.

What I found most interesting were their differences. They were at two ends of the spectrum. Cowper tried to picture the museum's objects objectively. I focused on her very detailed images of lace intended for use in the cataloging of the collection but also in educational books that were used by women working in the lace industry. Cameron created very romantic portraits of women in her life including her extended family.

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One photograph that I focused on was one of fifty portraits Cameron took of her niece Julia Jackson Stephen, the mother of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell. Stephen was a well-known figure in London, posing for many Pre-Raphaelite painters and strongly encouraged her two daughters to be creative. I had used this portrait before in a work of mine from 2008 entitled *Four Photographers*. I had used a reproduction of it in my work and it was impactful to view and work with an original print. Stephen died quite early in her life leaving a great loss for her children, especially impacting Virginia Woolf who was thirteen.

I did several days of in-depth capture at the museum in their photographic archives. During this same trip, I also went to various historic artist homes in England, including Charleston, the former home of Vanessa Bell, and Derek Jarman's Prospect Cottage. Both were influential to my approach to this new work in different ways.

I tried to synthesize all of this into these new works that I think of as screens. Each is titled *Lace Interlace*, and they're paired and arranged in a site-responsive manner in the gallery. They contain architectural references and references to the layering of images specific to the guard books as well as the Victorian use of shaped mats. But they also try to translate the variety of textures, material experiences, and details that I was photographing during my overall research process. They're toned in colors related to the albumen prints Cowper and Cameron made and they have a strong focus on pattern inspired by lace.

Installation view: *Sara VanDerBeek: Lace Interlace*, The Approach, London, 2023. Courtesy the artist and The Approach, London. Photo: Michael Brzezinski.

Rail: What colors are those?

VanDerBeek: That's a kind of mauve, or sometimes it's more sepia. The highlights are quite warm, but the colors of these historic prints have shifted over time, too. Sometimes they're faded in incredible ways.

Rail: Where did the title *Lace Interlace* come from?

VanDerBeek: Once I returned to my studio, I was trying to work through how these digital images I had made of early albumen prints made from glass plate negatives were going to work. I started to consider the movement from the print to the screen upon which I was reviewing the digital images. I considered rephotographing the screen to increase my final image's resolution and in turn became inspired by the interlacing pattern of the images on the screen. I've taken this idea and expanded it, combining these images with others taken with a medium format film camera as well as images captured off the screen using the live photo feature on my iPhone.

Additionally, in my research process for the show I saw a simultaneous confluence and conflict of the body and the machine as it evolved in lace manufacture and this to me was not only paralleled in the development of photographic reproduction, but foundational to our contemporary society's complex relationship with photographic images.

Mechanical weaving of lace and other textiles via card driven looms in the 19th century is increasingly cited as the origins of early computational programming and design, as envisioned by Ada Lovelace and Charles Babbage. So the term "Interlace" for me also becomes symbolic of the ongoing impacts of mediation and computational processing upon individual and collective memory.

Rail: You've used unusual shapes in the mats around your images.

VanDerBeek: Yes, early photographers used a lot of oval and semi-circular mats.

Rail: Was that because lenses vignetted and lost resolution around their edges in those days?

VanDerBeek: Many of these shapes were due to the nature of the lens and the possible irregular chemistry. You would have clarity in the center, and then it would drop off around the edges. But I wonder also if it came from historical cameos.

Rail: You've also introduced new UV printing technologies in *Lace Interlace*.

VanDerBeek: I was thinking that I am inspired by the past and may want to be a medium myself in some ways, but I also very much want to engage with our current moment. Because I felt like Cameron and Cowper were working at the vanguard of photographic technology, I wanted to work with its equivalent now. That's why I chose to work with UV printing technology. This, to me, feels as though it will continue to advance and become a significant printing method similar to the albumen or chromogenic processes of the past.

Rail: What are the advantages of UV printing? What sets it apart?

VanDerBeek: I should say that I work with digital and with film. I work with it all together because we can do that today. Each technology has its own strengths, and in combination with each other, they can create an extraordinary range of effects. But the advantage of UV is that the pigments have been cured with ultraviolet light. So the light that can possibly destroy traditional prints is used to set the color in place.

Rail: So it's ultra-archival?

VanDerBeek: Yes, and it can be printed on many different materials. And those may be the more or less archival part. It is used in both fine-art photographic printing and commercial printing. And on a nano scale it's being used to print memory patterns on computer chips. It's tied into our information technologies in many different ways. I thought it was important to try to weave—to interlace—this process into this work.

To see so much of the early evolution of photography from the Victorian era gives you a new perspective on our digital realm too, which is also still in its early stages.

Rail: It sounds like you're taking the past and kind of giving it an accelerative boost, sending it into posterity with new understanding.

VanDerBeek: My hope is that future iterations will look at how textile manufacturing, computer science, and digital imaging are part of a technological continuum. I've planned a research trip to MIT this summer to capture the memory ropes that were woven by contracted female textile workers for the first computer systems developed at MIT for the Apollo mission. I want to continue this development of the connections I have begun to realize between the body, memory, and the machine.

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THE NEW YORKER

Fateman, Johanna, "Goings on About Town: 'Interior Scroll or What I Did on My Vacation," *The New Yorker*, August 2021

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

"Interior Scroll or What I Did on My Vacation"

This delightful constellation of works by seventeen artists (some working collaboratively), installed in the back room of the Broadway gallery, identifies intergenerational strains of transgressive mischief. The show is part of a sprawling endeavor organized by Soft Network, founded by the curator Chelsea Spengemann and the artist Sara VanDerBeek. Other components include the excellent film series "Artists on Camera, 1967-2021" (available on demand at metrograph.com) and various events in East Hampton, New York—the original location of the fabled feminist performance piece "Interior Scroll," which lends this exhibition its name. In August, 1975, in front of a largely female audience, the artist Carolee Schneemann unfurled a scathing text—a takedown of a male filmmaker's pretensions—from her vagina and read it aloud. The piece is represented here by a black-and-white photograph; another black-and-white picture, of a young man with a knowing grin, shot by Alvin Baltrop at the gay cruising grounds of Manhattan's West Side piers sometime between 1976 and 1985, also feels like a curatorial muse. The octogenarian painter Juanita McNeely's pained but never humorless figurative canvases from the mid-eighties are always a treat to see, and a new print from Alisha B. Wormsley's ongoing series "There Are Black People in the Future," documenting a pair of rusted stakes and a battered cassette tape, among other artifacts, underscores the show's mood of radical time travel.

— Johanna Fateman

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THE EAST HAMPTON STAR
SHINES FOR ALL

Segal, Mark, "*Soft Network*'s Dialogue With the Past," *The East Hampton Star*, August 26, 2021

Soft Network's Dialogue With the Past

On the table behind Sara VanDerBeek is a poster for the 1975 exhibition "Women Artists Here and Now."

Mark Segal

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Soft Network, a platform established by Sara VanDerBeek and Chelsea Spengemann for connective arts programming, is a moving target of sorts, which makes sense considering what matters to them is "breaking down conventions of where art is shown," Ms. VanDerBeek said during a conversation at S&S Corner Shop in Springs.

Soft Network has recently touched down at Broadway Gallery in TriBeCa and Halsey McKay Gallery in East Hampton. It developed "Artists on Camera 1967-2021," a film series available for streaming from the Metrograph Pictures website that was set for a screening at the Arts Center at Duck Creek in Springs until Tropical Storm Henri scuttled it.

The website of Rachel Comey, a fashion designer, has a link to Soft Network's offerings, and ArtFizz Projects, an online community of artists, includes an exhibition of work by Tamar Halpern organized by -- guess who?

But it is at S&S Corner Shop on Fort Pond Boulevard that a constantly changing exhibition of work from the 1950s to the present gives a fascinating taste of the breadth of Soft Network's mission. That location is significant not only because many of the artists in the show have past or present connections to the hamlet, but also because Ms. VanDerBeek's family lived on Fort Pond Boulevard from the mid-1970s until 1984.

Indeed, it was last year at Green River Cemetery in Springs, where her father, Stan VanDerBeek, an experimental filmmaker and multimedia artist, is buried, that the idea for Soft Network began to take shape.

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"I was meditating, as an artist and teacher and as someone who is questioning it all right now, on what I can do, and I began to have an urge to program and engage with my community in the way I know how to work, which is through exhibiting."

She and Ms. Spengemann, who is the director of the Stan VanDerBeek Archive, developed the idea of working between the past and the present and between exhibition spaces and artists' archives.

The exhibition at S&S, "Interior Scroll, or What I Did on My Vacation," takes its title in part from a legendary performance by Carolee Schneemann, a multimedia artist, that took place in 1975 at Ashawagh Hall in Springs as part of the exhibition "Women Artists Here and Now."

The art historian Gail Levin described that performance in The Star: "Standing nude on a table, Schneeman painted her body and read parts of her 1974 text, 'Cezanne: She Was a Great Painter' . . . . Then she slowly extracted a paper scroll from her vagina while reading from it."

Organized by the artists Joan Semmel and Joyce Kozloff, that exhibition included, in addition to Schneemann, work by Lynda Benglis and Elaine de Kooning, Audrey Flack and Betty Parsons, Ms. Semmel and Perle Fine, among others. It was, in other words, intergenerational, and, since it included photography and performance, intermedia.

As Ms. VanDerBeek and Ms. Spengemann looked into that exhibition and spoke with Ms. Semmel and Ms. Kozloff, their research became not only about the exhibition but about "looking at the importance of community and artists' networks in supporting the realization of work."

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"I've come to know that women in the 1970s were dealing with gender and media discrimination. Film and moving image were on the outer orbit, and there wasn't a commercial network for it, so it was really challenging." It meant that many interesting artists were being excluded from the discourse about art.

Another source of inspiration for Soft Network was an exhibition Ms. Spengemann and Ms. VanDerBeek organized at the Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Center in 2019. Black Mountain was an experimental college founded in 1933 in Asheville, N.C., that counted among its faculty and students dozens of influential and innovative artists until it closed in 1957.

One of those artists was Stan VanDerBeek, and the exhibition, "VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek" paired the work of Stan and Sara. "That was the first time we were engaging in a meeting of historic work and my work," and it encouraged Soft Network's ongoing pairing of the past and present.

Ms. VanDerBeek, who divides her time between Brooklyn and Springs, teaches at Cooper Union, where she earned her B.F.A., and at Pratt Institute. Two recent works of hers, "Ancient Woman XX" and "Ancient Woman XXI," were on view at S&S last week.

They are photographs of a female Roman head from the Louvre that she painted on and rephotographed before manipulating the color during the reprocessing, and then painted again on top of the previous layers. She noted that she pushed the color because the sculptures were originally painted with vibrant colors.

She remarked on her relationship to "this complicated form that is the foundation of a lot of issues—the beauty ideal, power, gender, race, class. I can't help but be mesmerized by the complexity of these forms, so I've done a whole series of looking at ancient female forms."

Several of the works from that series were also in a show at Halsey McKay that included work by Schneeman and Sari Dienes. A multimedia artist, Dienes, who died in 1992, is represented at S&S with several works, including "Ginger Rogers," a 1955 ink rubbing.

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Typical of the connections suggested by the exhibition are a photograph of Ray Johnson by Anita Steckel. Johnson, who was well-known for his conceptual and correspondence work, is represented by several works, as is Steckel, who, like Stan VanDerBeek, went to Cooper Union and, when visiting the East End, stayed with Johanna VanDerBeek, Stan's first wife.

Johanna, who came to the East End in 1974, "is really our touchstone to the area," said Sara. While at Black Mountain College, she began to do food experiments and then "really moved into food" and cofounded Georgette's restaurant in Springs.

Speaking of Soft Network, Sara said, "It's important to us that there are these senses of lineage and overlap and connection. But it's also about continuum." What they are interested in is "not a preservation of the past, but it's very much about a dialogue with it."

The exhibition will continue to morph at S&S Corner Store, 11 Fort Pond Boulevard, through Sept. 26.

This article has been changed from the original and print version to include the address of S&S Corner Store.

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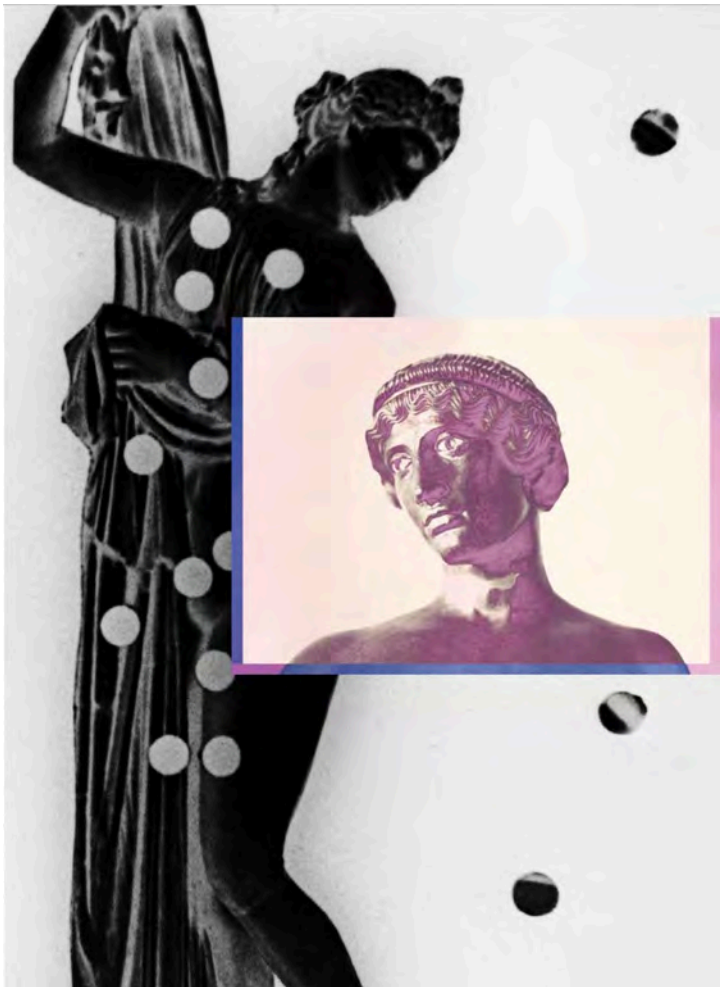
VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek

Sutton, Gloria. "Giving Form to a Memory of an Image," in *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* (Asheville: Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, 2019), 61-82.



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Giving Form to a Memory of an Image

Gloria Sutton

Often, I create pieces thinking about how do I give form or structure to a memory or a memory of an image.
Sara VanDerBeek, 2007[1]

Contemporaries

Disciplines thrive on dualities, and art history oscillates between two predominant registers. The synchronic or temporal mode of the practice traces aesthetic changes across time, while its diachronic development reflects on how art changes within a single period or context. Contemporary art history, in particular, is replete with such dualities, since, by its very disciplinary calling, it has the burden of defining emerging conditions and locating shared vocabularies in a process-oriented field where refusal and contestation prevail over representative examples or definitive case studies. Contemporary art historians have the added charge of explaining how to see the *new* within the *now* while underscoring the ways that the field is contingent on acts of historicization and prognostication in equal measure. In contrast to ancient, medieval, Renaissance, and even modern art history, which tend to comport themselves along specific chronological or regional designations, contemporary art remains tethered only by a capacious notion of the *present.* This sense of presentness remains both a processual and perpetual state: a marker of time (occurring now) as well as place (being here) that can also mean anytime and anyplace.

In effect, it is the very subjective nature of framing the cultural past within the present tense that the exhibition *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* lucidly foregrounds.[2] Selected paintings, photographs, moving image works, journals, letters, and ephemera produced between 1950 and 1967 by Stan VanDerBeek (1927–1984) were interwoven and layered with Sara VanDerBeek's (b. 1976) photographic series and sculptures made over the last eight years in a manner that took a more dialogical rather than chronological approach. Co-curated by Sara VanDerBeek and Chelsea Spengemann, Director of the Stan VanDerBeek Archive, the exhibition reanimates the postwar pedagogical backdrop of Black Mountain College as a reminder that experimentation is tantamount to creation and collaboration is endemic to art-making.

Working outside the delimiters of time and space, the exhibition sets up Stan's and Sara's work through a series of nodal connections not only to one another but also to the creative diaspora that formed in the wake of Black Mountain College's dissolution in 1957. For example, Paul and Vera Williams—who were instrumental in establishing Gate Hill Cooperative in rural New York as an iteration of Black Mountain's live/work ethos after the Lake Eden campus shuttered—are conjured through photographs by faculty Hazel Larsen Archer and Andrew Oates, Jr. Additionally, the curators have used the occasion to introduce new primary research, including unsealing Stan's transcripts and records from the North Carolina State Archives and projecting a newly digitized 35mm film of Merce Cunningham shot by Stan in 1965. Their curatorial gestures directly lead to acts of material preservation for artworks that do not necessarily fit the collection categories of museums, providing invaluable resources for the continued work of recasting the narratives of not only Black Mountain College but also the experimental arts in the postwar period more broadly.[3]

[1] Sara VanDerBeek quoted from a published conversation with Sarah Charlesworth in *North Drive Press #4* (2007), ed. Sara Greenberger Rafferty and Matt Keegan, https://www.librarystack.org/north-drive-press-4/.

[2] *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek*, Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center (BMCM+AC), Asheville, NC, September 20, 2019–January 4, 2020. This text is based on a public talk at BMCM+AC on December 5, 2019, at the invitation of Alice Sebrell.

[3] As part of its long-term conservation strategy, the Stan VanDerBeek Archive uses exhibition opportunities to preserve and screen new material. Except for *Astral Man* (1959), all the films included in *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* were recent if not completely new digitizations. According to Spengemann, the archive was able to preserve *Film Form* (1968) directly through an exhibition grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Other titles on view for the first time, digitized from 35mm through a National Film Preservation Foundation grant, included *BreathDeath* (1963) and *See Saw Seems* (1965). Additionally, *Moirage* (1967) was preserved by John Klacsmann at Anthology Film Archives in 2019, and this exhibition marked the first US screening. The newly digitized Cunningham footage was also used in the documentary film *Cunningham* (2019, directed by Alla Kovgan).

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Additionally, the exhibition presents recently digitized iterations of Stan's *Poemfield* films (*No. 3* and *No. 7*, specifically), a series initiated in 1967 that combined BEFLIX computer programming with 35mm and 16mm black-and-white film processing followed by film colorization to animate Stan's concrete poems. Viewed among Sara's ongoing investigations into photographic dye sublimation—on cotton voile in *Poem* (2019) and on neoprene in *Cunningham Leotards, Study* (2019), just to point to two examples—highlights the exhibition's focus on transfer processes writ large. In addition to illuminating their respective working processes, these works underscore the notion that art and history coalesce not around objects, but the liminal records of artists' ideas. Though driven by distinctly different cultural contexts, both artists remain mutually interested not only in the plurality of image media but also in the cultural production of images—how they can manifest as both public consciousness and deeply personal. And, equally, the inverse of that process is on full display: how public images can often take on personal and poetic associations. Collectively, the exhibition highlights their overlapping attentiveness to the ways that images circulate beyond the realm of art, how they seep into all facets of daily life and actively shape human connection.

Even the more overt references to her father's work—a series of black-and-white photographs from 2012, which cast a group of Baltimore dancers in curved silhouettes stretching and posing in positions that have been rehearsed for centuries—read more as poetic refrains than homages or direct citations to his long-standing interest in channeling the kineticism of bodies. As noted in the exhibition wall text, Sara's six-part series, *Four Photographers* (2008), alludes to the first photography class at Black Mountain College in 1949, in which Stan was a student. Led by Archer, the students collaborated on a portfolio/publication entitled *Five Photographers*, for which Stan contributed the critical text "Towards a Definition of Photography." He suggested that the "definition of" and "solution to photography" were bound up in what he outlined as the problematics inherent in the medium, including "the use of the camera as an external eye" that "deals with space yet interprets and controls it two dimensionally."[4] And the notion of the photograph functions as a type of "excerpt, an isolated area recorded and removed from context," and the prescribed "work area" of photography was limited to its mechanical and technical aspects.[5]

Besides learning how to make and process still images from Archer, Stan also gained an introduction to working with moving images in her class after the college acquired a 16mm Bolex.[6] The perceptive observations that he made as a student learning to wield a camera in the mountains of western North Carolina led Stan to conclude that, rather than seeing photography as an instrument for capture, it remained essentially "an expression for movement… movement towards an understanding."[7] Included in *Five Photographers* are Stan's black-and-white images of a dancer and a tree. Beyond the subtle play of light and shadow that Stan learned to use to bring a figure into relief against a darkened background, he did not endeavor to capture a moment or render a complete portrait. Instead, the images are suggestive of an epic leitmotif—the human figure as a fragment that appears throughout all of his paintings, drawings, collages, writings, animated as well as computer-generated films, 35mm slides used for his multiscreen projection environments, and videos for the next thirty-five years. Stan's nonlinear working process is aptly reflected in the exhibition through the co-mingling of his films, drawings, and collages with Sara's prodigious output, which highlights their shared investment in visualizing transitory forms. What emerges can be thought of as the residue of interactions.

[4] Stan VanDerBeek, "Towards a Definition of Photography," in *Five Photographers* (Black Mountain, NC: Black Mountain College Photography Class Magazine, ca. 1949). In addition to VanDerBeek, the publication includes photographs and statements by Hazel Larsen Archer, Vernon Phillips, Andrew Oates, Jr., and Nick Cernovich. A copy of *Five Photographers* is in the Museum of Modern Art, New York's research library. Also see, Gloria Sutton, "Stan VanDerBeek," in *Amazement Park: Stan, Sara, and Johannes VanDerBeek*, ed. Ian Berry (Saratoga Springs, NY: Francis Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College and Prestel, 2010), 66–73.

[5] VanDerBeek, "Towards a Definition of Photography," *Five Photographers*.

[6] For a description of Archer's photography course and the introduction of film at Black Mountain College, see Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 182–201, especially 188.

[7] VanDerBeek, "Towards a Definition of Photography," *Five Photographers*.

Importantly, both artists evoke myriad voices from the past, including the writing and works of Black Mountain College's vital female faculty members, such as poet and potter M.C. Richards, former Bauhaus weavers Anni Albers and Trude Guermonprez, and Archer. Each woman, in her own way, imparted the radical lesson that clay, fiber, and film were all equally variable media. This was an ethos absorbed by not only Stan but also the entire Black Mountain College community. Even among the more recent exhibitions and important new scholarship on Black Mountain College, the deep influence of these women has often been overshadowed by the dynamism of their male peers in contributing to our understanding of interdisciplinarity that became a central tenet to Black Mountain College pedagogy, which has subsequently become the cornerstone of art and design education in North America.[8]

On full display within the curatorial framework of *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* is Sara's highly attuned visual language. Her deliberate use of archaic, perennial forms (steps, columns, risers, chevrons, plinths), in both the artist's digitally produced photographs and her sculptures, mitigates contemporary art's predominant association with the instant and the immediate, establishing a productive tension between the timeless and the contemporary. Art historian and media scholar Ina Blom's explication of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century tension between photographic images and sculptural objects is played out in real-time for viewers in the surface conditions that Sara generates in her installations and exhibitions.[9]

Blom, who is Professor at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo, argues, "This is significant in the sense that surfaces not only implicate objects, architectures, and images alike, but also are increasingly understood as a useful term through which to understand the dynamic existence of materials in the realm of digital technologies."[10] "Here is a body of work," writes Blom, "that articulates some of our keenest contemporary intuitions: notably that screen realities are physical realities that extend far beyond the realm of the interface/surface in the limited sense of the term."[11] By incorporating multiple image capture processes in a manner that accents the iterative process of image-making, Sara also emphasizes moments and acts of transfer and transmission, showing us how contemporary art—no longer bound by medium specificity—has adapted the behaviors of digital media, remaining pliable, adaptable, and highly vulnerable to erasure and loss. In this way, any inclination to read Stan's output as the historical source object for Sara's work does not hold. Instead, in the exhibition, they are presented as contemporaries—two artists who have both looked to the past in order to comprehend the here and now.

Heterotopias

It is important to note that Sara accesses the memory of her father not just through personal recollection but also as an archivist would, mining his notes, papers, films, writings, and interviewing those who worked alongside him. In many ways, she is engaged in an interpretative process no more privileged than an art historian—a complete outsider who has come to the material, seeking not to resuscitate another lost visionary from the 1960s, but a corpus that operated in a manner that Michel Foucault articulated as a *heterotopia* in his 1984 article "Des Espace Autres" (published the same year that both Foucault and Stan died at the age of fifty-seven).[12] Seeing Stan's work as a type of heterotopian space offers a working methodology that allows for the recognition of the way his work manifests the aesthetic conventions of the

[8] Examples of this include *Merce Cunningham: Common Time*, Walker Art Center, 2017, and both John Cage's and Merce Cunningham's centennial celebrations (2012 and 2019, respectively), which involved yearlong, international programming. Two important corrections are Alice Sebrell's text "There Is Another Way: Hazel Larsen Archer, Photographer, Educator" in *Leap Before You Look* (Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and Yale University Press, 2015) and Haus der Kulturen der Welt's 2019 multivalent exhibition *Bauhaus Imaginsta*, co-curated by Marion von Osten and Grant Watson and including the online journal *Bauhaus Imaginista*. Collectively, these curatorial projects have also contributed to a resurgent critical and commercial interest in the work of Ruth Asawa and Anni Albers. David Zwirner gallery began representing the Asawa estate in 2017 and presented a solo exhibition of her work in the same year. Zwirner also became the exclusive representative of the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation in 2016 and mounted a solo exhibition of her work in 2019.

[9] Ina Blom, "Sculpture, Photography, Surface," in *Sara VanDerBeek* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2016), 37–41.

[10] Blom, "Sculpture, Photography, Surface," 39

[11] Blom, "Sculpture, Photography, Surface," 41.

[12] Based on a 1967 lecture by Foucault, "Des Espace Autres" was first published by the French journal *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*

postwar period. At the same time, it upsets those very narratives through his refusal to adhere to the disciplinary boundaries of art and continuous adaptation of emerging forms of communication technology.

When I first started researching Stan's work, from around 2001, few in the field of art history knew of this polymath figure whose prolific output was often curtailed to fit the disciplinary delimiters of the anthologies of the *New American Cinema* and the narrow editorial purview of *Film Culture* magazine. My first task was explaining how an influential filmmaker could also be recognized as an artist who took up moving images alongside photography and painting, not to represent experiences but to enact them in the viewer. If, in his own lifetime, recognition as a visual artist eluded him, it was certainly made in a statement upon his death through his insistence on a plot in Green River Cemetery in Springs, New York, alongside Lee Krasner, Frank O'Hara, and Jackson Pollock.[13] In addition to the efforts made by Stan's widows, Johanna and Louise VanDerBeek, to promote Stan's films following his death, the more expansive way that Stan's work has been received over the past decade is due, in no small part, to the VanDerBeek Archive's formidable ability to re-stage it, bringing a sense of formal acuity beyond what Stan managed to achieve in his own lifetime.[14] In each case, re-staging Stan's work is not a re-creation, or an act of recovery, seeking a type of fidelity, but an act of translation. Stan thought of his works as prototypes to be iterated upon.

I would posit that the carefully researched re-stagings of Stan's multiscreen installations are reflective of what I would call Sara's own "gestive" thinking—how she produces meaning from compositing (editing together) existing images and framing our attention. I use the term "gestive" as an intentionally oblique way to emphasize how the act of editing is often about thinking through one's ideas with one's hands in a gestural process of putting images side by side to generate altogether new relationships.[15] And while she may have intuited Stan's use of chance operations in figuring out a work's pace and flow and his treatment of his own filmic images as found material, she mastered her keen ability to command space and quieten images through the close mentorship of another one of her long-time interlocutors, Sarah Charlesworth (1947–2013). Writing on Charlesworth, Sara asserts that "her work and its influence, her writing, and her voice continue to resonate.... Sarah collaged Conceptualism, popular media, archival activities, educational practices, motherhood, friendship, humor, and charm into an intensely considered and expertly crafted image-language."[16]

Charlesworth's work signaled contemporary art's turn toward the dialogical and linguistic. At a key moment in the mid-1980s, Charlesworth pointed to a way to think about the photograph as a subject itself rather than its depictive function. She modeled, for her peers and the field of contemporary art writ large, not only how a photograph is made but also how it *worked*—both as a referent in the world and how it works on the viewer. This overarching concern with the aesthetics of engagement offers conceptual and historical through lines in the *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* exhibition, demonstrating how images are constructed, not just captured by the camera. And distinctly, in

in October 1984. Foucault's notion of a discursive heterotopian space that could map onto existing social structures, while also remaining incompatible, contrarian, or "other" to them, became foundational to the fields of American contemporary architecture and art history. See Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22–27.

[13] Johanna VanDerBeek waited six years for a plot to become available. She also commissioned Neil Noland, sculptor and Black Mountain College alum, to make the grave marker for Stan. The grave is placed next to Pollock, Krasner, and Henry Geldzahler. See Johanna VanDerBeek, "A Memorial Fit for a Maker," *New York Times*, September 26, 1996, 260.

[14] This includes realizing a prototype for the proto-interactive theater Stan called the *Movie-Drome* inside the New Museum for the 2012 *Ghosts in the Machine* exhibition and re-staging *Movie-Mural*, a multiscreen projection work, as part of the 2010 Gwangju Biennial and 2013 Venice Biennale, as well as the Whitney Museum of American Art's exhibition *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016* (2016–17), and the Walker Art Center's exhibition *Merce Cunningham: Common Time* (2017).

[15] The notion of "gestive thinking"—essentially, thinking by making—is an oblique reference to the philosophical writings of M.C. Richards, whose 1964 publication *Centering: In Pottery, Poetry, and the Person* became an influential text among the Black Mountain College community and proved foundational to Stan's own development. Not concerned with championing craft or the handmade, Richards completely eschews any reference to technique or the technical aspects of ceramics, instead delivering a philosophical treatise that uses clay as a metaphor for what art historian Jenni Sorkin calls "unmediated contact with the raw materials of the self," in her chapter "M.C. Richards's *Vanishing Point*." Additionally, Sorkin deftly compares *Centering* with the more dominant book on media variability published that same year—Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, explicating the connections between mid-century craft and media theory. See Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 161.

[16] Sara VanDerBeek, "Continuum," in *Sarah Charlesworth: Double World* (New York: New Museum, 2015), 152.

her own voice, Sara's work articulates ways that images operate in the age of *digitality*, a term that historically marks digital image technology's full integration into contemporary culture as completely ordinary, while also registering the deeper effects it has on the ways we picture and relate to one another.

Stan VanDerBeek +

Born in the Bronx in 1927, VanDerBeek studied art and architecture at Cooper Union, and after serving in the US Navy, he continued to take an interdisciplinary view of the visual arts, using the GI Bill to study at Black Mountain College between 1949 and 1951. He overlapped with Robert Rauschenberg and, most notably, John Cage, Buckminster Fuller, and M.C. Richards, who all taught at the school and would become VanDerBeek's lifelong intellectual interlocutors. In 1954, VanDerBeek returned to New York City and quickly established himself within the burgeoning experimental film scene while supporting himself with a design job at CBS.

Many of the stop-animation techniques and editing skills that he applied to his early award-winning 16mm films, including those looped in the upstairs gallery at BMCM+AC for *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek—Astral Man* (1959), *See Saw Seams* (1965), and *Breathdeath* (1963)—were acquired through his work on what can only be described as a proto-interactive children's program. *Winky Dink and You* encouraged children to apply a special clear vinyl mat to their television screens at home and, using crayons, draw along with the host of the program.[17] VanDerBeek often used the studio's editing equipment after hours to work on his own non-narrative films, which frequently combined his figurative drawings and paintings—some of which are disseminated around BMCM+AC's galleries—with collages made from magazine advertisements and news articles. These early collage films helped garner VanDerBeek's celebrated reputation as a part of the *New American Cinema* and became a source for many of his multiscreen installations, such as *Movie-Mural* (1965–68) and *Newsreel of Dreams* (1963–76), which treated 35mm slides and 16mm film as part of an image database.

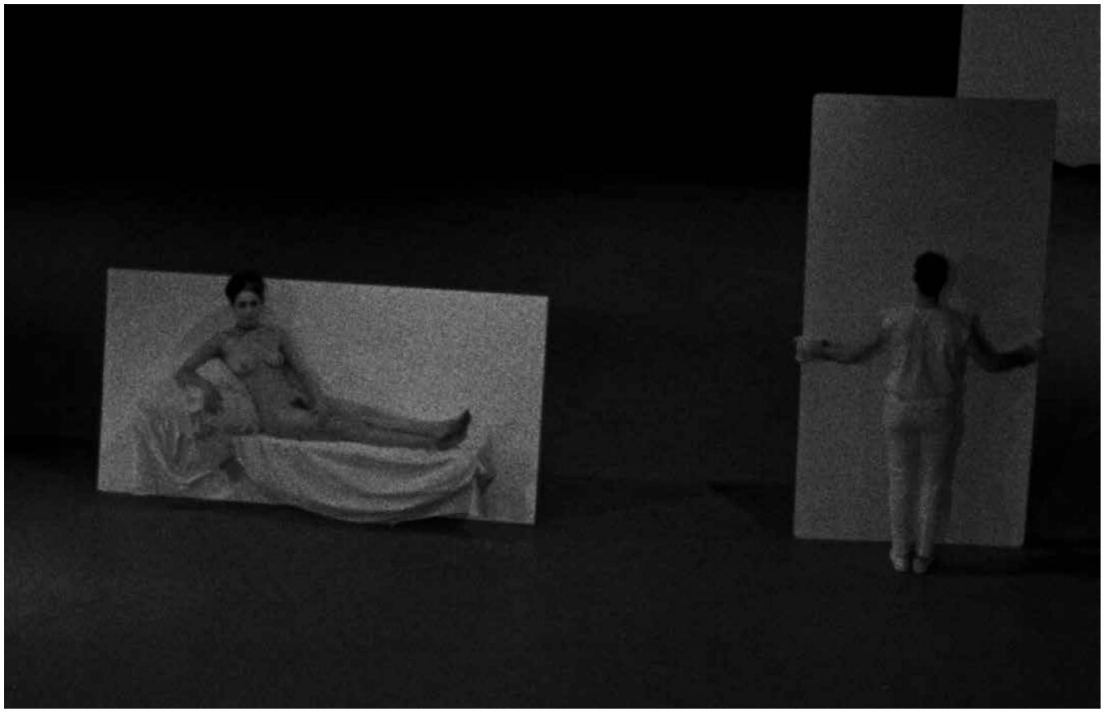
However, Stan was not just a filmmaker but also a signal member of the American avant-garde, whose experimental artworks refracted the pedagogy of Black Mountain College by merging the formal rhythms of painting, film, photography, and dance. He also continued to adopt emerging formats, such as the seriality of television and the logic of computer programming, to anticipate the current ways contemporary art operates under the dual pressures of globalization and digitality.[18] While he continued to produce experimental films, VanDerBeek also engaged in a stunning array of collaborative multimedia projects during the 1960s, which brought him together with other artists, such as Claes Oldenburg, Lucas Samaras, Carolee Schneemann, and Robert Morris. VanDerBeek was making films of Oldenburg's *Ray Gun Theater* events (1962) and collaborating with Schneemann and Morris to produce *Site* (1964), a six-minute super-8mm film distributed on a reel by the multimedia publication *Aspen* (5–6, Fall/Winter 1967), recently preserved and shown in its three-screen iteration for the 2018 exhibition *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.[19]

In further experiments, VanDerBeek emphasized audience participation even more as the subject of the work. This priority became most evident in *Cine-Naps*—a reference to his collective-experience experiments orchestrated in the mid-1970s in which VanDerBeek replaced the astronomical program normally projected within a functioning planetarium with a vortex of images and sounds that included *Poemfield* and early stop-motion animation works, both on

[17] Both *What, Who, How* and *Mankinda* (both 1957) were awarded bronze medals from the 1958 Brussels International Experimental Film Competition, which ran concurrently with the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. *Winky Dink and You* originally ran on Saturday mornings on CBS, from October 10, 1953, through April 27, 1957.

[18] This is the thesis of my book *The Experience Machine: Stan VanDerBeek's* Movie-Drome *and Expanded Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

[19] Ana Janevski and Thomas J. Lax, eds., *Judson Dance Theater: The Work Is Never Done* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018).



display at BMCM+AC, as well as 35mm slides and found footage.[20] This concept was also referred to as "Cine Dreams" and, like all of his work, took on various permutations each time it was staged, including events at the Fels Planetarium in Philadelphia in 1971, the Strasenburgh Planetarium in Rochester, NY, in 1972, and the planetarium at the University of South Florida in 1973. From the outset, audiences were encouraged to sleep during these extended events, which lasted four to ten hours. VanDerBeek's stated interest was to see if the multimedia experience stimulated any common dream content among the participants. Afterward, as they exited the venue, audience members received a handout with a local phone number and a request by the artist to call it over the next few days and record their dreams using a proto-voicemail system.

By creating a specific mode of audience feedback, the artist recalibrated the emphasis away from the projected images and toward a collective experience. This type of collective subjectivity can be situated between the singular modernist viewing subject of abstract film and painting and the dispersed, atomized audience of broadcast television, and points to the types of technologically connected yet isolated and disenfranchised audiences (including often-ignored racial and gender disparities) ushered in by the rise of the internet. More presciently, the project foreshadows the solipsism of social media, where truncated speech has replaced sustained critique and audiences are now defined as followers.

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[20] Recent restagings of this project, including setting up closed-circuit television projections for recording audience members and voicemail and email systems to record comments from those who participated, have been orchestrated in conjunction with the VanDerBeek Archive as *Cine Dreams: Future Cinema of the Mind*, first at Civico Planetario Ulrico Hoepli in Milan (March 28–30, 2014), organized by Fondazione Nicola Trussardi and miart and curated by Massimiliano Gioni and Vincenzo de Bellis, in collaboration with Comune di Milano; as part of ArtRio, Fundação Planetário da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (September 9, 2015), curated by Daniel Rangel; and most recently, as part of Art Basel Cities: Buenos Aires, curated by Cecilia Alemani. See also the documentation of restagings of VanDerBeek's work by the Box Gallery in Los Angeles: http://www.theboxla.com/show.php?id=4601.

What further distinguished VanDerBeek as a visual artist was how prolific he was as a writer. He regularly contributed to key journals that fomented the debates on art and culture throughout the 1960s up through the early 1980s, including *Film Culture*, the *Village Voice*, the *Filmmakers Newsletter*, *Film Quarterly*, and the *Tulane Drama Review*, among other publications. He also appeared with Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller at academic panels, which helped solidify his attribution to the terms "underground film" and "expanded cinema." In contrast to McLuhan and other "media visionaries" of the 1960s, VanDerBeek did not just celebrate technology but also considered the alienating impulse of computer and telecommunications technology within the political and cultural milieu of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the rhetoric of the space age. His emphasis on two-way communication, feedback, and data transfer speaks to visual art's transformation from the industrial to the information age.

In particular, his interest in digital media and computer programming led him to seek out the expertise of engineers like Kenneth Knowlton at Bell Telephone Laboratories before the more formalized and well-known collaborations organized through Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.). Stan and Knowlton created *Poemfield* using BEFLIX, a computer program written on punch cards. Taken as a whole, the suite of films melds the syntax of concrete poetry with the programming mechanics of early computing to generate a new type of animated film that presented poetry in cinematic time.

VanDerBeek was resourceful in cobbling together grants to support his work and looked for opportunities to gain access to large-scale computer processing and editing equipment, often necessitating his affiliation with universities rather than galleries. He also pushed the artist-in-residence model to new dimensions by forging positions at NASA and CBS. In 1970, VanDerBeek was one of the first artists-in-residence at the Boston public television station WGBH, where he orchestrated a project called *Violence Sonata*, broadcast on two public television channels and designed for viewing on two sets at once. Between each of the three "screen acts," home viewers could telephone live studio panelists with responses to questions and thus participate in a discussion about race and gender in America.

As this exhibition's inclusion of many of his journal notes, drawings, and student musings conveys, Stan advanced the idea that artists not only have an ethical imperative to consider the question of how we absorb the world around us but should also offer possibilities for modeling that irrevocably fragmentary experience. In this manner, his diffuse definition, "expanded cinema," provides a radical reformulation of subjectivity as an accretive process—what could be considered in VanDerBeek's own terms as an expanded experience "where you take and reshape."[21] These lessons were evocative of the philosophical writings of M.C. Richards. Her 1962 book, *Centering: In Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*, became an underground classic, melding studies in perception, craft, education, creativity, and spirituality and arguing for the richness of daily experience. Richards's writings ushered in what VanDerBeek described as an "awakening"—a direct reference to one of two poems Richards penned and dedicated to Stan titled "upon awakening...," a copy of which is included in the exhibition.[22]

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[21] Marion Weiss, "Stan VanDerBeek to Students: Take a High Risk!," *Journal of the University Film and Video Association*, no. 34 (Spring 1982): 19–20.

[22] M.C. Richards, *2 Poems of Love for Stan*, ca. 1951. Xerox copy from Stan VanDerBeek Archive.

+ Sara VanDerBeek

Sara has been internationally recognized as a key progenitor of contemporary art's engagement with the medium of photography and its attenuating histories within an expanded field of art practice. Made with the camera's perspective in mind, Sara's photographic and sculptural arrangements emulate a poet's economic use of structure, phrasing, and rhythm to suspend images and multiple image processes within a rigorously shaped framework. Sara's works operate as sites of contact—putting discourses and techniques typically associated with the archaeological and art-historical past in direct dialogue with current forms of image capture and circulation. Each body of work operates as its own visual palimpsest, showing how relics and remnants from the past are constitutive of the present—both in terms of cultural and personal memory. This includes her early tabletop studio series, *The Principle of Superimposition* (2008), which was meticulously arranged, lit, photographed, and then dismantled. She also shoots outside the studio in cities such as Detroit and Baltimore, her hometown, creating images that may be devoid of figures but point outward to the civic arena of neighborhoods, schools, museums, and other social sites.

Crepuscular in nature and cast in muted tones, her photographic propositions and their sculptural corollaries generate points of contiguity between the personal and cultural markers of lived experience. As the subtle yet striking color gradations in her two series of layered digital C-prints, *Rising Moon IV – VII* (2018) and *Setting Sun I, III, IV, V, VI* (2017–19), attest, the blue hues of dawn blend into the dusty pinks of sunset in a cyclical pattern that perpetually extends these moments of transition. The formal rigor of these images, in particular, also draws out the material conditions undergirding the art-historical reception of modernist photography.

[23] See Alex Klein's close reading of how Kasten's approach to photography in the round reflected broader investigations into sculpture's relationship to theater, among other revelatory readings of Kasten's process. Alex Klein, "Pictures and Props," in *Barbara Kasten: Stages* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2015).

[24] For a nuanced reading of how Kasten's weaving education and fiber studies inform her photographic practice, see Jenni Sorkin, "Tactile Beginnings: Barbara Kasten," in *Barbara Kasten: Stages* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2015), 149–56.

Additionally, Barbara Kasten's stage sets and her directed use of light against carefully arranged props to generate tension between the flat surface of an image and the physicality of experiencing sculpture in the round are also relevant orientation points.[23] Notably, Kasten's tacit understanding of the relationship between a surface and its material support was conditioned not by photography, which she never formally studied, but through her sustained examination of fiber sculptures, textiles, and weaving. She matriculated from the weaving department of the California College of Arts and Crafts (now California College of the Arts) under the close mentorship of her teacher, Guermonprez, who established a long career at the school after her formative experience teaching at Black Mountain College.[24]

Rather than mining the fields of textiles and ceramics, curators and critics tend to draw a link between contemporary engagements with abstraction and photography to developments in scopic vision through the proto-cinematic experiments of the 1920s–30s Neue Optik, or "New Vision"—often aligning Sara's work directly adjacent to the optical experiments of László Moholy-Nagy, for example.[25] However, I would argue that Sara's own photographic investigations into modernism's pluralistic output (literary, architectural, fashion, design) are critically mediated by the linguistic turn of contemporary art in the 1980s and 1990s.

Charlesworth's insistence on foregrounding the material relationship between artist and culture as a way to counter the modernist desire for an autonomous art object, for instance, becomes a vital tool for a current generation of feminist artists, including Sara, whose works do not conjure Moholy-Nagy or Josef Albers as a means of validation. Instead, the evocation of the modernist past in the contemporary moment is in service to rethinking the narratives of technological innovation that have subtended

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[25] Roxana Marcoci interview with Sara VanDerBeek in *Sara VanDerBeek*, ed. Gloria Sutton (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2016).

much of the history of photography—crowding out the contributions by other protagonists such as Lucia Moholy and Anni Albers—to tell a story of modernism that emanates from the weaving workshop as well as the studio. It also incorporates the vital work that happens behind the scenes, such as editing, documenting, and printing. In my view, Sara's work is not about revisionist gestures as much as it is about pointing the viewer to the ways that all contemporary art remains contingent on its contextual frames of viewing and the way art history itself, like the very images on display, is not static but constructed through complex processes of transfer and transmission over time.

Sara's own experimentation with photographic capture, collaborations in printing, cast-concrete forms, studio tableaux arrangements for the camera, and variations on scale points to diverse material cultures beyond the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College. Importantly, the resulting images convey a material sensibility in equal measure to an optical one. For example, the quilt-like diptych *Roman Stripe IV* (2016) does not depict a domestic object but—through the work's mirror-like finish, layered processes, and saturated hues—translates a textile's sensory and enveloping qualities while its proportional sizing to a twin bed presents viewers with a direct sense of ratio of the object to the body. Moreover, as seen in the careful installation at BMCM+AC, Sara's work argues for the primacy of bodily relationships to both objects and images in order to understand their sense of scale and ratio. Scale—the physically palpable sense of commensurability of the image to its matrix—has become so amorphous within digital culture that any measurable relation to their subjects or sources is not only rarely noted, but instead is rendered indiscriminate if not irrelevant as digital images are increasingly optimized to enhance compatibility across multiple platforms.

Sara's acts of transposing material and tactile qualities into photographic ones have been brought to bear on a range of cultural artifacts, including pre-Columbian art collections at Casa del Alabado in Quito, Ecuador, Hollywood film prop houses in Los Angeles, Greek and Roman statuary encountered during a 2012 residency at Fondazione Memmo in Rome, and Japanese textiles in the collections of the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA). As Sara has noted:

> *We are moving from the physical gestures involved in a nineteenth- and twentieth-century-based notion of image-making, such as the actions of capturing an image on a negative or collaging images via multiple negatives, or other earlier photographic processes such as silkscreens, photostatic/lithographic prints, et cetera, to that of the present moment. We seem to be somewhere between the tangible object and the ephemeral accumulation of information, and with this, the notion of the physical image or the image as a resulting artifact of a physical process (performative or otherwise) takes on new meaning.*[26]

Sara critically demonstrates how the cyclical patterns of visibility and disappearance within cultural history are often commensurate with the ways that photographic media are also conditioned by patterns of obsolescence and resurgence.

Feedback

I want to conclude by considering how core to the development of Stan's own media pedagogy was the notion that art itself was a direct form of communication; its own feedback mechanism. In 1975, when he joined the art faculty at the University of Maryland (where he lived with his

[26] Marcoci interview with Sara VanDerBeek in *Sara VanDerBeek*.

second wife, Louise, and their children Julia, Sara, and Johannes), he soon became disillusioned with how quickly the advancement of communication technology outstripped students' abilities to articulate any sense of creative agency. In a 1982 article on media art and pedagogy, published shortly before his death, he outlined his ideal arts program as a type of corrective, one that would "stress research as well as performance...where past artistic achievements and future utilizations of technology would be examined so that students create ideas to change the cultural environment."[27] More introspectively, VanDerBeek posited, "If the role of the artist is to give thought form, is he also helping to identify the changing surface of reality?"[28] And we should continue asking, as he did in this essay, "Is it art and technology, art by technology, or art for technology?"[29]

As a type of rhetorical response, we can think of Sara's *Women & Museums* series (2017–ongoing). Specifically, her 2019 MIA exhibition set up a direct relationship between the images of the objects she selected to photograph from the museum's collections and the objects themselves. Rather than see the turn toward digitally mediated experiences as a loss or remove from the original moment or source, the *Women & Museums* series is suggestive of the ways that contemporary conditions of digital image capture and storage are actually deeply rooted in nineteenth-century photographic techniques and pedagogical philosophy. These works bring into focus art history's own unresolvable conflict around experiencing works of art simultaneously in real-time as well as through the "scalar flexibility" of reproductive surrogates or proxies (photographs, books, slides). In fact, since the nineteenth century, art history has been dependent on what art historian Jennifer Roberts has called "the virtualizing force of pictorial representation" that governs the way art has been conceived, practiced, and taught from its inception as a discipline.[30] Art history is a field better suited than any other to fully understand what it means to comprehend an object, artifact, painting, sculpture, or site that remains accessible only through images. And, more specifically, how we rely on images to draw comparative associations or interpretations about objects that are never in the same place or time.

[27] Weiss, "Stan VanDerBeek to Students," 20. VanDerBeek died of cancer in September 1984.

[28] Weiss, "Stan VanDerBeek to Students," 20.

[29] Weiss, "Stan VanDerBeek to Students," 20.

[30] Jennifer L. Roberts, "Seeing Scale," in *Terra Foundation Essays Volume Two: Scale* (Chicago: Terra Foundation for American Art, 2016), 10–24.

Sara's *Women & Museums* series shows us how abstraction has been slowly cleaved from the cubic parameters of sculpture and concretized instead around the material conditions of digital compression to harness new ratios between bodies in space and bodies in time. In one image, a Cycladic figure from the second millennium BCE, now housed in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and a seventeenth-century Korean moon vase in MIA's collection are composited rather than collaged or montaged—a reference to the photographic and filmic piecing together of disparate parts to form a continuous whole—into a single digitally seamless image. Instead of trying to capture or approximate true color, Sara deliberately altered the colors "to move away entirely from any sense of the original object."[31] Sara details this process:

> *I wanted the coloration and the scale to emphasize my mediation of the collection, since I'm projecting my own ideas onto the past. I made the prints so large because I was thinking about the museum space as both fractured and immersive, much like our experience of screens. The way the images are layered conflates foreground and background, and I was thinking about the luminosity of screens with the dye sublimation.*[32]

Vertically oriented, photographs in the series *Women & Museums* read as compressed digital files that can be scrolled or swiped. These qualities within the works foreground the mutability of time-based media operating under the pressures of digitality. To be clear, *Women & Museums* does not perpetuate false binaries between unique objects and seemingly endless copies that have been enabled by cheaper forms of digital processing. Rather, in Sara's careful installation, which eschews setting up a direct ratio between the image and its source, her *Women & Museums* images convey what Charlesworth might call "a meeting of an object and its apprehension."[33] In this way, Sara makes her own claim to demand altogether different and diverse vocabularies to articulate notions of reproducibility distinct from those that currently circulate around film, video, and other arts based around the possibility of the multiple.

Transitions

By reframing Black Mountain College's cultural past within the current age of digitality, the exhibition *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* models the mutual embedding of media and contemporary art history. This is not accomplished by recuperating outmoded forms of image-making in a moment dominated by digital images or offering a counter-narrative of the school's storied past, but in a more nuanced manner that reflects the unreliability and inadequacies of media formats—both analog and digital, whose own built-in obsolescence contrasts the essential role of art history and art museums to conserve and, thus, preserve cultural history. Throughout the exhibition, the markers of lived experience become not only *more visible* but also legible, an activity that remains pressing and critical within both digital culture and contemporary art history. In the end, the exhibition *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* suggests that the role of art history is not about reclaiming the past as much as it is a means of filling in or organizing what's left of the past.

[31] Sara VanDerBeek quoted in an interview with Emily Watlington, "Sara VanDerBeek on Layering Depictions of Women," *Art in America*, September 13, 2019, https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/sara-vanderbeek-women-millennia-metro-pictures-56491/.

[32] Emily Watlington, "Sara VanDerBeek on Layering Depictions of Women."

[33] This descriptor comes from Kate Linker's perceptive overview of Charlesworth's impact. See Kate Linker, "Artifacts of Artifice," in *Sarah Charlesworth: Doubleworld* (New York: New Museum, 2015), 22.

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Campbell-LaFleur, Andrianna. "Sara VanDerBeek: Photographic Understanding," in *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* (Asheville: Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, 2019), 61-82.

Sara VanDerBeek: Photographic Understanding

Andrianna Campbell-LaFleur

Despite an initial reticence about continuing the familial legacy, Sara VanDerBeek, one of Stan VanDerBeek's five children, is now a prominent visual artist.[1] And to view Sara's diptych *Roman Stripe IV* (2016)—in which a triangular interlace of layered duotone color images depicts her own abstracted arrangement of sculptural forms—is to realize that an intergenerational link exists between father and daughter.

Roman Stripe IV, with alternating carna-tion-pink and blue-roman stripes, emulates the North American pieced quilt pattern of the same name. A quick glance makes the shapes within the images appear like downward-pointing arrows; however, the V is similar to the chevron: a heraldic figure pointing up. Containing ancient and modern references, *Roman Stripe IV* was featured in Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center's 2019–20 exhibition *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* alongside a selection of her father Stan's paintings, made during and after his stud-ies at Black Mountain College (BMC; 1949–51).

In his paintings, such as a small untitled work from 1950 (the only known extant painting from his time at the college), Stan experimented with close approximations of the isosceles triangle. This intricate work, featuring interlocking shapes reminiscent of greater-than and lesser-than signs, forms an interstitial closed network and an implied inversion through a remarkable series of minute gestures. To see the small paintings is to see the experimental quality of Stan's developing eye and hand as he applied brushstrokes of oil and acrylic to his cerise- colored board. Yet, it was also at BMC where he came to see painting as limited to the creation of a "minute world"—and that film and painting on film were a means to achieving an interface.

Recent writing on photography describes the convergence of digital and analog as a form of interface. For instance, Chris Wiley describes artists "[engaging] in self-reflexive analysis of the rapidly shifting image culture in which they find themselves."[2] His examination of material hybridity mirrors curator Bill Arning's description of Stan's darker futures for technology. Arning summarizes that the late artist's collagist, assemblage, and junk aesthetics are based on writers such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, who promoted the destruction of rational humanist man. The psychological impetus for creating irrational interfaces was to bypass these darker futures for utopian ends.[3]

Sara's photographs explore human rather than "big" utopian aims. She understands her father's goals as utopian but does not categorize her own photography in these terms. Her insistence on coupling and hybridizing the digital and analog is comparable to that of an active New York photographic cohort of practitioners, such as Wiley, Michele Abeles, Lucas Blalock, Ethan Greenbaum, and Eileen Quinlan—who interface photography with other media as a means of both expanding and evaluating the medium. Sara's more recent work also parallels photography by Margaret Lee, who has borrowed the artworks of friends and well-known artists in order to photograph them.

Both Sara and Stan have focused at times on abstraction and on their respective mediums of photography and film as subject matter. Significantly, both concertedly return, with a shared frequency, to psychological portraits and depictions of the body—often when events both public and personal have impacted their practices. Bodies in movement, in particular,

[1] Her brother Johannes is also an artist, and an exhibition of the work of all three VanDerBeeks was curated by Ian Berry in 2009–10. Titled *Amazement Park: Stan, Sara, and Johannes VanDerBeek*, the show took place at the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York.

[2] Chris Wiley, "Picking Up the Pieces," *Aperture*, August 2, 2013, https://aperture.org/blog/picking-up-the-pieces/.

[3] In the 1960s, scientists and engineers such as J.C.R. Licklider understood that computer technology could be merged with psychology for any number of aims. Arning's ultimate conclusion is that the computer becomes a tool of "social control." If there is a primary difference between the fears of 1968 and today, it is the focus on the humanism of the camera. As Johannes VanDerBeek has also described, fears about the atomic bomb, technology failure, and complete picture control recede from being subject matter in contemporary art. See Ian Berry's interview with Johannes in *Amazement Park: Stan, Sara, and Johannes VanDerBeek* (Saratoga Springs, NY: Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College and Prestel, 2010).

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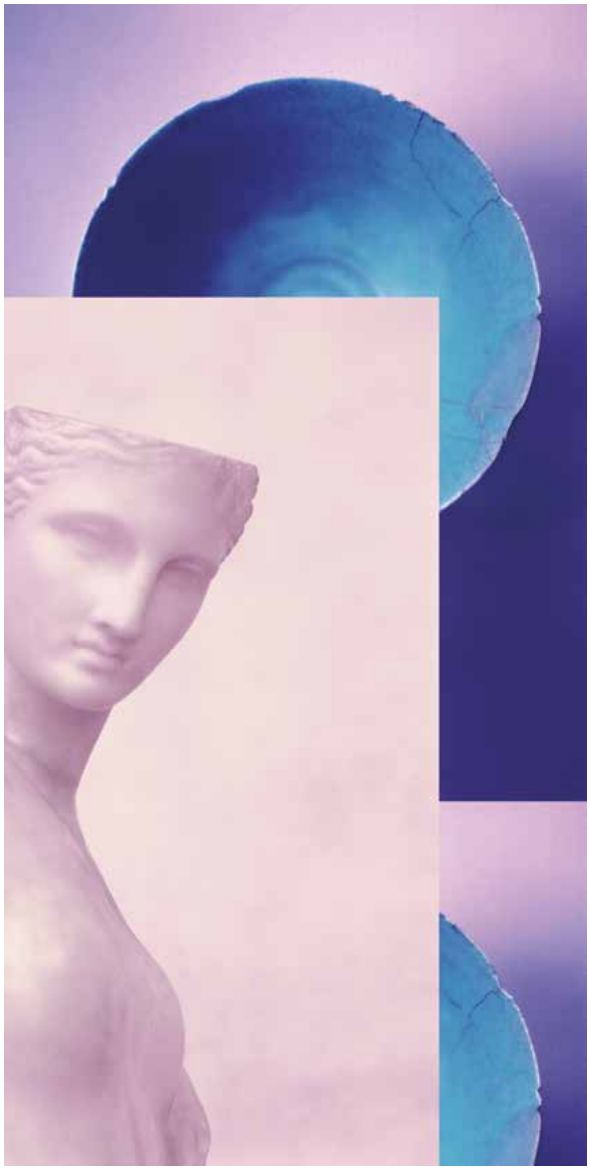

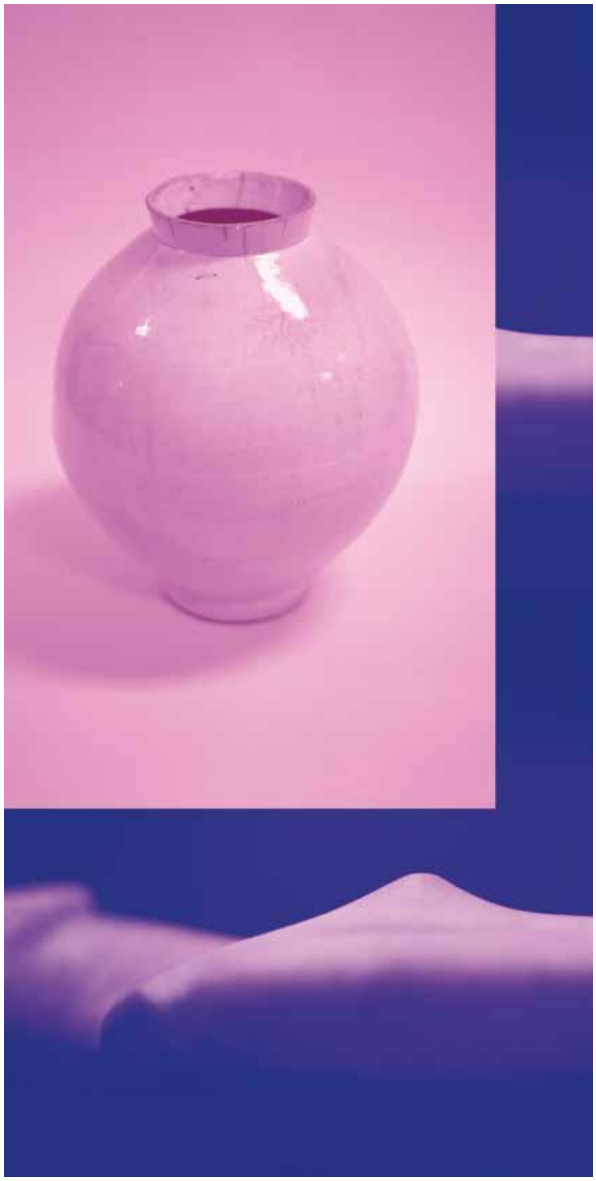

drew Sara to making the riveted shapes in her metal, cast plaster, and wood sculptures. As they have evolved over time, her sculptures and photographs have taken inspiration from the static bodies of antiquity, viewed and captured within various international institutions, as well as those of dancers, both professional and in training.

Sara's work capturing dance and dancers began in 2011 with her collaborative engagements with Sonya Flores, a professional dancer of Kupa and Ute descent specializing in the Fancy Shawl Dance, at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (as part of her residency and project at the museum). This has continued with an ongoing series of photographs entitled *Baltimore Dancers* as well as *Roman Women* (both commencing in 2012). *Baltimore Dancers* began with Sara taking tightly cropped black-and-white photographs of dance students in the dance studio at the University of Maryland in Baltimore County (where her father had taught and where she herself had once studied dance). In *Baltimore Dancers Six*, we see no faces, merely legs.[4] The dance floor is one that is delimited by the proportions of each dancer, and Sara's self-reflexive view in *Baltimore Dancers Two* is from below. Two figures sit in repose rather than dance —marking a rest that is, nevertheless, poised.

The work differs from Stan's 1965 black-and-white, 35mm film of Merce Cunningham dancing, titled *Untitled (Merce Cunningham)*. At first, Stan's camera concentrates on Cunningham's legs, and then on his spread-eagle arms. Cunningham, in a belted white tunic, stretches out and throws his arms up and backward. While he ignores the camera (in this case, similar to Sara's *Baltimore Dancers Six*), viewers are acutely aware that it was not filmed as a live performance. In both VanDerBeeks' approaches to dance, there is an expectation of privacy and intimacy—making viewers privy to the practice hall of the dancer[5]—and Stan describes dance as:

> The motion of man
> Shapes the form of mankind
> In the street...
> In the symboloc [sic] theatre
> In the landscape of the mind's eye
> In the preface to poetry and the electric-art That confronts
> The illusion of man in
> The magic-reality of light[6]

The light and color in Stan's films and, in turn, Sara's photographs alternates. At times, it is naturally occurring and soft and, at other times—as in his *Film Form* (1968) and *Moirage* (1967) and her *Baltimore Dancers Eleven* and *Twelve* (2019)—it is staged, applied, moiré-patterned, and wild. Their light play, a kind of shared magic of manipulation and superimposition, instead allows a slow sculpting of movement. Consequently, the viewer's engagement with the performance in each of their works is a twin action of the implied space between dancer and the patterning, felt close and in the distance.

To view professional dancers and those training to perform professionally is to understand circumscribed spatial and temporal interactions. These artworks (of father and daughter) react to each other in *VanDerBeek + VanDer eek* within their temporal feedback loops. Perhaps it makes sense to consider their archetypal dancer—made for the stage and trapped in film (both moving and still)—as an allowance for onlookers to see into the interstitial spaces of the performers and the artists capturing them. And in many of their artworks, the VanDerBeeks envelop dancers in a light-space environment or a color zone.

[4] This is comparable to Hazel Larsen Archer's Cunningham photographs from 1951–53 and Stan's untitled photographs from 1949–50/2007. Both pictured in Helen Molesworth and Ruth Erikson's *Look Before You Leap* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 192–93 and 200–01; and also included in the *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* exhibition.

[5] Anne Ellegood explores these ideas around privacy in her "Sara VanDerBeek" essay in *Amazement Park*.

[6] Stan VanDerBeek, "Dance and Cinema Illusion and Envelopment," ca. 1965. Stan VanDerBeek Archive. Stan published a revised version of this prose in *Dance Perspectives*, no. 30 (Summer 1967): 30–32.

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The process of light making form, mentioned in Stan's poem, has been integral to Sara's practice over the past twelve years. In a 2019 exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA), she showed her layered photographs of museological objects alongside objects from the museum's collection. Working within the museum, she used existing light in the galleries and daylight in their Photographic Study Center to capture a more sensorial view of the objects—selected by her and museum staff around a loose theme defined by the artist as an exploration of the female body as a site of production and reproduction.

One of the objects chosen for display was Manuel Álvarez Bravo's *Skylight* (1938–40), which pictures a woman reclining on her back. The position of the sitter's hands resembles the white lines painted on the tarred Mexico City roof, and the image, seen from above within the installation, placed viewers in a position mirroring that of Bravo's—Sara arranged this and other photographs from the museum's collection upon a large, low-lying pedestal. Framed images, such as this as well as those by Ruth Bernhard, Diane Arbus, Barbara Morgan, and James Van Der Zee, among others, of female bodies posing, dancing, at rest, aware and unaware of the camera, were organized in amongst a selection of museum objects, primarily made by women—ranging from an early Neolithic female figure to late-twentieth-century ceramic vessels and textiles. This installation highlighted Sara's interests in examining her working process as a mirror of and to contemporary image interfaces—one that is associative and fluid in nature, yet under continual evaluation by the artist as to her engagement with history, its artifacts, and its institutions.

When she began photographing dancers, Sara had already spent an entire childhood aware of the practitioners of integrative art strategies—and in many ways, her photographs are more traditional than her father's. The compilation in the Black Mountain show makes a legacy comparison seem a given, and yet, for the younger VanDerBeek, when she began her work, it seemed to be far removed from the artistic concerns of her father. To understand the foundation of this intergenerational insecurity, which is purportedly common for artists and their children, is to see their shared interest in form and a stretched subjectivity. However, perhaps more keenly apparent is the distance between them in their approach to women, gendered authors, and female cultural pioneers.

The resurgence of pictorial, sculptural, and filmic combinations in the early 2000s began as the younger VanDerBeeks became artists. Sara often gravitated toward folded bands of light and color in her photographs and incorporated shapes into her sculptures, photographs, and textiles that emulated dancer positions and choreography. Yet, she is not a collagist as her father was. Her natural predilection is for ambient lighting and diffused color. Her series *Women & Museums* (2019), *Roman Women* (2013–ongoing), and *Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms* (2016), as well others such as *Crepuscule* (2015), approach the art object in the museum with rigorous research. For instance, in *Women & Museums*, Sara photographed objects in the collections of MIA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the British Museum, London, the Warburg Institute, London, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Naples. Describing the core of her process as "observation, transformation, and interchange," she claimed the objects.

Many of the pieces are from unknown or under-documented makers that she culled from various institutions, and many were selected for their shared materiality and their connection

to the female form, such as a porcelain Korean moon jar, a Nigerian terra-cotta Ife head, and an Acoma Pueblo earthenware seed jar by Lucy Martin Lewis from 1968. Few of these objects would individually convey the canonical Western art-historical sense of authorship and genius assigned to high art before the revisionist histories of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first. However, all are considered art and cultural artifacts, and in capturing and combining them in her large-scale images, Sara wanted to put forward "an associative experience of creation, moving away from a separation of art and artifact the way museums traditionally have organized and presented these objects."[7]

Women & Museums V (2019) depicts Lewis's 1968 *Jar* sitting in front of its own isolated background juxtaposed with the running purple- and-blue-hued marbling of a Meisen kimono. Lewis, one of the known makers Sara selected from the collection, continued an earthenware tradition dating back to the Acoma potters of the 1300s while retaining her authorial position. Sara was also interested in Lewis because of her "matrilineal lineage of creation and her use of ancient patterns to create her own individual visual language," and "greatly [admired] her as a mother of nine children who collaborated at times with her children on the ceramic objects she made over the course of her long career."[8] The Lewis's familial legacy of collaborative making appealed to Sara, who is now in a second exhibition focused on this intergenerational linkage.

Lewis's earthenware jar also casually connects with an international history of formalism and avant-gardism, as detailed by scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, who described the Surrealist and artistic histories of Western makers in their rush to collect the spoils from empire-building, oftentimes resulting in the destruction and expropriation (robbery) from original makers.[9] Sara, in her re-staging and reconsideration of this aspect of Western art—where museologically cherished art objects often cover up a lack of commensurate credit for these makers—remains aware of the fraught complexity of this scenario, as it has informed and influenced museum collections and artists alike. Thornier questions—such as, "Additionally, when an object is in a museum, does this not then intrinsically empower the object and its resonance over its creator?"—led the artist to update the language of her father.[10]

Sara's emotional perceptiveness is one part of envisioning a humanist approach to an international art culture[11] and indicative of her interest in "[putting] forward a space for reclamation and reconsideration of the female body and the collection and display of its various forms within museums."[12] It is easier then to understand why Sara wanted to focus on women in her *Women & Museums* series. In her MIA installation, Sara's anthropomorphized photographs, tall and slender, face the objects in the room. They constitute a forum of onlookers peering at a history of collecting that no doubt contains tragedies. Her photographs, already indebted to collage and quilting (both considered "women's work" in the Victorian era), here offer female depictions layered in an archaeological manner. And, in a way, they are both stand-ins and standing.

Sara's vertical photograph of an armless Aphrodite participates in the space as the goddess would have done in the temple. The original intended uses of these art objects enter into larger discussions around intent, appropriation, and ownership. Sara considers the complexity of museums and their collections as one that is complicated and evolving, writing that they are "contemporary secular spaces in which objects—that are often spiritual, burial-related, and deeply personal—are staged and displayed publicly, removed from any original context," and these issues of maker,

[7] Sara, in an email to the author, December 23, 2019

[8] Sara, in an email to the author, December 23, 2019.

[9] I have not found reference to Stan's interest in culling from other cultures, though his projections are comparable to cave paintings. Many artists of the generations before him, such as Marsden Hartley, Lee Mullican, and numerous Abstract-Expressionists, found inspiration in indigenous American art. Often, they bought these objects and decontextualized them of their histories.

[10] Sara, in an email to the author, December 23, 2019.

[11] Gloria Sutton, "Stan VanDerBeek," in *Amazement Park*, 67. This is different from Sutton's writing about Stan's "aesthetics of anticipation."

[12] Sara, in an email to the author, December 23, 2019.

subjectivity, and subject matter are "in flux."[13] She continues, "The object is suspended and in a state of continual recapture and reappraisal by each incoming visitor—in whose mind and body is housed myriad references, histories, and memories that inform and impact their knowledge and understanding of the object."[14]

Sara's *Women & Museums III* (2019), a magenta-red and purple dye-sublimation print, features a photograph of an Ife head pictured twice. The terra-cotta piece is a Nigerian Yoruba shrine head, made between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, in the MIA Collection. According to the museum's object files, the head depicts a royal woman and would have only been viewable by Nigerian aristocracy and royalty. The shrine head, like many of its kind, features eyeliner around the eyes and scarification marks on the forehead.[15] This particular portrayal questions the notion of stretching the role of the author to include and "capture" all within sight. In some of Stan's installations, he made makeshift environments out of stretched plastic, resembling a tender membrane scrim. This stretching of the screen's fabric recalls the VanDerBeek legacy. The shared, voluntary performance and viewing was a stretched subjectivity where, for a moment, the artist and audience existed together in the built viewing environment.

Sara's world exists in that variant space of photography, as both the projections of people and unknown histories. Thus, these figures and records inhabit the physical world and the projections of her illusory making.[16] In Plato's fifth-century description of the cave and Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), facts intertwine with the illusory. Facts or the "real," as she often describes it, are also crepuscular in Sara's photographs: what is real and not real (the imagined) merge on the plane of looking. Recalling Gloria Sutton's apt summation of Stan's art as establishing "a new interpretative framework for understanding media art, not just as an accretion of film and computer technology, but [also] as a critical means of engaging the effects of mass media on cultural experience," Sara's photographs traffic in the phantasmagorical.[17] Thus, Stan's photographs and films find a home in *Women & Museums* and *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek*.

A final element of the VanDerBeek legacy is the pairing of what the Western canon considers "cultural objects" within the framework of color and space in conceptual art. Stan's projection and color environments include cherry-picked aesthetics and objects from other cultures, as seen in the pages of *Life* magazine and other global publications. His immersive works influenced other artists, such as La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela. Their *Dream House* (1962– present), a magenta-pink light and sound environment, enacts a synesthetic substitution of filmic image using sound and chromatic lights.[18] Young and Zazeela's extreme duotone focus on pinks and blues shares a similar coloration with Sara's photography. It would be remiss to see Sara's works as siloed in a feedback loop of familial legacy. Her photography (which, for many years, has extracted any ruddy warmth, pairing instead cool pinks and deep cobalts) introduced the atmospheric perspective of light-color spatiality—seen in Young and Zazeela as much as in the "experience machines" of her father— to the new structural photography of the 2000s. It is her hyper-saturated hue-scapes that convey understanding the full in-the-color experience.

[13] Sara, in an email to the author, December 23, 2019.

[14] "I am capturing and picturing a private object that has been collected and staged publicly within an encyclopedic institution in America, quite far from its original context in time and place." Sara, in an email to the author, December 23, 2019.

[15] The striping that Sara incorporates into her *Pieced Quilts*, *Wrapped Forms* echoes this part of the early beautification and decoration rites of Nigerian artists.

[16] Sara describes lenses and the camera as "[going] beyond the more obvious idea of mystery—i.e., illusion or obfuscation—and closer to the ancient sense of mystery as an almost spiritual experience," in *Amazement Park*, 114.

[17] Sutton, "Stan VanDerBeek," *Amazement Park*, 73.

[18] The first installations of *Dream House* were at Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich, in 1969, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 1971, and *Documenta 5*, Kassel, Germany, in 1972. Commissioned by Dia, Young and Zazeela installed *Dream House* at 6 Harrison Street, New York, from 1979–85. The MELA Foundation's 1993 *Dream House* at 275 Church Street, New York, is on long-term view. See https://www.diaart.org/about/press/dia-art-foundation-acquires-dream-house-by-la-monte-young-marian-zazeela-and-jung-hee-choi/type/text.

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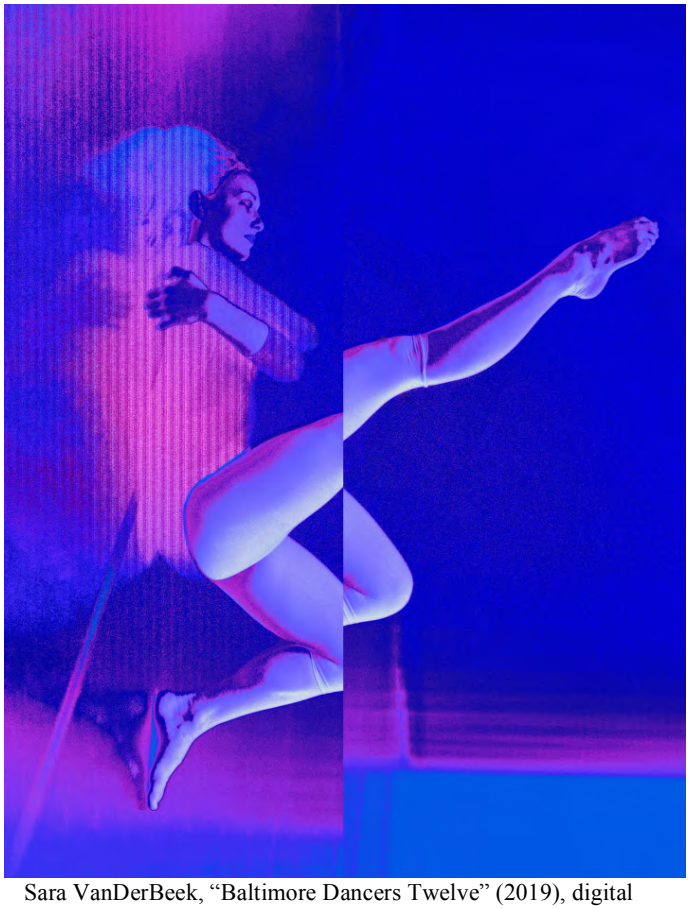
HYPERALLERGIC

Stoll, Diana. "A Father and Daughter's Art in Conversation Across Six Decades," *Hyperallergic*, 21 October 2019.

A Father and Daughter's Art in Conversation Across Six Decades

This exhibition of works by Stan and Sara VanDerBeek shows how both artists span traditional boundaries between media and engage similarly intangible concepts: spirituality, the mutability of time, memory, and space.



Sara VanDerBeek, "Baltimore Dancers Twelve" (2019), digital C-print, 20 x 15 3/4 inches. Edition 1 of 3 (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)

ASHEVILLE, North Carolina — *VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek* at the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center in Asheville, North Carolina, brings together works by the late experimental filmmaker (and polymath) Stan VanDerBeek and his daughter, photographer (and fellow polymath) Sara VanDerBeek, who is also the exhibition's co-curator. Although their careers never coincided — Stan died in 1984, when Sara was seven — the show identifies areas of conceptual and visual overlap between father and daughter, and feels very much like a collaboration between artists.

Growing up in the shadow of a pioneer of "expanded cinema" (a term he invented), Sara VanDerBeek has

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managed, strikingly, to establish her own firm voice as a creator. Her multivalent work — combining photography, sculpture, and installation — has been featured in solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art (2010), the Hammer Museum (2011), and the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (2015), among other institutions. Yet her output, including these successes in her own right, has inevitably been touched by her father's creative legacy.

Stan VanDerBeek, "Untitled" (1950, printed 2008), silver gelatin print, 8 x 10 inches (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)Sara VanDerBeek, "Baltimore Dancers Six" (2012), digital C-print, 6 x 8 inches (image); 16 1/4 x 16 1/2 inches (frame). Edition 3 of 3 (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)

Stan VanDerBeek took some of his earliest steps as an artist at Black Mountain College. Sara VanDerBeek and her co-curator, Chelsea Spengemann, are deeply immersed in the Stan VanDerBeek Archive (of which Spengemann is the director), and the exhibition is rich with archival materials that illuminate many of the ideas he began formulating at BMC. After arriving at the school in 1949, he wrote poems, studied painting with Joseph Fiore, and explored photography under the guidance of Hazel-Frieda Larsen (later Archer). The exhibition includes VanDerBeek's photographs of dancers at BMC that make stunning use of silhouette, cropping, and long exposure, anticipating some of the radical techniques he would apply as his explorations into visual media broadened. Later, he would collaborate extensively with some of the luminaries whose names are still closely associated with the school, including John Cage and Merce Cunningham.

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Sara VanDerBeek, “Roman Stripe IV” (2016), diptych; 2 digital layered C-prints, each: 96 7/8 x 48 7/8 inches (framed), overall: 96 7/8 x 100 3/4 inches. Edition 1 of 3, 2 APs (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)

VanDerBeek began his experimental film work in the 1950s, not long after leaving Black Mountain. His films and videos often incorporate wildly eclectic imagery — combining found footage, animation, still imagery, and riotous soundtracks — all moving at an exhilaratingly frenetic pace; a paradigmatic example is his 1963 tour de force *Breathdeath*, on view in this show. VanDerBeek observed that he was simply following the rhythm of his times. In the 1968 documentary film *VanDerBeekiana: Stan VanDerBeek’s Vision*, he declared: “Culture is moving into what I call a ‘visual velocity.’ Sometimes I wake up and think to myself: It looks like it’s going to be a 60-mph day.” In an effort to cram as much experience as possible into the dizzying moment, in the mid-1960s he invented his Movie-Drome, a vast, dome-shaped audiovisual laboratory built in Stony Point, New York, in which multiple film projections could be experienced simultaneously. Investigating the intersections of art, technology, and communication, he understood the power of television and foresaw the then-nascent potential of computers, fostered by stints as artist-in-residence at Bell Labs, MIT, and NASA.

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Sara VanDerBeek, “Roman Stripe IV” (2016), diptych; 2 digital layered C-prints, each: 96 7/8 x 48 7/8 inches (framed), overall: 96 7/8 x 100 3/4 inches. Edition 1 of 3, 2 APs (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)

Among his films featured in this show are two untitled 1965 collaborations with dancers; these were eventually used as projections accompanying *Variations V*, a multimedia performance project by Cage, Cunningham, and David Tudor. In one — with the privileged access that only film or physical intimacy can offer — we see up close Cunningham’s gloriously gnarled feet and watch him move like an animal, graceful and frantic, across his rehearsal room.

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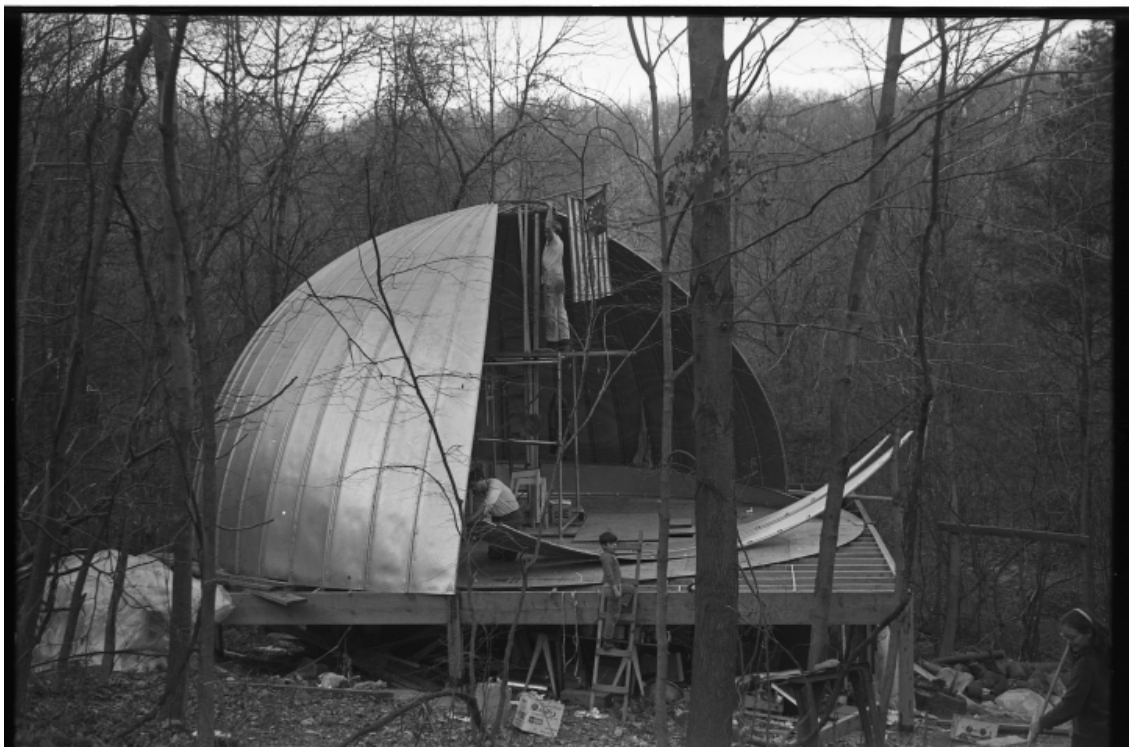

Stan VanDerBeek's Movie-Drome (1963–65) under construction in Stony Point, New York (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

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Stan VanDerBeek, still from *Breathdeath* (1963), 35mm film transferred to video, black and white, sound, 14.33 min. (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

It is in the realm of dance that the resonances between Stan and Sara VanDerBeek's work are most immediately apparent in this exhibition. Drawing from her father's archive, Sara incorporated some of his images of BMC dancers in her 2008 project *Four Photographers*. She subsequently pursued this theme, photographing dance students at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where her father taught in his later years. Her ongoing series *Baltimore Dancers* explores the interplay of light and body. Layered color images are boosted with digital interference in recent additions, recalling her father's psychedelic video and film experiments.

"Like my father, I feel like a bridge," the younger VanDerBeek said in a talk before this show's opening. The two artists span traditional boundaries between media, and they engage similarly intangible concepts — spirituality, the mutability of time, memory, and space. Yet while Stan was a maximalist, Sara is decidedly a minimalist — her diptych "Roman Stripe IV" (2015), a pair

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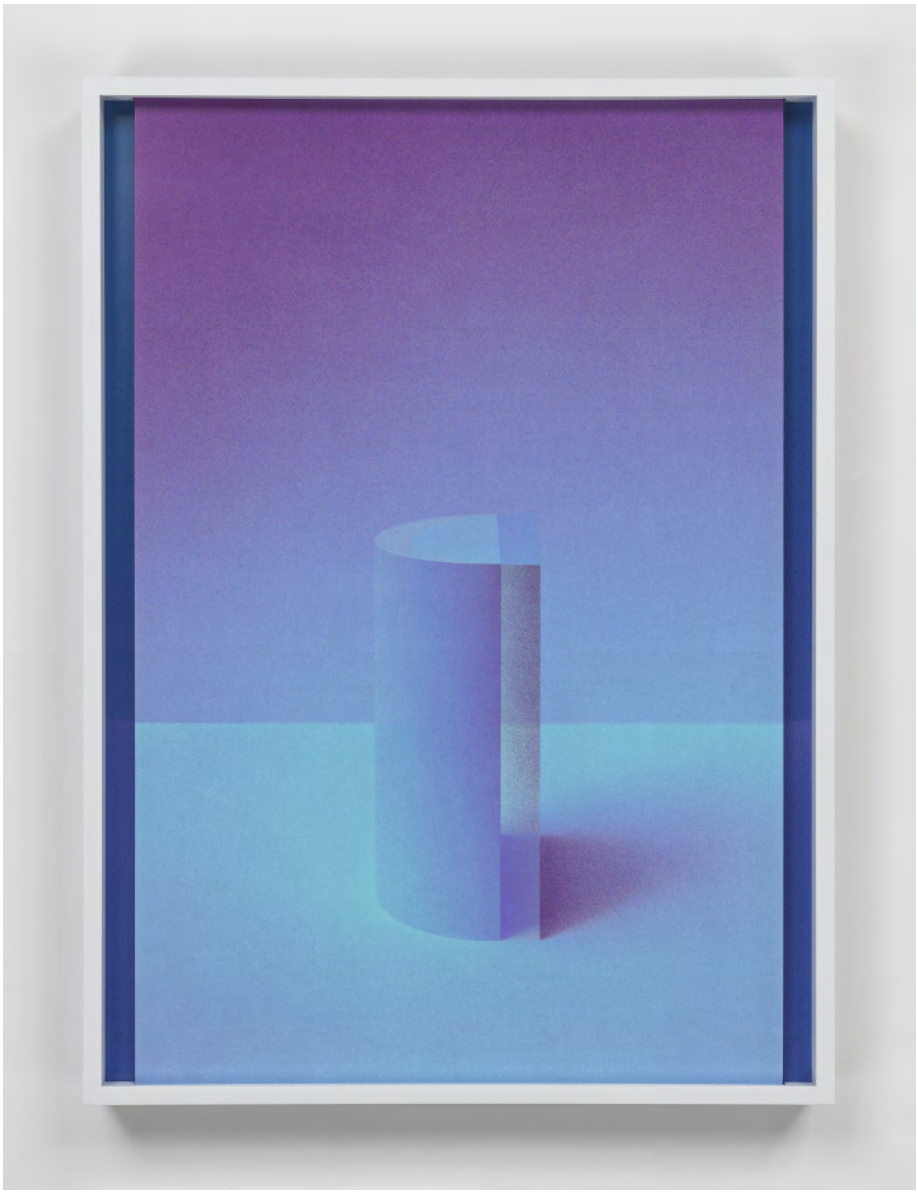
of monumental C-prints, evokes the meditative visuals of Agnes Martin or the purposeful linear trajectories of Frank Stella. Two other photographs here, “Roman Woman VIII” and “Roman Woman XI,” depict fragments of Classical sculpture, a recurring theme in her oeuvre, in blasts of high-contrast electric hues. In such works, Sara VanDerBeek engages freely — as her father did — in all parts of history, from the ancient to the future. In this way, too, they are both bridges.



Sara VanDerBeek, “Setting Sun VI” (2019), two layered digital C-prints, 20 x 14 1/2 inches (image), 20 1/2 x 15 inches (frame) (courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York)

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Stan VanDerBeek, “Untitled (Lune Light)” (ca. 1955), paint on wood panel, 10 3/8 x 5 7/8 inches (image); 12 3/8 x 7 7/8 inches (frame) (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

The exhibition also highlights instances of poetic alignment between the two artists. One gallery wall is lined with nine figure studies by Sara VanDerBeek, layered C-prints in seductive neon colors, their titles invoking the rising moon and the setting sun. Nearby on the floor a white cylinder lies on a bed of cloth: her “Moon” (2015). Overlooking them is a small painting made by Stan VanDerBeek ca. 1955, “Untitled (Lune Light)”: a full moon in a deep blue sky over a simple landscape. Here, as throughout this show, bodies in space — sculptural, filmed, photographed, painted; dancing, abstracted, celestial — are fundamental to the artists’ bodies of work.

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Stan VanDerBeek, "Untitled" (1950, printed 2008), silver gelatin print, 8 x 10 inches (courtesy Stan VanDerBeek Archive)

VanDerBeek + VanDerBeek *continues at the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center (120 College Street, Asheville, North Carolina) through January 4, 2020. The BMCM+AC's 2019 "ReViewing" conference took place at University of North Carolina Asheville's Reuter Center, September 20–22; the focus of the symposium was Stan VanDerBeek, and the keynote speakers were Sara VanDerBeek and Chelsea Spengemann.*

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"Sculpture, Photography, Surface," from *Sara VanDerBeek*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, pp. 37-41

Sculpture, Photography, Surface

Ina Blom

On the media battleground of modern art, the legendary struggle is between painting and photography, the upheavals and transformations taking place as the images of preindustrial craft traditions were either displaced or remediated by images produced by a mechanical apparatus. Less fabled but no less significant is the battle between photography and sculpture. In a world increasingly given over to the ubiquitous yet fleeting imagery of photography, film, and television, the medium of sculpture—staid, immobile, three-dimensional *things*—would appear to have been left behind. Charles Baudelaire compared sculpture with the complex illusions of painting and found it "boring," and in a media age fixated on the constant capture of attention through dynamized sensation, it would appear even more so.[1] If twentieth-century sculpture did its best to stage itself as increasingly dynamic, serial, dispersed, placeless, and environmental, it could never compete with media speeds and media presences.

On the other hand, photography from early on seemed obsessed with sculpture while also serving the interest of sculpture on many levels. It documented three-dimensional artworks *in situ,* making them globally available for the new discipline of art history. Reducing them to a two-dimensional surface and a distinct point of view, photography also produced a play of light and shadow that fed the desire for illusion and interpretation. More broadly, this alliance between sculpture and photography is illustrative of the complex relation between images and objects in a capitalist economy. If Baudelaire also accused sculpture of being mere luxury objects, photography's ability to imbue isolated objects with depth and mystery was arguably *the* driving force in creating desires for brand-new shiny things among a burgeoning consumer class. Photography could only ever produce inferior reproductions of paintings, but it would add important new dimensions to sculptures and commercial goods alike. Photography was *for* the world of things. The unending celebration of the photographic practice of Irving Penn, to single out one example, seems to hinge almost entirely on his ability to turn anything and everything into a freestanding, sculpture-like commodity/object, attesting to the perseverance of this reality into the realm of late capitalism.

It is hard to avoid recalling this media history when confronted with the works of Sara VanDerBeek: her artistic trajectory seems to reproduce the

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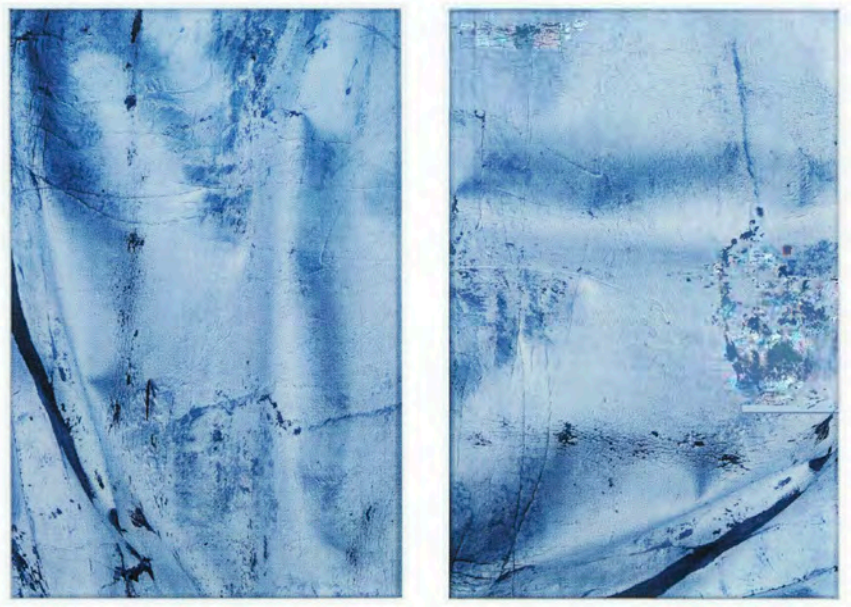
entire feedback loop between photographic images and sculpture objects. At the outset, she created sculptures for the sole purpose of subjecting them to photographic interpretation. As images, the sculptures were placed against neutral shallow backgrounds, framed and cropped in ways that supported their dimensions, lit so as to emphasize texture. Alternatively, they took center stage in actual rooms, engulfed in light and shadow. Generally the photographs would lean discretely toward the monochrome, underscoring the identity between object and image.

Yet, after this initial career as images, circulating in exhibitions, catalogues, and digital media, the same sculptures have taken on a new life as actual objects in installations. In this new incarnation, they have been framed by the walls of a white cube propped up on the outside by visible scaffolding, an ostensibly constructed space within a larger white cube exhibition space. More than anything, these spaces come across as photographic stage sets where sculptures are prepared for photographic reproduction as "exhibition pieces": they are, so to speak, physical reminders of the virtual museums of networked art appreciation, as exemplified by tendentious websites like Contemporary Art Daily that cater to visual skimming rather than reading. In these photographic (or photogenic) spaces, sculptures also

Turned Stairs/Stars, 2014, installation view, *The Blue of Distance*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, 2015



Alhambra I, 2014

compete for attention with framed photographs on the wall, object against object, so to speak. But then again, photographs also tend to be treated as objects *in* VanDerBeek's photographic works. Here they are recorded as elements in spatial arrangements that recall the way in which they are used in everyday life: for instance the way they are hung on fences or propped up on sidewalks and staircases in impromptu rituals of public mourning at sites of accident or catastrophe.

On first impression, her practice may recall that of Constantin Brancusi, who used photography to emphasize and extend the multiple reproductions of his sculptures, and further, as a way to explore the way they might function as purely optical effects, inscribed in plays of light and shadow or figure versus ground.[2] This is even more so since Sara VanDerBeek's sculptures often seem to intentionally reference the repetitive geometric forms of Brancusi's plinthless columns and column-like plinths. Still, to see the Brancusi-effect in her work is also to gauge the distance that separates her media feedback loop from these earlier encounters between sculpture and photography. This distance comes across above all in her emphasis on surfaces, underscored in close-up shots of anything from Greco-Roman architecture, ancient Native American ceramics, to the poured concrete surfaces of contemporary cities. This is significant in the sense that surfaces not only implicate objects, architectures, and images alike, but also are increasingly understood as a useful term through which to understand the dynamic existence of materials in the realm of digital technologies. In her recent book, Giuliana Bruno uses the concepts of surface and screen as a way of addressing an entire architecture of mediatic transformations. Due to the

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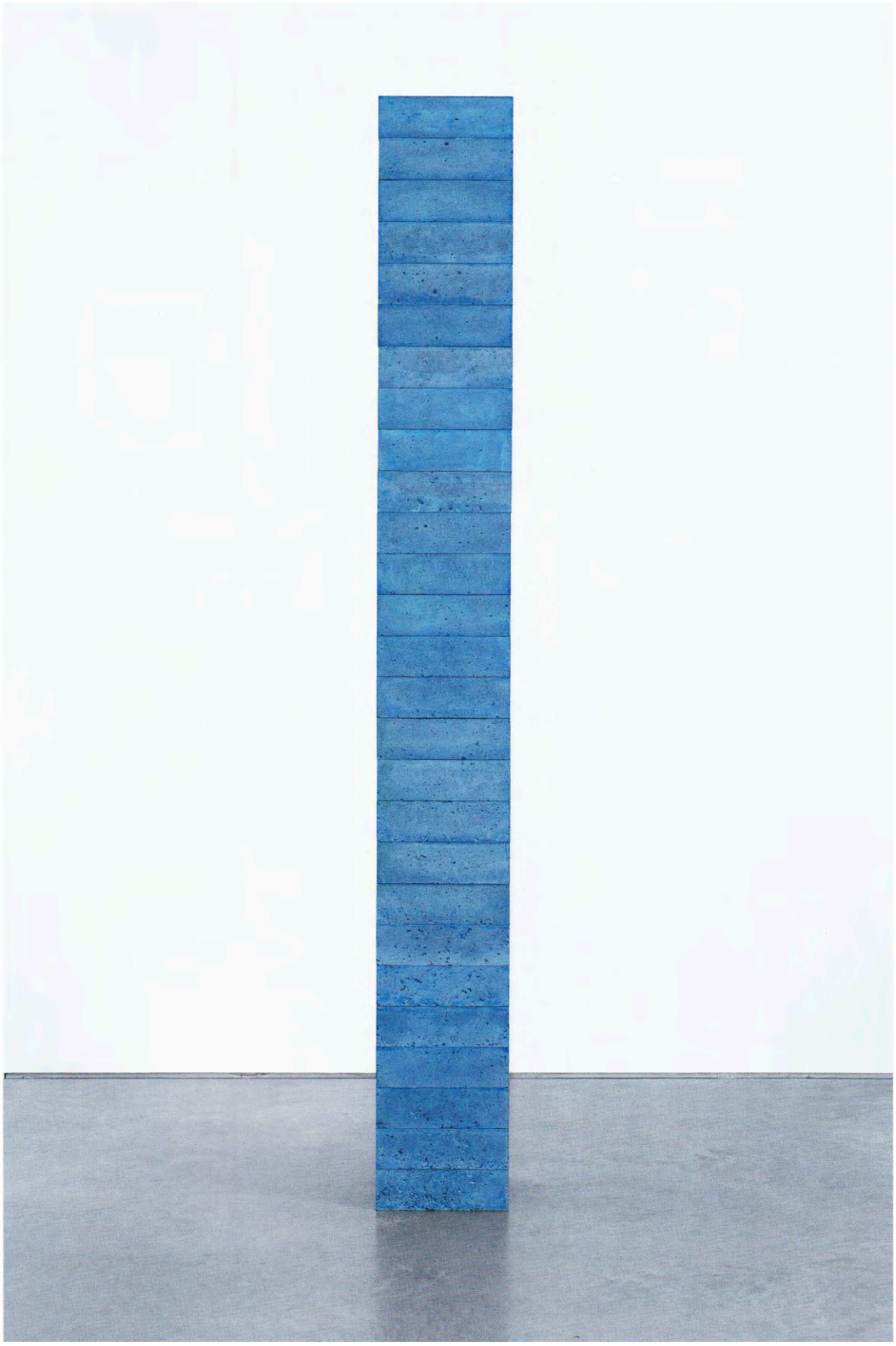

Setting Sky, 2014

variety of time-critical operations enacted through screen surfaces, they can no longer be contained by optical metaphors such as "windows" and "mirrors" but function more like membranes or connective tissues that turn architecture and art into pliant planes of moving images, or the enfolding of space.[3] As VanDerBeek's photographs constantly zoom in on the mottled surfaces of buildings and sculptures and out again to the various archi-tectures of image/object display, we are implicated in precisely such pliant screen realities. Even classical sculpture-the Greek and Roman busts that were among the first love objects of photographers-is given a new life as screen effects. While nineteenth-century photographers like Henry Fox Talbot and Roger Fenton dryly captured such sculptural specimens for the purposes of art-historical registration, late-twentieth-century photographers like Patrick Faigenbaum staged them with dramatic lighting and close fram-ing in order to invest them with the psychological qualities of real persons.[4] In VanDerBeek's photographs, in contrast, they seem to float inside demon-stratively artificial layers of monochrome color, products of a modulation of surfaces that cares less about historical origins and points of identification and more about new material contingencies and points of contact. Here is a body of work that articulates some of our keenest contemporary intuitions: notably that screen realities are physical realities that extend far beyond the realm of the interface/surface in the limited sense of the term.

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Paul Paret, "Sculpture and Its Negative: The Photographs of Constantin Brancusi," in *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, ed. Geraldine A. Johnson (Cambridge, 1998), p. 104.

2 Ibid.

3 Giuliana Bruno, *Surfaces: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media* (Chicago, 2014).

4 Geraldine A. Johnson, "Introduction," in Johnson 1998, pp. 3–6.

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"Sara VanDerBeek in Conversation with Roxana Marcoci: On the Conditions of Photo-Based Culture," from
Sara VanDerBeek, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, pp. 92-94

Sara VanDerBeek in Conversation with Roxana Marcoci: On the Conditions of Photo-Based Culture

Roxana Marcoci I'd like to start with your chromogenic color print *Delaunay* (2008), a work I know rather intimately because it is in the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. I have looked at this particular image over time and up close, and return to it now as a reference point to discuss the conceptual underpinnings of your practice. In an earlier conversation we had [December 9, 2014], you mentioned that you based *Delaunay* on a tapestry design by artist Sonia Delaunay-Terk, who was co-founder of Orphism and pioneer of color-based abstraction. Indebted to the philosophical theo-ries of Henri Bergson, Sonia and Robert Delaunay developed the concept of *simul-tanism* (all things are simultaneously present to consciousness), which led to their radical experimentation with colors and designs in prismatic collages, paintings, and, in Sonia's case, also book bindings and dresses.

Sara VanDerBeek Sonia Delaunay-Terk has been and continues to be a reference point for me. Her work *Electric Prisms* from 1913, for example, is considered a reflec-tion on modern life in the early twentieth century, yet I also see its title and the Delaunays' notion of visual simultaneity speaking to our current twenty-first-century, pixel- and screen-based culture.

RM You have, in fact, expanded the Delaunays' modern idea of simultaneity in your own practice by mining extant images from numerous sources, including art-history survey books, personal albums, archives, newspapers, and magazines. More specifi-cally, your work *Delaunay* draws together reproductions of a Frank Stella painting, a Rayograph, African textiles, Kabuki actors, and Leni Riefenstahl's photographs of the Nuba people. Can you talk about the principle of simultaneity in your work?

SV One way I see this principle manifest in my own work is through the layering of multiple images in a single frame. Recently, in *Electric Prisms,* a work I completed in 2015, twelve framed images are each comprised of two layers. The composition remains the same in all twelve images, yet when viewed as a sequence the objects depicted take on varying spatial and temporal qualities via subtle color shifts from one image to the next. Starting on the left with the deep blue of night, the framed images progress through hot pinks and reds of dawn, arriving at the strong contrast of day-light and then shifting again toward the dusky pink and blue crepuscular mix at day's end. The succession of forms moves from concrete and tangible to ephemeral and translucent, eventually fading out by the end of the sequence.

RM What does "simultaneity" mean culturally and, more specifically, how have you translated this concept into the present?

SV The color combinations within *Electric Prisms* (2015) were developed from my recent research trips through North and South America. They also refer directly to textiles used by Delaunay-Terk and Anni Albers, who in turn both drew upon ancient pre-Columbian textiles for their own work. I was thinking about the simultaneity of contemporary culture as advanced by Sonia Delaunay-Terk, as well as the continuities and continuums throughout a lifetime, throughout a larger shared history and the ways in which this accumulation of experiences results in a dynamic whole that at times is formed like a film—a sequence of specific moments that are layered over and amongst one another.

RM How does this filmic concept of simultaneity become enacted in your work?

SV Through continuous formal experimentation, I strive to create a sense of expanded duration, what can be thought of as an accumulative movement within a static image. This has resulted in new forms of collage and ways of layering the photographic image. As I move away from using found imagery toward photographing on site as well as bringing the experimentation of the studio and my process into the exhibition space itself, I have returned to a consideration of simultaneity as a way in which not only to convey but also to ramify the precarious and fragmentary condition of lived experience.

Chorrera, 2014

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Lunar Calendar, 2014

When working on a series that came to be titled *Ancient Objects, Still Lives* in 2014, had a unique opportunity to work with Casa del Alabado, a pre-Columbian art museum in Quito, Ecuador. I was granted access to photograph rare ceramic vessels created by the ancient Chorrera culture between 1300 BCE and 300 BCE. They effectively employed geometric forms and patterned adornment to reach a balance of formal resolution, complex stylization, and spiritual function. Additionally, the shapes of certain vessels could have easily been mistaken for modern pottery, and certain patterns were similar to those I had seen on ancient Greek amphora. These types of cross-epochal and -cultural connections are of ongoing interest to me as they complicate narratives around issues of importation, cultural influence, and formal adaptation that we typically ascribe to more contemporary iterations of globalization.

You have taken on the correspondence between South America and Europe, advancing transmodernism in the exhibition *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires: Grete Stern and Horacio Coppola* [May 17 to October 4, 2015], while more recently exploring the crossover of artistic communities in *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980* [September 5, 2015, to January 3, 2016]. Of particular interest to me is the feedback loop between Bauhaus and other pedagogical experiments, such as Black Mountain College, with that of ancient indigenous cultures in both South and North America.

RM A key focus of the exhibition *From Bauhaus to Buenos Aires* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, was on the Bauhaus laboratory and the radically photophilic moment of the nineteen-twenties and early thirties, which saw in photography a means to redefine both human perception and social worlds. That moment resulted in the formation of two contrasting yet loosely related modernist tendencies: *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and *Neues Sehen* or *Neue Optik* (New Vision).

SV After seeing *Transmissions* and, in particular, Juan Downey's video installation in which he filmed and shared the footage with various indigenous individuals, how do you see the recognition of these new counter-geographies playing out after World War II?

RM This is the premise of *Transmissions,* which I co-organized with my MoMA colleagues Stuart Comer and Christian Rattemeyer. It focuses on parallels and connections among artists active in—and in reference to—Latin America and Eastern Europe in the sixties and seventies. During these decades, which flanked the widespread student protests of 1968, artists working in these distinct political contexts developed cross-cultural networks to expand and circulate their artworks and ideas. I think that artists have always tried to develop alternative circuits for intellectual exchange, and as you alluded to earlier, artists often bring art into daily praxis to reach a wider public and exert an impact on society. I want to return to this notion of a fragmentary and prismatic conceptual process that you outlined earlier. Can you talk about how this is reflected in your production methods?

SV I work both in the more controlled setting of the studio and out in the world capturing images of objects, forms, surfaces, and spaces in a more aleatory process. I prefer a medium-format SLR film camera primarily because it is flexible and I can move quickly and carefully. I use film for its strength and range and then scan the negatives, which allows me to continue refining the images in the digital printing process. I can exploit the strengths of digital and analogue processes to yield an image that embraces and explores hybridity, both formally and materially, in the actual makeup of the properties of the image.

RM This brings to mind the "montage-collision" work of cultural theorist Aby Warburg, a slightly older contemporary of the Delaunays. His iconological experiments with photographic layouts in documenting civilization led to the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (Mnemosyne Atlas) in 1924, a vast pictorial atlas he left unfinished in 1929, at the time of his death.

SV Philosopher Giorgio Agamben noted that Warburg once enigmatically defined *Mnemosyne* as "a ghost story for truly adult people."[1] I like this idea of the past as something spectral and transformative. What I find even more compelling is what Agamben goes on to say: "If one considers the function that he assigned to the image as the organ of social memory and the 'engram' of a culture's spiritual tensions, one can understand what he meant: his 'atlas' was a kind of gigantic condenser that

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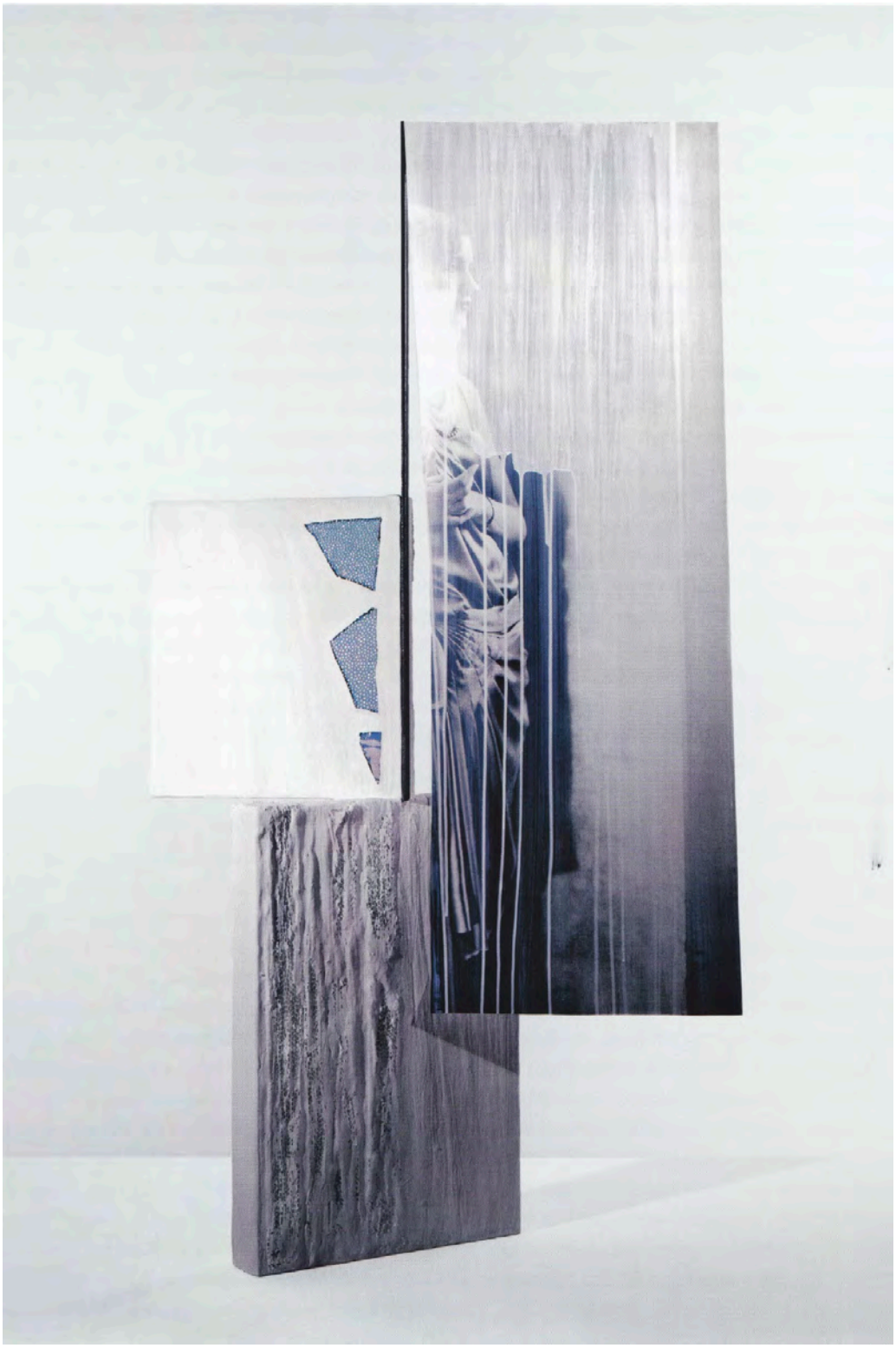


After, 2009

gathered together all the energetic currents that had animated and continued to animate Europe's memory, taking form in its 'ghosts.'"[2] Despite the historical specificity of Agamben's description, I translated this into contemporary terms, and the condenser he refers to immediately in my mind becomes the Internet.

RM There are analogue parallels. The physical architecture of the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* comprised seventy-nine large screens covered with black fabric. Between ten to thirty photographs were affixed to each screen. Disparate in their sources—artworks, advertisements, postage stamps, and newspaper clippings—they were grouped around shared themes, or around the formulas of emotional style that Warburg called *Pathosformel.* These images were formally related but separated by centuries of culture. Warburg's primary aim was to bring into focus recurrent motifs, "movement" or "performance," for example, based on gestural and physiognomic formulas.

SV This type of typology of recurring motifs that cut across centuries, which you just mapped out, combined with the way that Warburg physically layered his black-and-white images upon black fields of canvas, presaged the current logic around interfaces where there is no hierarchy and images are the dominant form of communication.

RM Can you expand on that idea as it relates to specific bodies of work? Your four-panel *A Composition for Detroit* (2009), which was included in the *New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek* [September 30, 2009, to January 11, 2010] exhibition at MoMA, comes to mind in terms of a relational montage of images and the cultural connections between them.

SV I was thinking about the variability of images and their sliding significance within our collective memory when making this and earlier works such as *Delaunay.* Pragmatically, I was also thinking about the way most of us work now—on a screen, often layered with a divergent array of windows, icons, and messages. Also both Warburg's *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* and Edward Steichen's 1955 design for *The Family of Man* exhibition at MoMA [January 24 to May 8, 1955], which famously plied photographs into an immersive environment, were in my peripheral view.

More significantly, *A Composition for Detroit* was made after an initial visit to Detroit, at the height of the economic crisis in the United States. Designed as one work, it consists of four large-scale constructions resting in a dark blue, almost black field, captured and printed as four large photographs. The decision to make a single work that moved in time from back to front and from left to right in a broken syncopation resulted from my experience photographing factory buildings in various states of decline around that city. Images by artists who had influenced my approach to this project, such as Walker Evans, as well as photojournalists and other concerned photographers like Leonard Freed were interspersed with details from publications covering the 1968 riots that had occurred in Detroit. I used certain details from these pictures in still-life images I photographed and then reincorporated these images into the larger constructions. Re-photographing the works of others as well as my own—

this echoing—was an attempt at translating the continual impact of past events on the present state of the city and, for that matter, the country as a whole. Detroit, as well as Baltimore and Cleveland where I have subsequently worked, have become visible markers of how divisions within class and race can be starkly illustrated via the dividing lines of urban decay. The lasting impact of the Detroit riots could be felt throughout all parts of the city some forty years later. *A Composition for Detroit* was the first work that included images I had taken directly on site. It has since changed the way I work. From this initial experience of research via a direct physical engagement with a place and a community, I have increasingly captured research- and site-based images as a means of engendering studio-based work.

While I had created larger screen-like constructions prior to this work, *A Composition for Detroit* felt like a culmination of various experiments in simultaneity, collage, and constructed photography. In particular, *The Principle of Superimposition II* (2008) was a predecessor. Created at the same time as *Delaunay,* I built a screen structure modeled on a folding screen designed by architect Eileen Gray and photographed it set against a black seamless backdrop. On each section of the screen I placed a singular image, or a collage made with strips of images layered diagonally across the panel, like a filmic cross-fade made concrete. Multiple moments, cultures, and perspectives were combined to create a shifting screen of memory in which both the personal and the universal rest in equal scale with one another and moments from the past and present rise and recede in the dark theatrical space of consciousness.

RM Your idea of a "filmic cross-fade made concrete" is a compelling description, and in many ways this process you described is analogous to the shifting role that photography has played throughout history as a medium for cataloging existence.

SV Steichen and Warburg are only two examples of the ways that photography has been inextricably linked to documenting "civilization." How do you think what has been characterized as the medium's democratic nature is shaping our sense of the world and how we document culture as a whole?

RM Photography is a populist medium: it belongs as much to amateurs as to professionals. Walt Whitman said that photography provided America with a new, democratic art form. When used as a tool for self-representation, it has agency. But, in speaking of Warburg and Steichen, I think that they had different intentions and so was the reception of their ideas. It's true that both devised specific layouts that invited a new way of reading photographs. Their layouts were structured like visual essays, a hybrid genre of critically self-reflexive commentary and images. Warburg and Steichen were both keen in supplanting the slow-paced linearity of art-historical text with the fast-paced jump cut of visual montage. Your work, whether *A Composition for Detroit* or *Delaunay,* does this by offering similar jumps, cuts, and repetitions. Constituted as potential atlases of pictures within pictures, these works suggest that there is no closure in the interpretation of the history of art. Your associative approach to image-making seems to ask, "Is photography an object, an image, or a way of looking?"

SV Your reading of those works feels apt. Whitman—his particular meter often jumping from intimate exacting moments to more nebulous grand pictures of existence in a single poem—fascinates me. I often think about how my approach to images could emulate a practice such as his. I agree that this line of inquiry you set up—Is photography an object, an image, or a way of looking?—remains pressing within contemporary photography. How do you see the critical reception of Steichen's *The Family of Man* factoring into more recent photography discourse?

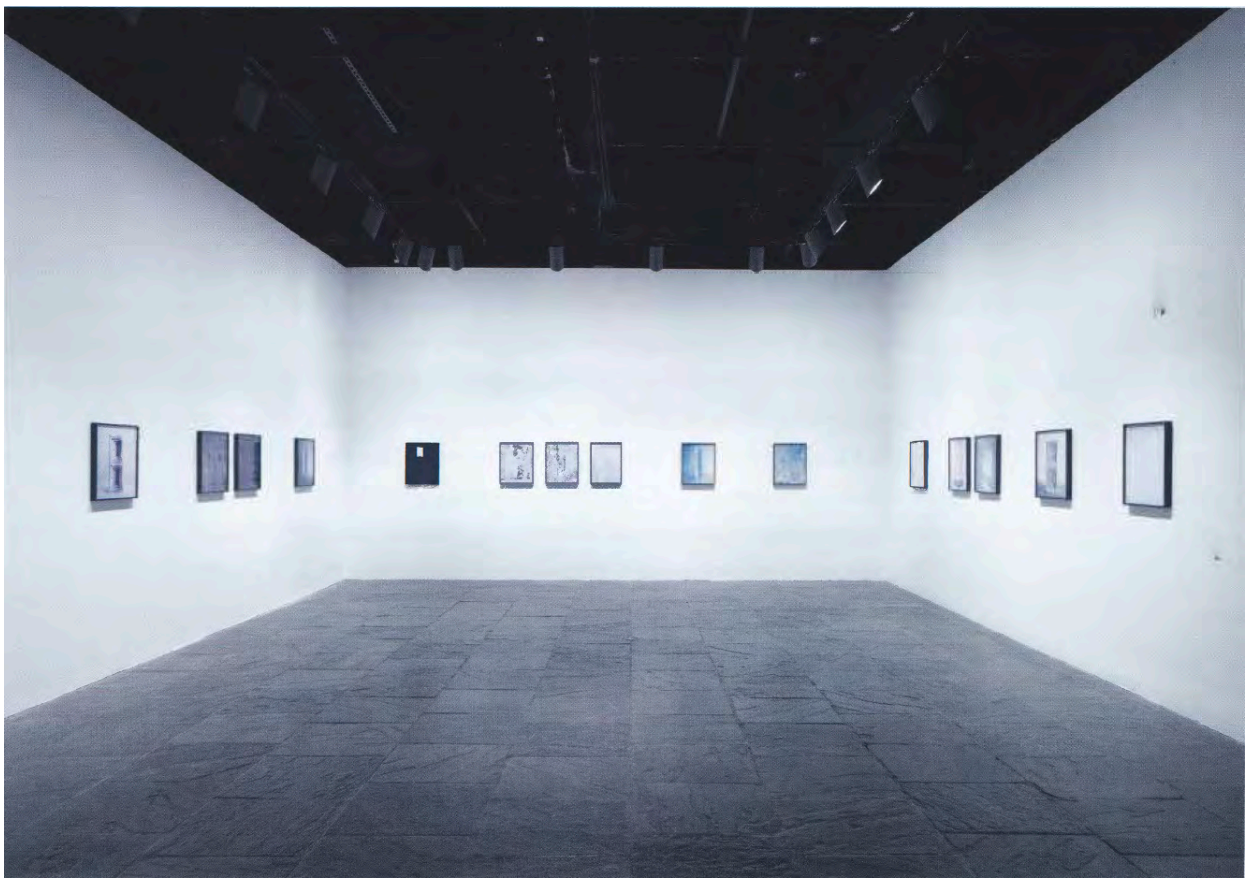
RM Made after World War II, *The Family of Man* enjoyed huge popular success, attracting some nine million viewers. It traveled around the nation and, thanks to the United States Information Agency, also internationally to thirty-seven countries. Yet, a number of critics from Roland Barthes to John Berger denounced the show as American mythology and an act of cultural colonialism. It is only recently that theoreticians such as Ariella Azoulay have been reevaluating the exhibition's universalizing potential through the lens of democracy and human rights. In 2011, *The Family of Man* became the subject of a conference in Arles, its contents published by the LUMA Foundation, the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, and Sternberg Press. The book, titled *The Human Snapshot,* is a collection of essays that foregrounds the idea of a "citizenry of photography."

SV And how would you frame Warburg in relation to this type of reevaluation?

RM Warburg, as mentioned, was preoccupied with the role of photography in documenting civilization. Yet, his encyclopedic project was not conceived in response to contemporary history. Nor was Warburg attempting to build, as Steichen did, a linear presentation of history, or rather narration, through images—from lovers, to childbirth, to household and careers, then to death, and finally, full cycle, back to children in the end. Instead, his project was intended to activate the viewer's memory of past art history, or what he called "the afterlife of antiquity." Warburg called the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* an "iconography of intervals," since it was based on historical anachronisms and discontinuities. Warburg's nonlinear, relational montage of images was intended to formulate an art history without artistic progress from one image to the other. He was one of the first to organize the presentation of large groups of photographs by editing them into flexible arrangements or montage-like sequences. It's a sensibility your work shares: activating the images' latent effects through resonating juxtapositions, and orchestrating the construction of a new temporality paced by looking at an assembled sculptural installation made of a heterogeneous mix of images.

SV "Activating latent effects," as you elegantly described, was central to my exhibition *To Think of Time* at the Whitney Museum of American Art [September 17 to December 5, 2010], where I created three hangings of photographs based on three of Whitman's poems. Central to this exhibition was *The Sleepers,* in which still lifes of hand-cast and sometimes painted sculptures that I made in the studio were mixed in with close-up views of the scarred surfaces of nine different foundations I photo-

graphed in the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans that same year. Although each piece was an autonomous image, this series, perhaps even more than the layered constructions we have discussed, presented the sequencing of images in direct relation to their spatial locale in both a poetic and filmic manner. As a montage, the three hangings appeared much more linear than pieces I had made previously if you "read" the images from left to right around the room. When I took a group of high school students that I was working with at the time through the show, I learned that most people weren't starting at the first poem. They entered the room at various angles and, in a way, made up their own poem that often ran opposite to the prescribed path I had imagined for the viewer. Over the course of the exhibition, I began to consider it more of an evolving and fractured montage that changed upon each person's individual viewing experience. *Foundation, Deslonde Street* (2013) from this series is particularly important to me. Its surface conveys a whole course of human construction moving from the remnants of pictographs or fragmented floors at archaeological sites to that of contemporary buildings and homes in which the outlines of standardized materials and measures are apparent. All that remained were the traces and outlines embedded in the concrete, marking a traumatic past and also literally providing the foundation for yet unrealized activity.



Installation view, *To Think of Time,* Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2010

The physicality of photographic montage was foregrounded in your essay for the catalogue that accompanied your MoMA exhibition *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today* [August 1 to November 1, 2010]. You discuss montage as "an organizational system based on a fragmentary, composite syntax of pictures culled from newspapers and magazines."[3] Montage—its use, application, and our understanding of it today in the early part of the twenty-first century—seems to have shifted along with the technological changes that are impacting the larger media landscape.

RM Hannah Höch, like other artists working with photomontage early on, including George Grosz, John Heartfield, Raoul Hausmann, and Gustav Klutsis, realized the activist power of this new medium. Höch, for one, used photomontage to examine mass-media representations of women in post–World War I Germany. Her politics engaged race and ethnography, and a prevailing theme in her work was the tension between the sexually liberated *Neue Frau* (New Woman), whose androgynous look reflected the period's deconstruction of rigid masculine and feminine identities, and the image of idealized femininity.

The role of photomontage in shaping mass consciousness only intensified after World War II and peaked during the period of the Vietnam War. Höch's critique of the clichés of mass-media representation proved to have had a lasting influence on women artists, specifically on the generation emerging in the nineteen-seventies and early eighties.

SV That moment of the seventies and early eighties remains vital yet often overlooked. Whose work in particular do you think takes up the earlier politics of photomontage?

RM I am thinking of Martha Rosler's photomontage series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967–72) as part of her antiwar and feminist activism, in which the artist spliced images of Vietnamese citizens maimed in the war, from photographs published in *Life* magazine, into images of the homes of affluent Americans, from the pages of *House Beautiful,* thus making viewers reevaluate what she called the "here" and "there" of the world situation. I am not sure if photomontage—whether digital or analogue—has the same political inflection today. In the age of the Internet, it has certainly allowed for a conceptual shift in the understanding of what a picture can be. Reality now widely consists of images. This means that one cannot even begin to understand reality without understanding forms of visual montage.

SV Martha Rosler's work is undeniably powerful. For the reasons you just enumerated, I included her 1982 video *Martha Rosler Reads Vogue* in a show I organized at Guild & Greyshkul in 2008. It was called *The Human Face Is a Monument* and was developed around artists—primarily female—working with the figure. Central to the exhibition was a work by Sarah Charlesworth titled *Figure Drawings* (1988/2008). I helped Sarah to produce this work for the exhibition after a number of conversations with her about her participation in this context. She had the idea originally in 1988 and,

in what I thought was a really brave move, returned to the idea and realized it for the show. This experience is reflective of the long-standing relationship I had with Sarah personally—through our intimate discussions about art, our practices, and our lives, as well as the lessons I gleaned from her work that continue to be a reference point. Sarah's particular approach to found imagery and her subtle and effective use of collage in works like those from her *Objects of Desire* series from 1983–88, for example, demand close and careful looking. When you move in on a visual detail, like the hard cut edge of the alluring blonde hair pictured in *Blonde* (1983–84), you are then immediately hit with its violence. And simultaneously, a void and aching is conveyed by that cut. Sarah's work turns on the precarious ways that presence and absence struggle to find a sense of balance—albeit one that remains tensional. It's an affective balance that I find can appear provocative as well as haunting and something I strive for in my own work. Both of these women and also Barbara Kasten have been incredibly influential on my thinking and my approach to image-making.

RM I'd be curious to hear you speak of the ways you enlist earlier photo-cinematic techniques. It seems to me that László Moholy-Nagy's and Man Ray's experiments with multiple negatives and photographic montages inform your practice. Their experimentation with photographs provoked a reimagining of the visual experience of objects. You use photography to call into question the notion of traditional sculpture by assembling objects and images as subjects for pictures that amplify a sense of photogenic porosity. Is photography a tool to construe the sculptural? And, what about the space of sculpture and choreography in your work?

SV It would be disingenuous for any artist working with the abstract qualities of photography in the current moment to not feel indebted to the early experiments of Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray, myself included. While they definitely inform my practice, it's important to th nk about how those processes and images from the early part of the twentieth century have been mediated by other artists. I recently read in Matthew Witkovsky's 2011 essay "The Unfixed Photography" that Bruce Nauman, having seen a retrospective of Man Ray's work in Los Angeles in 1966, equally admired the diversity of his practice. What I found significant was this abutting of two formative eras that have great resonance now for myself and others and the implied sense of accumulation and feedback in that moment of recognition on behalf of Nauman. Yet there was also a sense of passage and a movement from one way of working to another.

Inherent within this and our discussion of montage is a question of physicality and materiality. We are moving from the physical gestures involved in a nineteenth- and twentieth-century-based notion of image-making, such as the actions of capturing an image on a negative or collaging images via multiple negatives, or other earlier photographic processes such as silkscreens, photo static/lithographic prints, et cetera, to that of the present moment. We seem to be somewhere between the tangible object and the ephemeral accumulation of information, and with this, the notion of the physical image or the image as a resulting artifact of a physical process (performative or otherwise) takes on new meaning.

RM That's an interesting point. It relates to ideas teased out in one of the most recent exhibitions I co-curated at MoMA, *Ocean of Images: New Photography 2015* [November 7, 2015, to March 20, 2016], which, as its title points out, refers to the Internet as a vortex of images, a site of piracy, but also to what Jeff Wall called in a text from 1989 "liquid intelligence."[4] Photography as liquid, in flux, performative, not fixed. Some of the most promising experiments today engage photography as an unfixed field where digital and analogue, virtual and real, online and offline cross over. There are various ways of experiencing the world: through images that are born digitally, made with scanners or lenses in the studio or the outside world, presented as still or moving pictures, remixed online, or morphed into three-dimensional objects.

SV Your point underscores what I think of as a shifting sense of the physical, which at times acts as a stand-in for the actual amongst the mediation inherent within photographic capture. The photographic then in turn takes on aspects of the virtual, of the imagination, and of the subconscious, and with that I am intrigued by what are the many questions and problems that the mixing of photography and sculpture poses. Working with and against notions of documentation both inside and outside of my studio, I have been increasingly interested in pushing the printing and presentation of my final images into a nexus of two- and three-dimensional approaches. These works can then operate as a portal between an unfinished past and a reopened future.

RM Sometimes you capture sculptures, sometimes you construct them, and sometimes you examine the space between sculpture and photography. In all cases, and operating within a future anterior tense, you want to make palpable the tension between object and image. Can you speak of the process through which you choreograph an image?

SV The term choreography precisely addresses the sense of movement that occurs when an image is transformed. It is not just the arrangement of forms within a compo-

Four Photographers, 2008 (detail)

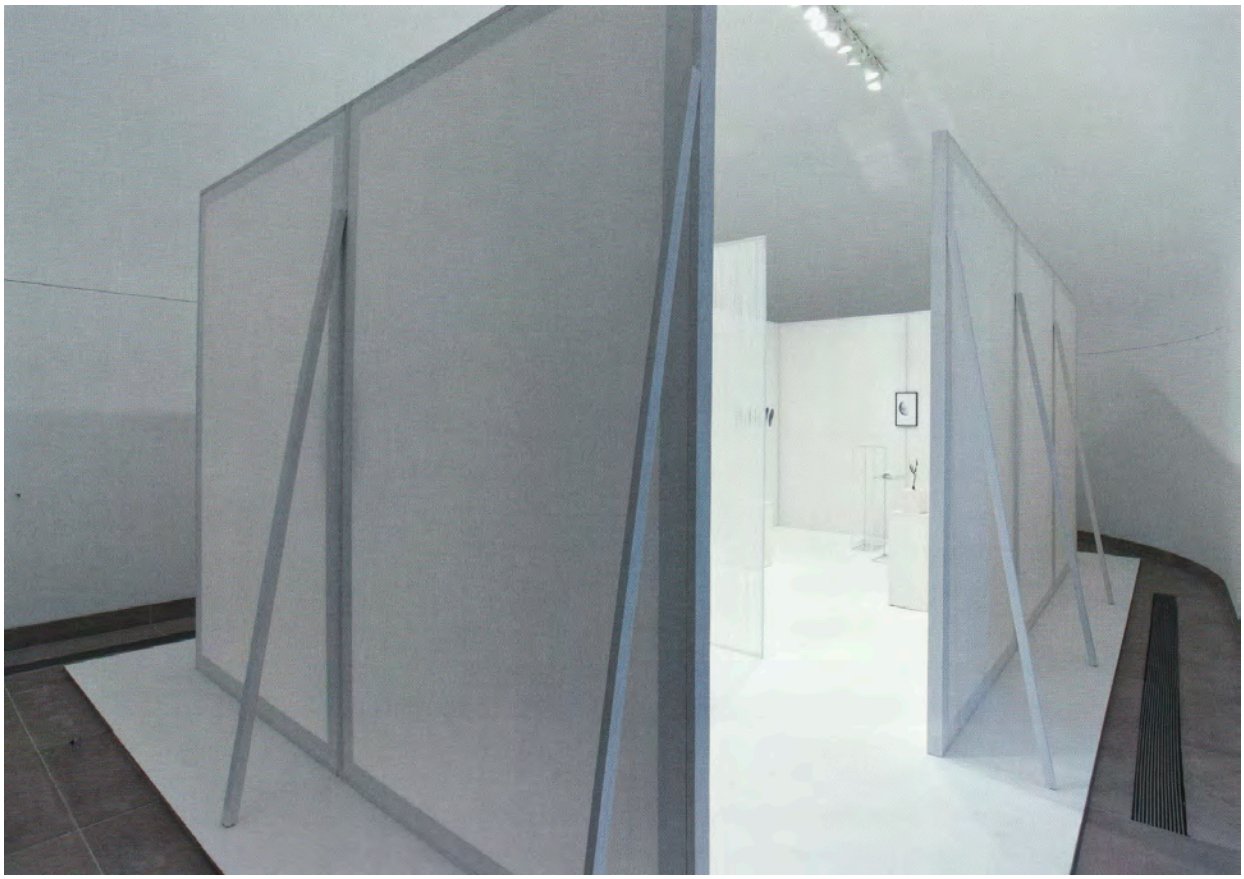
Four Photographers, 2008

sition or the placing of objects and images within a room that is choreographed, but the whole process has become about balance—the balance of the actual and the imagined.

Dance as a practice as well as dancers—as figures and forms—foreground this issue of balance within my own images. It is also an acknowledgment of the important historical relationship that dance has to considerations of minimalism, performance, and exhibition design. One reason is that dance, more than theater's narrative forms, offers a set of vocabularies to articulate what I think of as a spatial organization of interaction. This is a reference to the structure and rigor of dance mixed with the chance aspects of collaboration, the sense of gravity inherent in the body, and the importance of rhythm and timing as these elements coalesce to create the final work. I am also drawn to dance for the way the body becomes something other—more sculptural yet mobile.

RM We have spoken a few times in the past about Constantin Brancusi, who often choreographed his sculptures for the camera. Since the early nineteen-twenties, his studio space was articulated around hybrid configurations that he called *groupes mobiles* (mobile groups), each comprising several pieces of sculpture, bases, and pedestals grouped in proximity.

Pushing photography against its grain, Brancusi developed an aesthetic antithetical to the usual photographic standards. According to Man Ray, he often made out-of-focus, over- or underexposed, scratched and spotty prints, insisting that this is the way his work should be reproduced. In search of transparency, kineticism, and infinity, Brancusi used photography and polishing techniques to dematerialize the



Installation view, *Hammer Projects,* Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2011

static, monolithic materiality of traditional sculpture. There are several important strategies in his work. One is the way he amplified the reflection of light when photographing his polished bronzes. Known as *photos radieuses* (radiant photos), these pictures are characterized by flashes of light that explode the sculptural gestalt.

SV The radiant photos are remarkable, and Brancusi's use of light to both record and disrupt or, as you put it so powerfully, "explode" the sculptural gestalt is very significant. In certain ways, it is making the tangible intangible and vice versa, so that the image is continually oscillating—shape-shifting, forming, and re-forming itself as we observe it.

RM This is an important aspect for the contemporary generation. Think of an artist like Liz Deschenes and the metallurgic surfaces of her photograms. Liz's photograms taken by moonlight or daylight are reminiscent of direct-positive daguerreotypes. Or, Lisa Oppenheim whose solarized photographs of fires are reminiscent of Alfred Stieglitz's *Equivalents,* pictures of clouds taken in the twenties and thirties. Similarly, your *Metal Mirror (Magia Naturalis)* series from 2013, framed in mirrored glass, creatively engages with abstraction and representation.

SV The phenomenological aspects involved when viewing both Liz's and Lisa's works are particularly strong. Having recently viewed a collection of William Henry Fox Talbot salt prints, in which the images rise and recede with a similar illegibility to the *photos radieuses,* suggests that abstraction and transformation have always been at the root of photography even when the motivation, such as Fox Talbot's, was to document the world in detail. Considering a synergistic practice such as Brancusi's, or for that matter Liz's, can you talk about how you think this idea of the metamorphic, or of staging, has informed contemporary installation practices?

RM Clearly Brancusi envisioned his studio as a site-specific installation. The artist Scott Burton, in his essay "My Brancusi" (1989), called Brancusi's studio a "Duchampian set."[5] This is a perceptive analogy, justifying Brancusi's special interest in Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise (de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rrose Sélavy)* (1936–41), a miniature proxy for the artist's studio, containing reproductions of many of Duchamp's works and one original. Brancusi's pictures of his studio cast light on how his works should be understood. Assembling and reassembling his sculptures for the camera, he transformed each unique work into multiples. This is another aspect of specific interest to contemporary artists. I am here thinking of Jason Rhoades's *My Brother/ Brancuzi* [*sic*], an installation presented at the Whitney Museum in 1995.

SV Though both Jason Rhoades and Scott Burton used specific materials to punctuate the space for the viewer, I would say that my own strategies for exhibitions and set perspectives are more aligned with the ways that Liz works. She engages with the poetics of a space as exemplified by her recent exhibitions at the Walker Art Center [November 22, 2015, to October 18, 2015] and Mass MoCA [May 23, 2015, to April 24, 2016], both of which I had the privilege to see and experience. But I don't feel you can disregard the glut of stuff that surrounds us even in the virtual corners of our world. Even though I veer away from it in my own work, I like the intentional sloppiness that makes Jason Rhoades's emotive accumulations of goods feel even more resonant today.

RM In one interview with Anne Ellegood about your 2011 exhibition at the Hammer Museum, you referred to the exhibition space as a camera.[6] How does this inform the ways in which you present and position your work?

SV I consider closely the larger context surrounding a particular exhibition space. Sometimes in a more literal translation I use doorways to frame a sculpture. At the Hammer, and many times since, I have used white washes of paint to collapse or merge a three-dimensional object into or within its environment. The Hammer project was the first instance where I decided to show three-dimensional objects. I wanted to retain certain transformative qualities that were inherent within the still-life images I had created in the past.

RM The installation at the Hammer was a room within a room, akin to a theatrical set.

Installation view, *Sensory Spaces 6*, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2015

SV While the space at the Hammer was clearly delineated by the set construction, the walls were translucent, the floor bounced light, and the site remained visually permeable.

RM Within that setting everything was precisely staged: the picture *Western Costume, Aurora* (2011), taken at the Western Costume in Burbank, California, was presented next to sculptural works, such as *Four Directions* (2011), informed by totemic forms as well as modernist designs by Frank Lloyd Wright and Jean-Michel Frank. It seems that the exhibition design was particularly poignant in that instance.

SV It was crucial in that context and does continue to inform how I address the installation of an exhibition from the onset of a project. I develop the images and the sculptures in tandem and in response to one another in the hopes of creating a total and resolved relationship. That being said, I am still experimenting. I learn a great deal with every show and very much abide by John Dewey's tenet of learning through doing. Regardless, the vulnerability of figuring things out in real time can sometimes be challenging. The Hammer project was akin to opening my intimate studio practice to the public. And while I clearly strive for a type of formal convergence between the two,

the disconnect between the images and the sculptures can also create a compelling in-between space for the viewer, of which I spoke earlier.

RM In your 2013 exhibition at Metro Pictures [May 2 to June 8, 2013], you paired images of antiquities photographed at various museums and archeological sites in several European cities with abstract cast concrete sculptures. Certain pictures were framed behind blue-tinted Plexiglas, which invite analogies to early cyanotype techniques, while others were colored during the printing process such as *Roman Woman I* (2013). In each case, you were expanding the images into three-dimensional objects. How do you see the relationship between images and objects in this particular arrangement?

SV When photographing these ancient figures in person I was struck by the remaining elements of paint on their faces and bodies that I had never noticed as clearly in reproduction. This spoke of their earlier state as polychromatic forms, as both image and object. As painted figures that were disseminated into the larger empire, they communicated ideals that have continued to inform our sense of beauty, proportion, and the female form to this day. In most of the museums where I was photographing, the figures were lit with focused display lights. These spaces often also had windows, the light from which caused the resulting images to have a contrasting mixture of color. While working with the images in my studio, I realized that by isolating and removing the yellow from the ambient light captured at these sites, I could colorize the figures and push them during the printing process to reach strong pink and purple tones reminiscent of their earlier polychromatic existence.

Western Costume, Aurora, 2011, installation view, *Hammer Projects,* Hammer Museum, 2011

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Metal Mirror VII (Magia Naturalis), 2013

In addition, the scale of the figures was usually different from what I had imagined them to be, and so I thought a great deal about scale and the body as both an abstract idea and as a physical measure of perception in this project as well. Central to the show were the eight mirrored works entitled *Metal Mirror (Magia Naturalis)* featuring details of an oxidized metal wall that had turned to a vibrant mix of iridescent pinks and purples. I had shot the images at dusk to further emphasize this transformational color field. The arrangement of the mirrored works, surrounding a central line of four modular concrete cast columns, referred to the historic palazzos in which I had photographed the figures and, more importantly, to a very specific moment I had experienced during my time in Rome. In their physicality, and shifting spectrum of light and dark, the *Metal Mirror(Magia Naturalis)* were installed to convey the weight of a setting sky against a group of ancient columns I had encountered at Ostia Antica. It was an experience in which the site, its texture, the forms amongst it, the light and time of day, seemed to coalesce into this dynamic combination of both the ancient and the modern in one succinct and powerful space. This installation was perhaps the closest I got to creating and staging a take on the "afterlife of antiquity."

Mirrors and mirroring effects are integral to photography. They appear in my work sometimes as props and in other ways as surfaces or mutable spaces, such as with these works from 2013, where the semitransparent mirrors were intended to capture, refract, and reflect subject and space, while also allowing the rust images to appear and disappear amongst the reflections. Currently, I am exploring this idea of mirroring via the transparent layering of color and form in a new series of still-life images in which new compositions are created using physical and photographic repetition.

Something I have been considering recently when moving between two- and three-dimensional work is how our sense of scale, as well as notions of the two mediums, have changed. With that my sense of the movement between the sculptural and the photographic has changed. When an image can be rendered (via a sequence of building, processing, and exporting information) and an object can be printed- collective notions and definitions of these mediums have then also been dissolved.

RM Can you elaborate on how these ideas play out in your technical process?

SV I still shoot on negative film, but by scanning my negatives and printing via a digital chromogenic process I exploit the strengths of both traditional and digital means of production. Much of the work I do digitally emulates the darkroom experiments of earlier movements such as multiple exposure and inverting images, or more contemporary color processes of dialing in and out colors as well as flashing film. Yet with some of my recent images of geometric forms, animation, filmic techniques, and digital rendering programs have become influential factors. Equally, I am thinking about the fluidity with which we move between the virtual and physical world in such that our understanding of the actual and the constructed have merged.

For example, I have been making color via adjustments in Photoshop, manipulating the way in which that program reads information by adjusting color on a pixel-by-pixel basis. I should also mention here that I am not alone when I am doing this. My printing process includes a number of important collaborations and con-

versatiors With two individuals in particular, Julie Pochron and Joshua Kolbo of Pochron studios based in New York. The inherently collaborative nature of photographic printing is often not discussed, yet it plays a s gnificant role in the final production of a work.

RM Can you expand on this notion of collaboration as it pertains to digital production?

SV With digital printing the assumption is that aesthetic decisions are automated and mechanized, leaving little room for the subtleties of translation and/or chance. My overall process runs quite counter to that presumption. While the digital offers a high degree of control, down to the pixel, I frequently push the process. I ask Julie to go beyond conventional printing techniques and print something for me that enters into a mysterious alchemical realm where we both cannot say exactly how the final color was achieved. For my most recent series of images, *Concrete Forms,* I gave her a selection of source material that ranged from images of pre-Columbian artifacts, modernist textiles, and that of a concrete wall I shot in Ventura, California, on a recent research trip. From these samples, we derived a sequence of color shifts that were as much about enmeshing various experiences within the compositions as they were about distinct color choices.

To turn this question back to you, Roxana, how do you navigate this shifting situation as an exhibition-maker? And how do you see these questions of transformation and migration across media manifesting themselves most urgently?

RM To take one example, in organizing *The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1839 to Today,* I focused on a specific class of visual images—images of sculpture—to consider how the one medium has been implicated in the creative reproduction and analysis of the other. Through crop, focus, angle of view, degree of close-up, and lighting, as well as through ex post facto techniques of darkroom manipulation, collage, montage, assemblage, and seriality, artists using the camera, I argued, have not only interpreted artworks but also created stunning reinventions of them.

Through its 177-year history, practitioners of photography have come from other fields—from science (Fox Talbot); from theater, or more specifically the diorama, a theatrical device that anticipated the motion picture (Daguerre); from painting (Fenton, Nègre, and many others); and from sculpture (Brancusi). Today the work of R. H. Quayt-man, Rachel Harrison, Wade Guyton, Jimmy Robert, and Tris Vonna-Michell, among others, reminds us that photography remains open, unfixed, in flux, porous, and able to contaminate other practices, which brings up the question of performativity. What do you see to be the relationship between dance and photography? How does one inform the other?

SV The space in which I set things up for the camera is a performative space. The darkness in my camera surrounds the image like a proscenium. I am staging still lifes and working with light and color at the moment of capture and throughout the printing process in ways that borrow from scenography or cinematography. The stylization of

Sonya Flores, Fancy Shawl Dance, 2011

the image or the sculpture contributes to the overall narrative. Certain choices seek to implicate the arching ways in which artifacts have been displayed as part of a museological and thus historical impulse. I often think of how these techniques of display contribute to the mythologizing of historical progress and how, what, and who is and isn't included in the official tableaux. I am drawn to the markers of theatricality within this complex process. But this makes it seem like I cast a gimlet eye on the artifice of performance, and that is not the case at all. In many ways, my project at the Hammer was an attempt to slow down and even freeze certain live moments in order to exaggerate the weird duality of experience and performance.

RM Your photographs of "performance" are notably images of dancers; you've taken a series of photographs of Los Angeles-based dancer Sonya Flores and also photographed modern dancers for the series *Baltimore Dancers,* for instance. More specifically, you have discussed how your interest in Native American dance and regalia relates to a broader concern with performance.[7] How did this become manifest in the Hammer project?

SV I met Sonya Flores, a professional Native American dancer and instructor at a public powwow in Los Angeles. I approached her after watching her perform the fancy shawl dance. The term "perform" is fraught in this context as I have learned from Sonya and others. There is a spiritual aspect to certain dances, and though shared publicly they remain sacred. I was struck by the way the ribbons of the shawl enveloped Sonya's body and her figure intentionally became a moving mix of lines, shapes,

and energy. I worked with her on several aspects of the project that was eventually installed at the Hammer Museum. I cast her face and used it in one of the sculptures. I filmed her at several locations and had her enact the fancy shawl dance in the room I had built in the Hammer gallery before the images and objects were installed. The room was arranged as a set, and the photographs and various abstract artifacts had the ineffable quality of awaiting the performance or perhaps a space in which a performance had just transpired.

In considering performativity, what do you think of the mediation of live performances such as those streamed online from an institution such as MoMA? How do they impact our understanding of human scale and what constitutes the "live"? How do these streamed events shape questions of accessibility and audience engagement? Or, in the case of the Google museum, how do they open exhibitions to a larger public that is both there and not there?

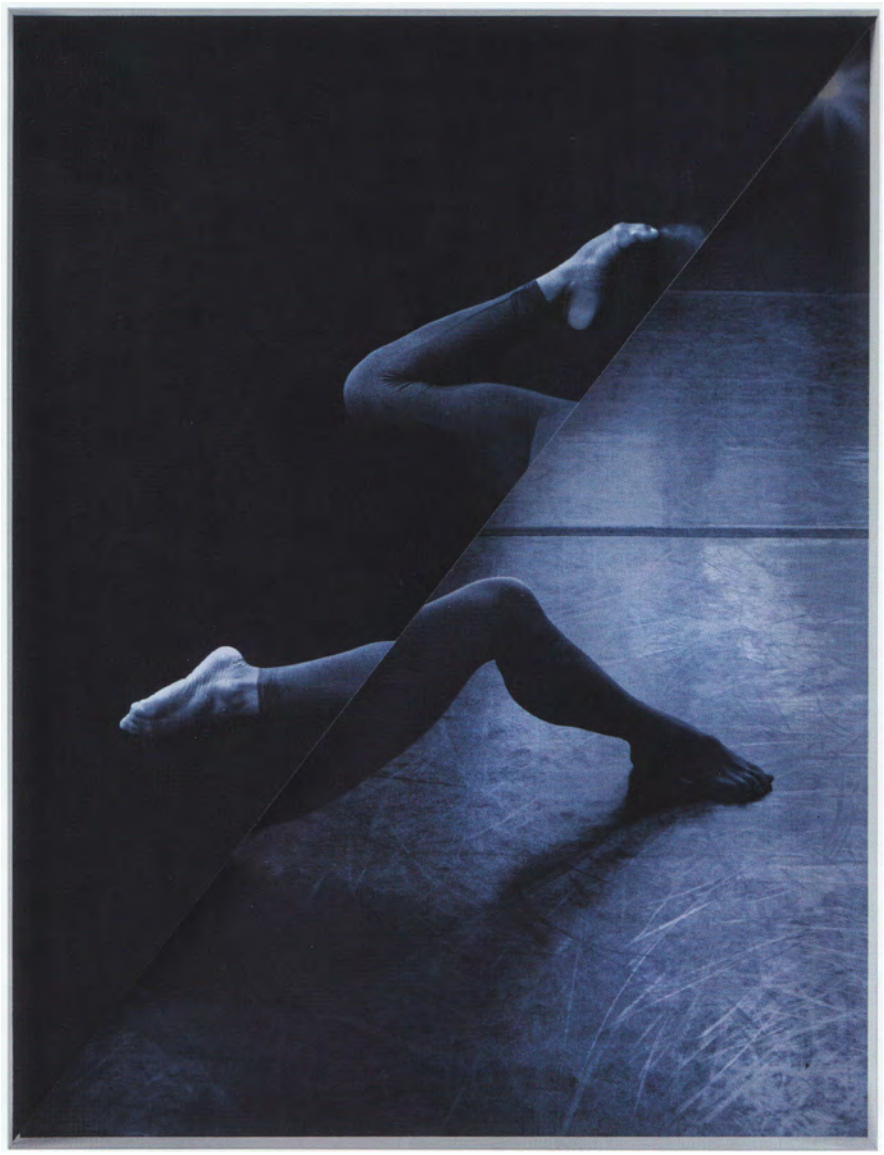
RM Everyone, it seems, needs an online presence, needs constant exposure. Visual culture theorist Jonathan Crary speaks of this in rather bleak terms in his book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2014), noting that our society is always engaged, interfacing, interacting, communicating, responding, or processing within some telematic milieu. He calls this the connectionist paradigm. Yet communication is not the transmission of images but an ethos of sharing. While spectacle, Crary argues, is the expropriation of that possibility: the production of one-way communication.

Regarding the live streaming of performances, earlier this year I invited to one of MoMA's forums on contemporary photography Barbara Clausen, who teaches performance theory and history at the University of Québec, to discuss the relationship between the immediacy of performance versus its representation via photographic or filmic representation. She argued that what we perceive as "live" performance is always subject to mediatization since each performance is already built on the relationship between mediated and so-called authentic identities. Speaking of performance and your interest in dance, you have described "a connection between found movement and found materials."[8] Can you expand on this?

SV This is a reference to the influential way that Yvonne Rainer's early choreography emphasized the quotidian over the virtuosic, people walking down the street, for example, in groundbreaking works such as *Trio A* (1966). I drew on Rainer's vocabulary of everyday movement over the dramatic for my exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art [April 12 to September 20, 2015]

RM In *Steps* (2015) installed as part of that exhibition, you used horizontal marble planks that were the relative size—same height and width—of the steps leading up to the Baltimore Museum of Art's Neoclassical building.

SV In conceiving the Baltimore Museum of Art show, I kept returning to the marble steps. They are not specific to the BMA but are ubiquitous throughout Baltimore's historic districts. I isolated them as a sculptural form within the museum to underscore their liminal qualities—the ways that these steps often function as a space of



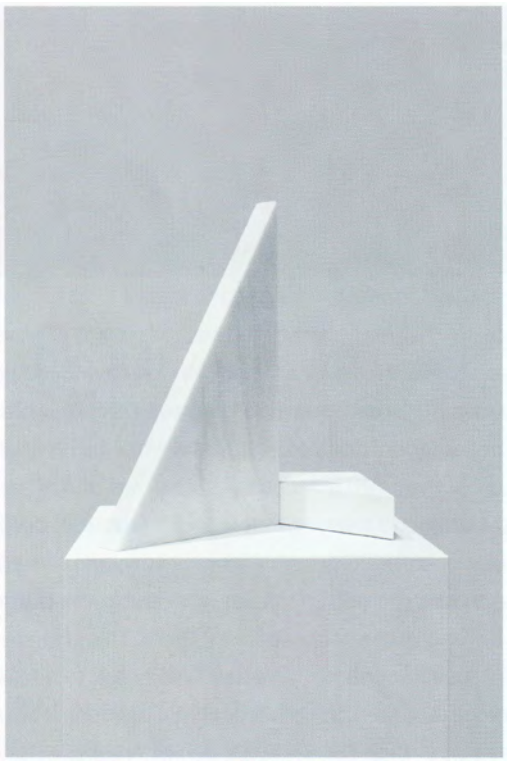
Orpheus, 2015

transference and transformation. Because these white marble steps are visible in almost every neighborhood of Baltimore—they appear on both stately grand buildings and on many of the city's row houses—they are one of the few recognizable and shared forms that transcend the city's civic and residential borders. And, more significantly, I see them as one of the few connectors across a racially and economically divided city. I laid six four-foot lengths of marble with the same proportions and scale of a normal riser end-on-end in the center of the gallery. This changed the up and down movement ascribed to their function to one that was linear like traversing across a plane as you would when you walk through the city. Their original utilitarian purpose remained, which I equated with Yvonne Rainer's isolation of specific gestures. I treated the length of the marble steps with a thin glaze of translucent white paint so that they were

also like a memory object, a representation of the accretion of time and a conflation of experiences more than a literal translation of a step.

RM Your photographs of modern dancers have inspired the aesthetic decisions of your recent sculptures and assemblages, which are minimal and abstracted. This experiential dimension of your work made me think of Simone Forti's *Dance Constructions* (1960–61) or the way Scott Burton would incorporate furniture in his performances in the seventies, as he did, for instance, in his *Pastoral Chair Tableau* (1975), in which he staged modern chairs in front of a blue curtain. Can you speak more of your recent exhibition in Baltimore and the ways in which you connect human movements to the hard-edged sculptural work you are making now?

SV I saw Forti perform this last spring, and it was a strange, mesmerizing, and brave performance that, like her work overall, continues to deliberately oppose established modernist dance patterns of development and climax. Anne Truitt's columnar works and her distillation of form and color were also a point of reference in this exhibition, which took place next to a gallery that featured her work from the Baltimore Museum of Art's deep holdings. The triangular shapes used in *Modern Symbols* (2015) directly refer to Rudolf Laban's innovative notation system in which triangles convey the direction of movement within a dance. But the larger context of the city itself cannot be overstated. I was returning to my home, but that home was no longer there. The city was in a traumatized state and that sense of the hard edges of loss is in this work, too.



Modern Symbols, 2015 (detail)

Front Room: Sara VanDerBeek, Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, 2015

RM You have taken photographs in Baltimore, New Orleans, Rome, Detroit, and Rotterdam, among many other places. Does your sculpture relate to an interest in architectural and urban history? And how is this related in turn to the politics of a social landscape?

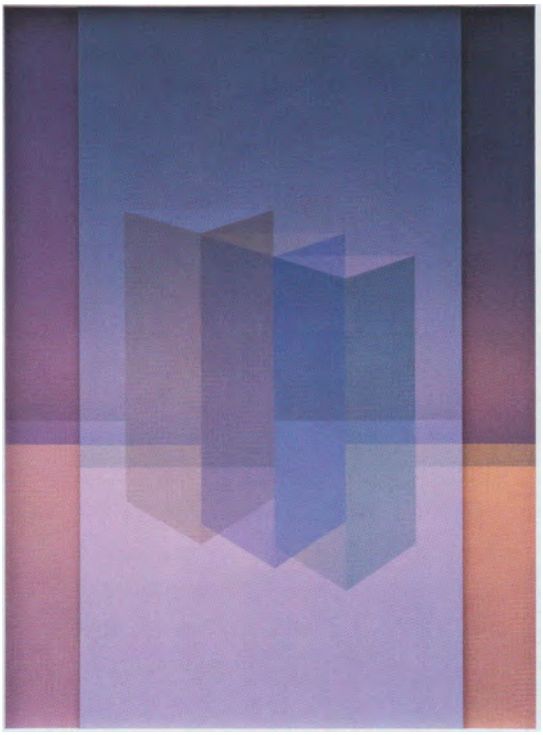
SV Like so many other artists and writers, I think of the contemporary urban environment as an expanded field of perception that is fragmented yet expansive in nature. It is a realm of simultaneity rendered in its most physical and psychological terms. Cities remain connection points, and therefore they are by definition sites of inclusion and exclusion. The death of Freddie Gray and the unrest that followed in Baltimore, as well as countless other unnecessary deaths in and around American cities, have drawn attention to the chasms in equality and rights that remain to be recognized, let alone resolved. Both convergent and discordant, cities by their very scale and density mirror and amplify our fractured existence. With my interest in the historical layering of cities, built up and eroded over time due to natural cycles as well as economic ones, I often photograph in abandoned or overlooked areas within city centers. Therefore, an important component of many of my projects has been to engage with groups—primarily students—to try and see how their own capture, cropping, and editing of images generates different forms of meaning.

Most recently, in conjunction with my exhibition at the Baltimore Museum of Art, I led a week-long workshop for high school seniors at the Baltimore School for the

Arts that concluded with a public exhibition reflecting their individual sense of the city's complex struggle during this difficult time. My experience at the Baltimore School of the Arts, first as a student myself and also coming back to do this workshop in 2015, combined with my educational experience at Cooper Union, has made me aware of the lack of resources given to the vital enterprise of public education and civic engagement at the present time. The sad irony is that while public art education is often the first cut made to a budget, my own experience in the classroom has shown how the act of careful observation and critical engagement with our own communities cultivates empathy.

RM The pedagogical aspect of your artistic practice and engagement with student communities is critical to understanding the relationship between aesthetics, experience, and political agency. Much of the language you use to describe your work conjures a sense of urgency, as in a consideration of the politics of power, but it also relates to temporality: to documenting movement or change, to the passage of time, to an oscillation between the antique and the modern, to an interest in memory. We touched on the concept of simultaneity at the beginning of our conversation, but can you tell me more about the idea of duration in your work?

SV My work rests somewhere between the metamorphic and the photographic. Color, contrast, and composition translate my experiences of the physical world into an amalgam of the actual and imagined. The works are also intended to be both fixed

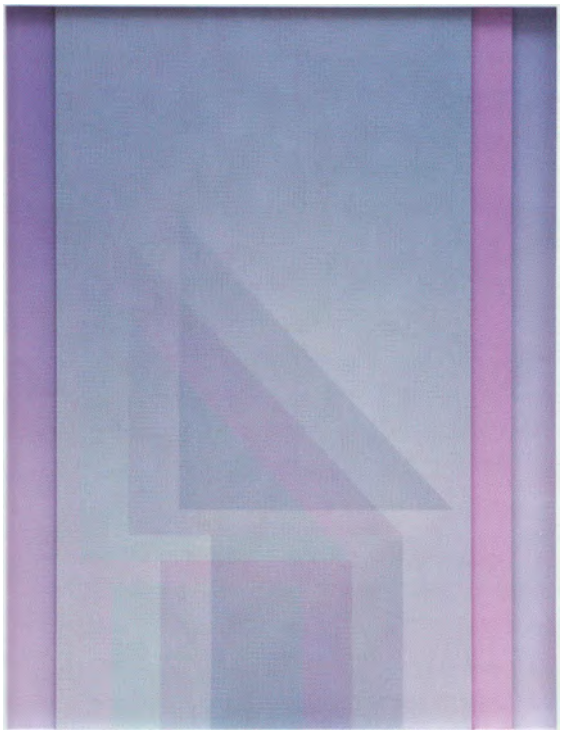


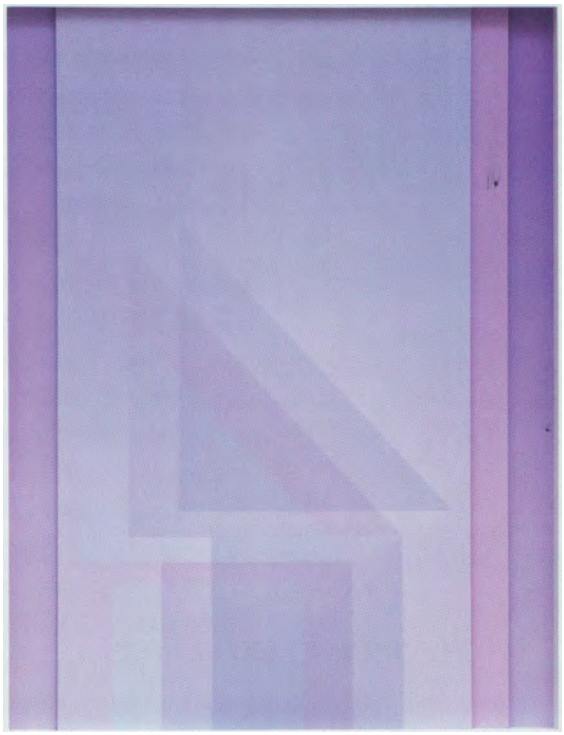
Electric Prism III, 2015

and unfixed, implying a sense of transference or movement caught at a moment of stasis. The still image is intended to feel as though it will continue to shift and re-form anew. And with this it is also a movement away from the "decisive moment" to one of an expanded duration. A sense of accumulation or transference is of consistent importance to the final resulting exhibition. Although quite choreographed and made of opaque and static materials such as marble, plaster, or concrete, my sculptures and installations are intended to feel ephemeral.

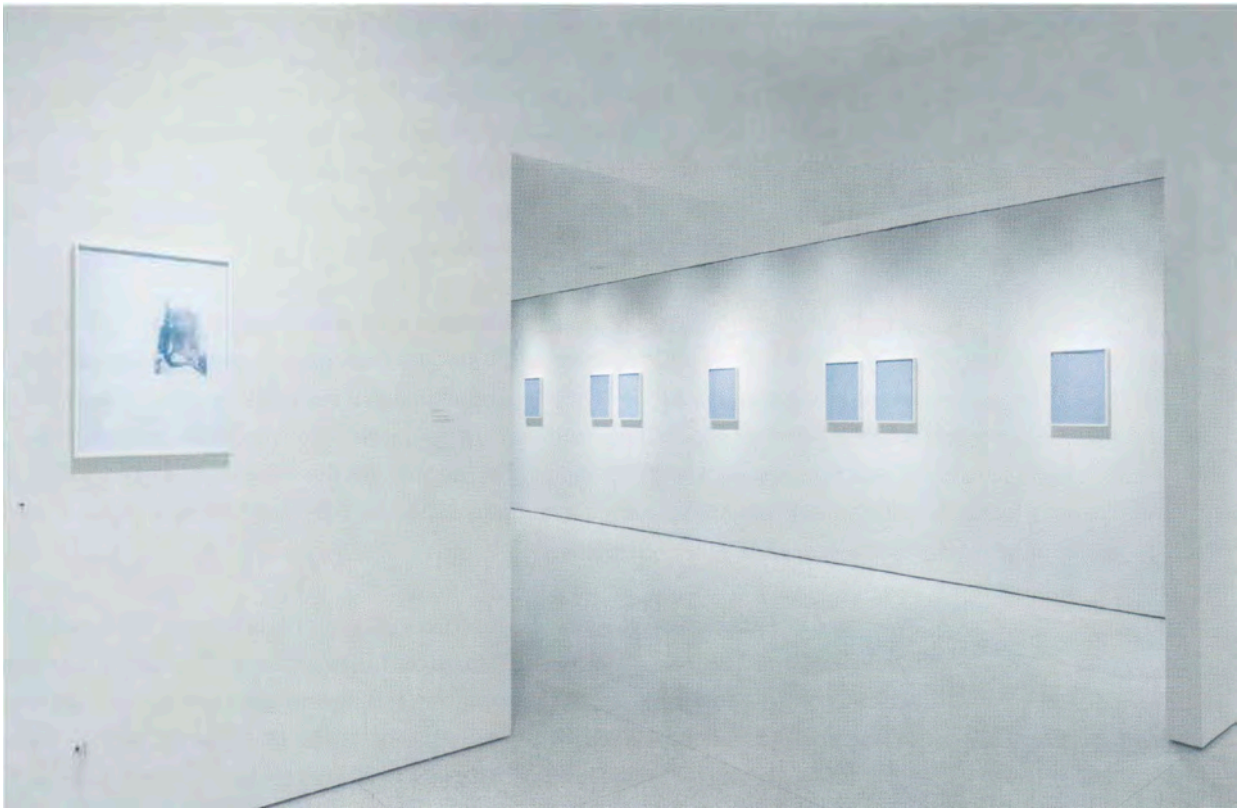
RM I see the circulation of your still images across different supports as unmistakably filmic. Does your concern with multiple framings, perspectives, movement, and layering express an interest in cinema? And in what ways do you see your work relating to that of your father, Stan VanDerBeek, whose collaboration with John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Yvonne Rainer, as well as Ken Knowlton at Bell Labs, is reflective of a contemporary discourse around the interface of media, dance, film, technology, and everyday experience?

SV I am very interested in cinema. I am certain some of this is genetic, but some of it comes also from the fact that cinema and its narrative forms and cultural cues have had an outsized influence on our expectations of how images are both made and circulated. As someone who contributes to the enterprise of image production, I see an ethical responsibility to question the reception of images. I would need a lot more space to address my father's ongoing influence on my approach as an artist—I often





, from the series *Ventura*, 2015



Sister, 2015, and *Crepuscule,* 2015, installation view, *Photo Poetics: An Anthology,* Guggenheim Museum of Art, New York, 2015

wish he was present to see the shape of things now. As an early voice in the debates on multimedia art, I think he would have much to say. I continue to be inspired by his prescience and forethought as an artist who was advancing important questions about the complex relationship between art and communication technology. To return to the question, what impact do you think the moving image and filmic techniques have had upon our understanding of time, memory, and the still image?

RM Sigmar Polke once said that a negative is never finished, implying that a photograph is not determined by the decisive moment (releasing the shutter), but by a series of expanded, unfinished temporalities. This has a lot to do with cinema. Polke subverted conventional darkroom techniques to a degree that was virtually unprecedented. He experimented with multiple exposures, reversed tonal values, blurring, under- and over-exposures. He pushed the reproduced image toward disintegration. He then applied the lessons he learned in the darkroom to painting, turning a static image into something closer to a slow-motion film.

I'd say that the cinematic in photography is in fact rather diverse. It appears under the format of film stills in the work of Cindy Sherman, Lorna Simpson, and Richard Prince. It can take a directorial address in the case of Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Stan Douglas, and Jeff Wall. It manifests itself in montage processes, as in your case. In split screens, multiple slide projections, photo-texts, storyboards, sequences, and narrativity in the work of Nobuyoshi Araki, Nan Goldin, and Paul Graham. There is also

time-lapse photography, which is distinctly cinematic. I'm thinking here of Rineke Dijkstra, for instance. And there are various other means of temporalizing photography. Zoe Leonard's pre-photographic camera obscuras materialize a film in flux, unfolding in the present. Liz Deschenes's photograms reflect their environment, change over time as they oxidize, acquire a history of where they have been exhibited. We are talking about works that engage duration and the viewer's attention over prolonged periods of time. It's a cinematic, literary, or poetic form of observation.

SV Poetry for me is a sequence of acute observations that are then distilled down to their most essential form. The work of certain writers, such as E. E. Cummings or Anne Carson, instills a desire on my part for succinct essential gestures, long looking, and a refusal of prescriptive closure, allowing the universe in.

I translate Polke another way. A negative for me is never finished because I often work, re-work, and return to images, frequently making them into new works or incorporating them into larger installations. Similarly, I repurpose and reuse sculptural objects in my still-life images and exhibitions, and I enjoy the effect that this layering, repetition, or echoing has within the larger body of my work.

My most recent work, *Crepuscule* (2015), for example, is a response to a poem by E. E. Cummings of the same name. Mirroring its title, the images rest on the edge of indiscernibility. Triangular prisms and semicircular plaster casts are layered photographically and physically within a series of nine images in which one form slowly transforms into the next through very subtle shifts in transparent pale colors. The forms are elusive, both appearing and disappearing within the atmosphere that surrounds them. The images continually shift between the concrete and the abstract in an attempt to emulate the way that "Crepuscule" and other of Cummings's poems move so meaningfully between recognizable subjects and events, as well as dreams and the imagination, to get at this varied, complex, and compelling rendering of life.

Poetry is for me the gathering, forming, and un-forming of meaning. Its intentions are at once finite and infinite. And the fluidity of verse to move amongst the strata of existence via a few well-chosen and well-placed words is hard to beat.

Roxana Marcoci is Senior Curator in the Photography Department at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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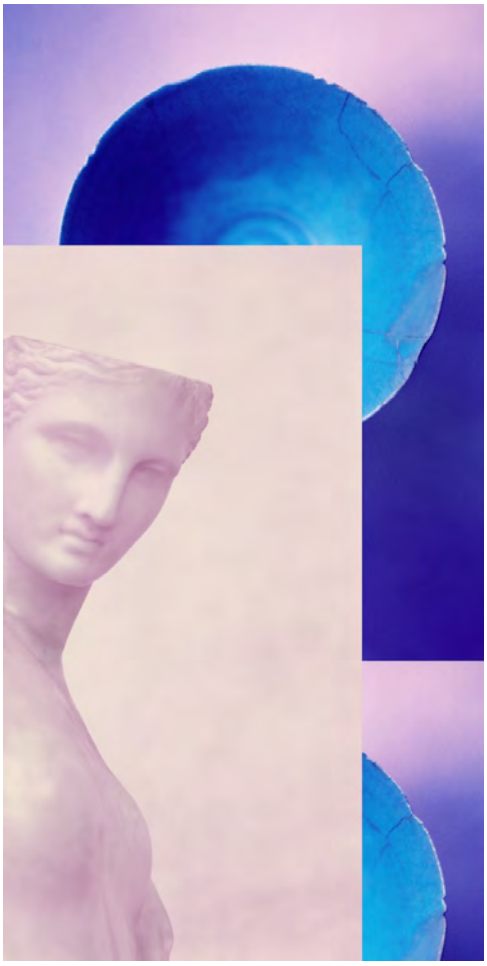
British Journal of Photography

Abel-Hirsch, Hannah. "Sara VanDerBeek explores representations of the female form," *British Journal of Photography*, 9 October 2019.

Q&A
CONCEPTUAL

Sara VanDerBeek explores representations of the female form

written by **Hannah Abel-Hirsch**
Published on 9 October 2019



Women & Museums I. 2019. © Sara VanDerBeek

"From the earliest iterations of the female form, women have been both empowered and burdened by symbolism. Their body is never just their own. It is forever shared"

The conceptual photographer Sara VanDerBeek began working on her new series *Women & Museums*, from which six images are on show at Metro Pictures, New York, following the birth of her daughter Lee. "I have worked with the female form in the past but the process of birth reframed my relationship to my own body," she explains "and pushed me to consider a return to representation after working with abstraction for several series." The project is rooted in VanDerBeek's exploration of objects from multiple museums across Europe and the United States — artefacts that spoke to her experience as a woman and a mother, and provoke questions about the female body as a site of production and reproduction.

VanDerBeek visited several institutions including the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum, the Warburg Institute, the Ashmolean, and the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. She selected different artefacts and photographed them from

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multiple perspectives. The resultant images are exquisite. Realised as large-scale dye sublimation prints, the objects depicted feel palpable — smooth surfaces and curved edges pushing through the picture plane. The colour palette shifts from deep, fluorescent purple and red, to glowing pinks and creams. Pairs of images are juxtaposed in a single frame: ceramic bowls and sculpted busts, textiles and vases.

"The series presents the roles and representations of women as a continuum that is fluid and evolving"

Women & Museums IV. 2019. © Sara

"Observation, transformation, and interchange are central to my practice," says VanDerBeek. *Women & Museums* encapsulates these methodologies. In presenting the objects depicted in a context divorced from their traditional setting, the artist endeavours to transform them into sites of "contemplation, discourse, and reclamation". The female form is fraught with tension; a site of continual analysis, debate, and discussion, and the countless ways it has been depicted throughout art history reflect this. VanDerBeek's work should provoke questions about the representation of the female form and also how institutions choose to curate their representation of it. "Throughout my career, I have examined how museums collect and interpret historical objects," says VanDerBeek. "This current presentation of what I hope is an ongoing series makes the multifaceted and complex nature of interpreting material cultures evident, while its visual approach underscores the role photography continues to have in shaping our understanding of diverse histories, ancient cultures and societies today."

Below, the artist discusses the processes and concepts that underlie *Women & Museums*, and her wider practice.

BJP-Online: What interests you about the female body, and its role as a site of production and reproduction. Why is it an important time to be investigating this subject matter?

VanDerBeek: During one of my research trips for the project, I viewed and photographed a Neolithic female figure at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. According to the museum's records, it is one of the earliest representations of the human form in Western art in their collection. With its emphasis on the breasts, abdomen and pudenda, I considered the power and problems embodied within the small handheld form to be foundational to the complex and complicated existence of women today. It is of its time and a threshold to the future.

From the earliest iterations of the female form, women have been empowered and burdened by symbolism. Their body is never just their own. It is forever shared. It is continually shifting from the physical to the ideological — it is a representation of ideals, a space for a message, and a mirror upon which society views itself. The multiplicity of experience for women is at the centre of my approach to the photographic series.

BJP-Online: Could you select a specific piece, and explain the stories behind the individual objects, and why you decided to depict them in this way?

VanDerBeek: I approach most objects with an earnest reverence and I am often entranced by the object as I am photographing it. I shoot many frames of the film moving carefully around the object until I feel all perspectives are captured. This photographic approach then transposes to the conceptual as I am composing the final images intending to connect divergent forms and views in which to present a multiplicity of cultural and temporal perspectives.

During my time at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, I learned via Juan Lucero, a ceramic artist from the Isleta Pueblo, of the work of Lucy M. Lewis, an artist from the Acoma Pueblo and mother of nine children working throughout most of the 20th century. Creating phenomenal vessels by hand, the artist followed a primarily matrilineal pottery tradition and adopted ancient patterns found among ancient shards in the earth near her home. She was a revolutionary artist bringing the past forward via her distillation of ancient patterns into her contemporary visual language and she is a model for me as I move forward with the project.

In *Women & Museums V*, my image of her seed vessel from 1968 is layered atop a detailed view of a Mesien Kimono produced in Japan in the 20th century. I was drawn to this particular kimono because its pattern emulates marble. The marble pattern speaks of stone, (it was designed to emulate marbled Italian Renaissance paper) but also of water with its undulating lines. The pattern on the Lewis vessel derives from earlier rain patterns

she found on ancient Pueblan Pottery. The pattern on her vessel is also similar to water patterns painted on Cycladic vessels I had observed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, England.

Women & Museums VI. 2019. © Sara VanDerBeek

BJP-Online: What did you want to achieve by divorcing the works from their museum context? What do you hope that audiences will take away from viewing these works?

VanDerBeek: While my perspective is highly subjective, I aim to address a collective experience. I feel it is important to strive towards inclusivity albeit with an understanding that in regards to certain objects I do not have any shared cultural heritage with that object and its creator and therefore I am an outside observer. The collection and presentation of these objects within museums place these forms in an interstitial space suspended in time. I am interested in exploring this suspension as a parallel to our contemporary screen-based existence in which we are often operating between multiple spaces and modes at once.

The scale and layout of the *Women & Museum* series were inspired by the simultaneous verticality and horizontality of Japanese screens, computer screens, phone scrolling, the Mnemosyne Atlas and memories. I am interested in the pairing of historical objects with that of contemporary image space; the meeting of film capture with its grain; the push and pull of focus with that of emergent digital printing processes such as dye sublimation, which I used for this new series.

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Women & Museums II. 2019. © Sara VanDerBeek

We are at a phenomenal moment in the evolution of photography, where rapid technological innovations continue to be strengthened and informed by its ever-expansive history. The layered compositions of these works imply movement and my hope in that is to encourage an active engagement on behalf of the viewer, which is open to change.

BJP-Online: Can you explain how the work's distinct aesthetic plays into the narrative it is exploring?

Layering images of figures, faces, and vessels captured at multiple museums, the series presents the roles and representations of women as a continuum that is fluid and evolving. The work's associative network of images posits questions of institutional authority, cultural appropriation, and the roles of artists and museums at this critical moment of discourse around the female form.

Much of the colour in my work is a combination of actual and imagined colour. The colours are often drawn from the existing site of capture and the time of day in which I was working. At the Minneapolis Institute of Art, I had the opportunity thanks to the generosity of the Photo department to use the photo study room as my studio and I employed daylight to capture many of the objects. I used the shifting strength of the light as it changed over the day to interpret my experience of the object.

In some images, I used the softer light of dusk. I am interested in that transitional time called the blue hour, and dusk as a meeting of day and night when shadows become blue and sometimes pink and everything feels transitory. Much of this body of work rests in this dusky hue.

Women & Museums is on show at Metro Pictures until 19 October 2019.

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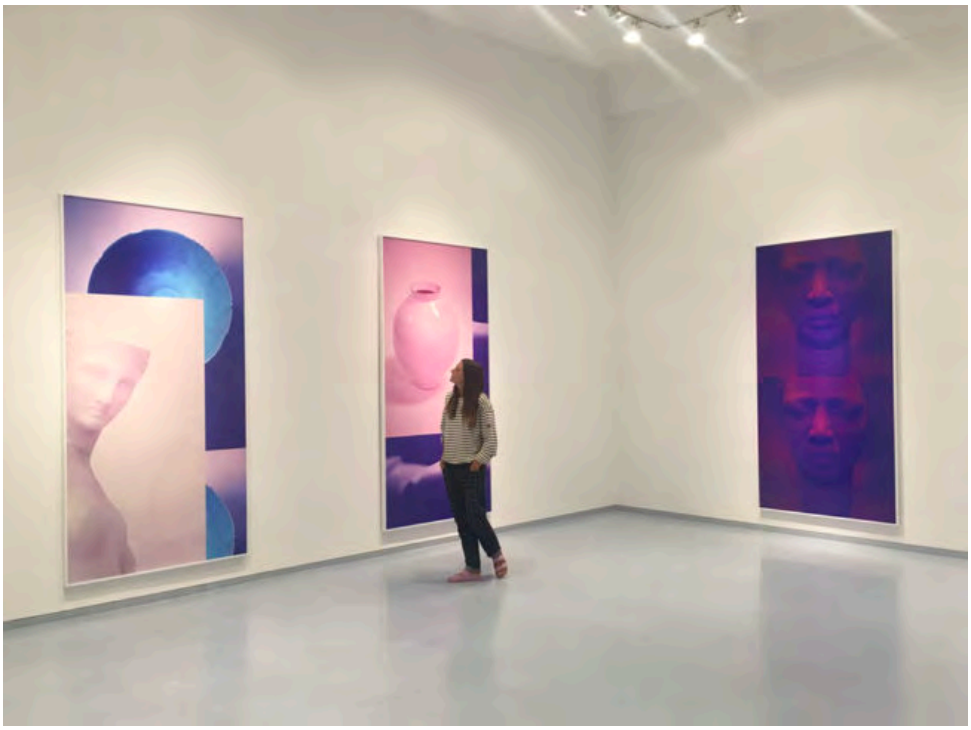
Art in America

"Sara VanDerBeek on Layering Depictions of Women," *Art in America*, September 13, 2019.

INTERVIEWS | Sep 13, 2019

Sara VanDerBeek on Layering Depictions of Women

by Art in America



Portrait of Sara VanDerBeek at her exhibition "Women & Museums," 2019. Photo Emily Watlington.

Sara VanDerBeek's exhibition "Women & Museums," on view at Metro Pictures, New York, through October 5, consists of six large photographic prints. All vertically oriented and cast in the pinks and blues of sunset, the images depict objects representing women and made by women. VanDerBeek selected the pieces in her photographs from the holdings of the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia), as well as European institutions including the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and the Farnese Collection in Naples. "Women & Museums" is an ongoing series. It debuted this past spring in an exhibition at Mia, where the photographs were shown alongside objects from the

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museum's collection.Below, the artist discusses her photographic process and research on depictions of women over time.

Curator Yasufumi Nakamori invited me to develop a project using Mia's collection, so I visited several times over two years. The invitation came right around the time I gave birth to my daughter, Lee, and underwent a total reappraisal of my own body. I started thinking about symbols of reproduction and the figure, especially the female figure, as among the earliest forms represented in art. During my time in Mia's collections, I photographed works by or depicting women, making intuitive, not linear, arrangements and choices. Mia is an encyclopedic museum, with galleries designed to flow continuously through times and cultures, and I likewise approached my photographs as a continuum, trying to capture a sense of a larger whole while also honoring each object's specificity.

Sara VanDerBeek: *Women & Museums II*, 2019, dye sublimation print, 96 by 48 inches; at Metro Pictures.

Women & Museums II shows a Cycladic figure from the second millennium BCE, now housed in the Ashmolean Museum, and a seventeenth-century Korean moon vase from Mia. Cycladic figures predominantly depict women, many in early stages of pregnancy. My juxtaposition highlights the parallel between pregnancy and vessels. The figures are typically shown upright in museums, even though they're actually unable to stand and have to be supported by armatures. They are funerary figures that were buried in the ground, so I photographed this one lying supine. Archaeologists are perplexed by the function of pregnant funerary figures.

Many of the objects I chose had ceremonial or spiritual functions in addition to utilitarian ones. For *Women & Museums V,*I photographed a 1968 seed vessel by Lucy M. Lewis. She was a phenomenal artist from the Acoma Pueblo who worked throughout the twentieth century. I got to know her work from Juan Lucero who works at Mia—a ceramic artist from the Isleta Pueblo—and from Susan Peterson's book about her [*Lucy M. Lewis: American Indian Potter* (Kodansha, 1984)]. It blew my mind that she built this vessel by hand: it's not thrown on a wheel. Then, she painted her interpretations of ancient water patterns, and I saw her as this amazing translator of the past into the present, which is also what I'm doing. Lewis had nine children and a prolific ceramic practice, all while working at a time when the United States government honored even fewer Native American rights than it does now. It's a seed jar, so it's small, but there's so much power to this object.

I wanted the coloration and the scale to emphasize my mediation of the collection, since I'm projecting my own ideas onto the past. I made the prints so large because I was thinking about the

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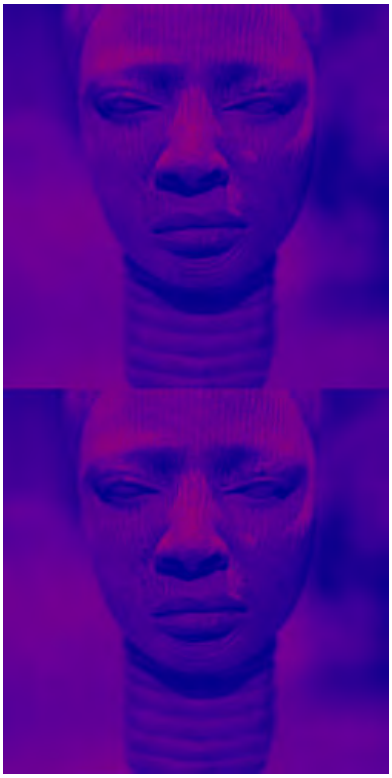
museum space as both fractured and immersive, much like our experience of screens. The way the images are layered conflates foreground and background, and I was thinking about the luminosity of screens with the dye sublimation.



Sara VanDerBeek: *Women & Museums III*, 2019, dye sublimation print, 96 by 48 inches; at Metro Pictures.

I shoot using medium-format roll film and existing light, then combine images and alter the colors in Photoshop. Some of the objects at Mia were stored with identifying Polaroids that are now faded. For the moon vessel, I created colors that recalled the Polaroid with Julie Pochron, a printer and artist I've worked with for thirteen years. The photograph of the twelfth-century Kashan ware in *Women & Museums I* is fairly naturalistic; the vessel has this amazing glaze. I shot it at dusk and just pushed the contrast. I paired it with a second-century marble sculpture of Aphrodite, and took out all of the warmth to emulate the stone cold of the marble. I altered other colors to move away entirely from any sense of the original object. The Ife shrine head in *Women & Museums III* is shot in Mia's galleries under low light, but the walls were red; I pushed the reflected red in the space.
I'm always pulling out the colors of dusk latent in each object. Dusk is a powerful and spiritual time, a crossing of color and light and tone, a moment for reflection. Are we at a dusk moment in history? I was also thinking about the fluidity with which Mia mixes objects within their galleries across time and cultures. It's important to think about the female form and women's roles within societies as fluid, as continually forming and reforming since the beginning of our recorded existence. We're still figuring these roles out. My hope is that showing layered frames implies this constant change, suggesting we're not in stasis.

—As told to Emily Watlington

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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.

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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."

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KQED ARTS

Drew, Emma. "Sara VanDerBeek's 'Roman Women' Disrupt the Past in Living Color," KQED, August 7, 2019.

ARTS

Sara VanDerBeek's 'Roman Women' Disrupt the Past in Living Color

By Emma Drew Aug 7

Sara VanDerBeek, 'Roman Woman XVIII,' 2019. *(Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco)*

Color has long been contentious—even Plato and Aristotle disagreed as to whether it helped or hindered the aim of art, which was always the imitation of nature. Color was decorative, even false, but gave painting and sculpture life, and truth. The Greeks used the word *pharmakon* for paint and artificial color; it also meant drug (both poison and cure), remedy, medicine, charm and spell. Color has often been associated with the marginal, the threatening—that which is not in charge—so also: the foreign, the feminine. Its definitions have included "to hide," "to conceal," "a pretense"; it still means to embellish, at the very least to influence.

Artist Sara VanDerBeek knows that ancient Greek and Roman marble statues were originally many-colored, vibrantly painted, and that, when antique statuary was rediscovered during the Renaissance, the brilliance had largely worn away. Figures were prized above all for their (colorless) forms. Better yet, she knows that the contemporary impact of such a revelation has less to do with the reapplication of color to the statues—as some art historians are now undertaking via plaster models or projection—than with revealing the decidedly fragmentary nature of the past and its hold on us.

In *Roman Women*, on view at San Francisco's Altman Siegel gallery through Aug. 30, VanDerBeek's saturated, synthetically colored photographic prints of Roman statues both acknowledge and render foolish our heavily conditioned assumptions about the place and virtue of unadorned white marble—and by extension the chauvinist ideals of Western empire.

Her vivid, all-over color images are further manipulated: cropped, duplicated, printed on flat metal plates and wrapped around three-dimensional objects. As such, they accentuate how simultaneously incomplete and pervasive our own understanding of the past can be, and challenge the legacies tied to art and to bodies, particularly women's, inherited images so often carry.

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Installation view of 'Roman Women.' *(Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco)*

In *Roman Woman XI*, at the gallery's entrance, a bright and piercing lapis offsets a crouching, life-size woman entirely cast in deep and ethereal violet. She's missing a portion of her head and both arms; she casts a shadow on her own thighs and gentle belly rolls. A thin purple strip along the left edge of the print hints at the meticulous coloring process.

Like all the 2D works, it is a dye sublimation print on aluminum, meaning the ink and image are essentially fused into the metal, making the print color-fast and UV-resistant. It's mounted on a thin plate of colored plexiglass and frameless, hovering slightly off the gallery wall.

VanDerBeek ups her transformative techniques in *Roman Woman XVIII*. She's big (48 by 66 inches), shown from the shoulders up. On a pale peach background, her skin is the color of glowing silver gelatin, her face awash in warm magenta. She's a little blown out, contrast-wise, so that a highlight erases, a lowlight blotches. VanDerBeek shoots with film before scanning the negatives for digital editing, and the texture of the emulsion is often present in the print.

Her images work best by building depth of color, not depth of space. The layers of color are inextricable yet beg to be plied apart—you feel their additive weight without quite comprehending which is laid over what. You see the composite colors, the deep indigo, the magenta, like colored gels along the edges, and witness how at one stage VanDerBeek turned this woman blue, gray or purple.

While photographing the statues in collections and museums across Europe and the United States, VanDerBeek used only existing light, shooting from every angle. In an *Aperture* interview, she describes being mesmerized.

Her now-extensive image archive of classical and neoclassical figures began with a residency at the Fondazione Memmo in Rome in 2012. Her final prints, of inky blue torsos and enlarged silhouettes, have been shown in New York and, earlier this summer, in Minneapolis. The distortions of color and perspective are greater, however, in the work at Altman Siegel.

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Sara VanDerBeek, 'Roman Woman IX' and 'Roman Woman X,' 2019. *(Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco)*

Two six-foot-tall prints feature the same woman, partially effaced in the posterization, the images identical but for their inverted colors—silver and crepuscular, cloudy purple. There's another bust in quadruplicate, and in the next room, a face cut off by the angled slant of the print. Obfuscation and repetition highlight the paucity of certainties we possess about the way our readings of images and objects come to be, about the values we receive yet treat as full and absolute.

VanDerBeek wraps prints around a wooden pillar and foam rollers, rendering those women visible only fractionally. She turns images into objects and objects into images, a feedback loop of references and referents, of symbols and meanings.

I've never seen an ancient statue in all its polychromatic glory (I missed *Gods in Color* at the Legion of Honor in 2017), but, by looking at *Roman Women*, it's possible to understand what it is we're often missing in our encounters with antiquity, and other eras.

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"This is the *pharmakon*," writes poet Lisa Roberston in her essay, "How to Colour," "an indiscrete threshold where our bodies exchange information with an environment." VanDerBeek's Roman women are not just in color but in conversation with their place in the cultural imagination and historical reality; they are materially critical of their inherited significations.

As a photographer interested in the properties of photography—its production, reproduction and circulation—more so than its mimetic knack, VanDerBeek reminds us that the scale of space as well as time is ever fungible, that context is crucial, that viewpoint is always limited. Might an imitation of life look different than we once thought? As we reconsider the ways in which we see ourselves, we must assert that there are no givens, not anymore.

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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*

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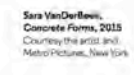
aperture

Respini, Eva. "On Defiance: Experimentation as Resistance," *Aperture* (Winter): 100-107

ON DEFIANCE

Eva Respini

Experimentation as resistance



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

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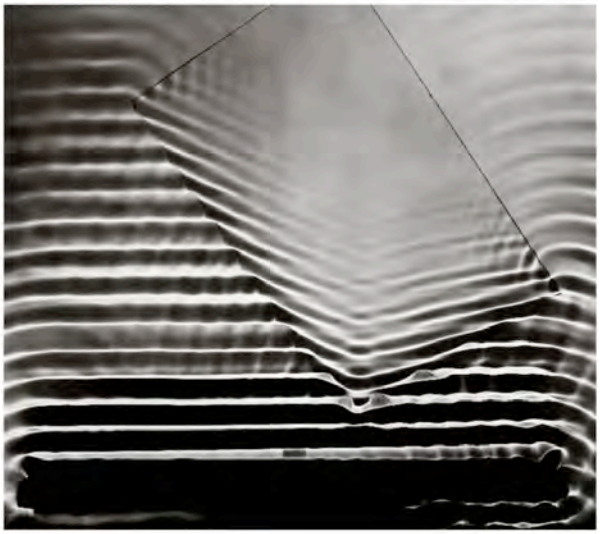
Below, left:
Miranda Lichtenstein, *Last Exit*, 2013
Courtesy the artist

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*.



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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, *Convalaria 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?

Eileen Quinlan,
***Monument Valley*, 2015**
Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

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.

Barbara Kasten, *Construct XI A*, 1981
Courtesy the artist; Bortolami, 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

This page:
Liz Deschenes, *Gallery 4.1.1*, installation at MASS MoCA, 2015. 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

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,

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> 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.

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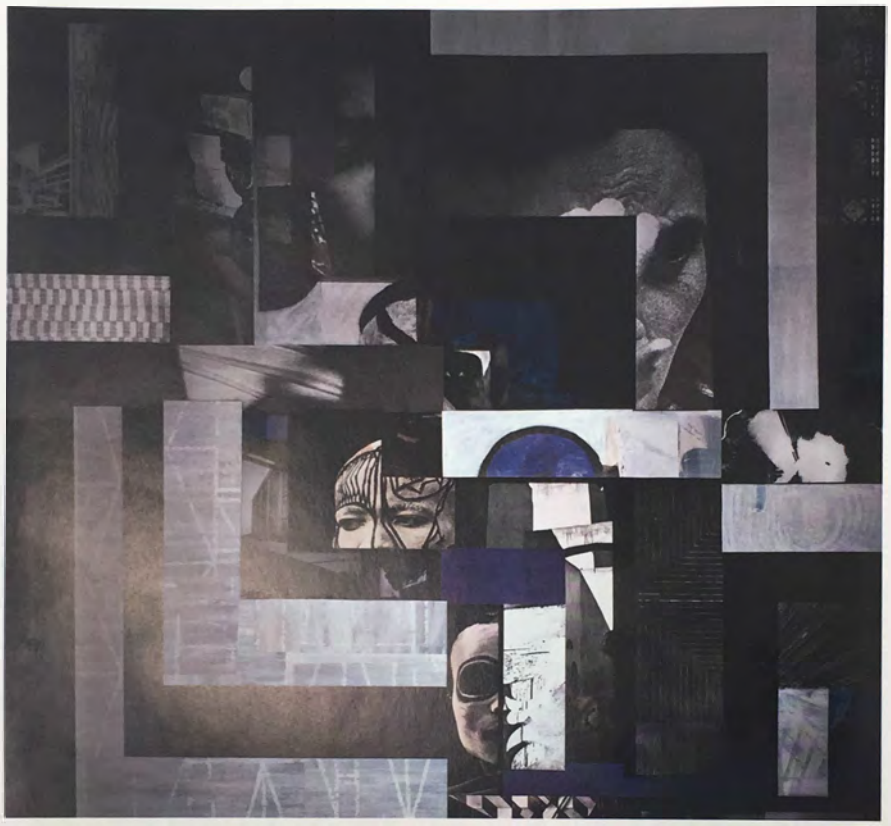

Delaunay, 2008

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RM What does "simultaneity" mean culturally and, more specifically, how have you translated this concept into the present?

SV The color combinations within *Electric Prisms* (2015) were developed from my recent research trips through North and South America. They also refer directly to textiles used by Delaunay-Terk and Anni Albers, who in turn both drew upon ancient pre-Columbian textiles for their own work. I was thinking about the simultaneity of contemporary culture as advanced by Sonia Delaunay-Terk, as well as the continuities and continuums throughout a lifetime, throughout a larger shared history and the ways in which this accumulation of experiences results in a dynamic whole that at times is formed like a film—a sequence of specific moments that are layered over and amongst one another.

RM How does this filmic concept of simultaneity become enacted in your work?

SV Through continuous formal experimentation, I strive to create a sense of expanded duration, what can be thought of as an accumulative movement within a static image. This has resulted in new forms of collage and ways of layering the photographic image. As I move away from using found imagery toward photographing on site as well as bringing the experimentation of the studio and my process into the exhibition space itself, I have returned to a consideration of simultaneity as a way in which not only to convey but also to ramify the precarious and fragmentary condition of lived experience.

Chorrera, 2014

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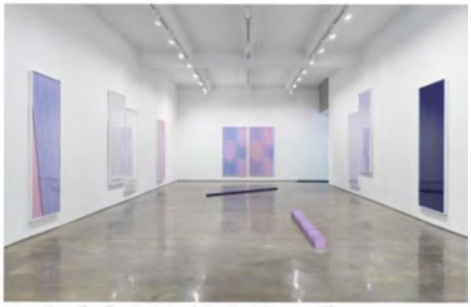
BLOUIN ARTINFO

Dafoe, Taylor, "Elusive, Illusory: Q&A with Sara VanDerBeek," *Blouin Artinfo*, September 22, 2016

Sara VanDerBeek has always worked in the interstices between mediums. Previously, it was the gap between photography and sculpture that she focused on, often building and photographing sculptural objects, then abstracting the image. In recent years, she's added textiles to the mix.



Sara VanDerBeek "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms," 2016

In her great new show, "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms," on view at Metro Pictures through October 29, 2016, VanDerBeek's interest in textiles is at the forefront of her work. The show is divided into two sections. In the first, she presents a series of abstract photographs that adopt the vernacular of textile making in their exploration of geometric patterns, and physical and conceptual weaving. Through printing, VanDerBeek repeatedly layers her images, a process that adds dimensionality to the print, yet dissolves the planar distinctions in the image itself. In several works in the show, the print is wrapped around its substrate — yet another reference to textiles — and collaged with other images.

The second section collects a series of concrete, plaster, and wood sculptures that she's created over the last several years, but never shown. Totemic and modular, the sculptures call to mind the Minimalists — specifically the work of Anne Truitt, a major influence for VanDerBeek. But the sculptures are familiar for another reason, their shapes having appeared in various (often smaller) forms in many of VanDerBeek's own photos. Tying up the conversation among mediums, she wraps several of the sculptures in her own textile designs, created by printing photographic images on fabric.

In advance of the opening, VanDerBeek sat down with Artinfo to discuss the new work, her recent research experiences, and her interest in collapsing the distance between "real" and "imagined" images.

Sara VanDerBeek "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms," 2016

When I read that your new show, "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms" was influenced by textile- and quilt-making, I started to think about how much your work already had a textile-like quality to it. There's a lot of layering involved, be it physical layering through overlapping printing processes, or conceptual layering through art historical references or the gesture of re-photographing. There's also weaving —

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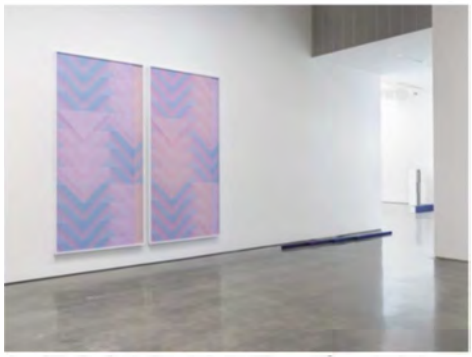
the weaving of analogue and digital production techniques, photography and sculpture, and so on. Did your interest in textiles emerge from photography, or was it the other way around?

Based on past and recent research experiences, particularly during my time working with the Dunton Quilting Collection at the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Joseph and Anni Albers Foundation I began to see that within these textile works was a meeting of form, material, image, object, and geometry. But also, at times, amongst the various pieces there would be a dynamic break from the structural patterns of their construction. It was a great meeting of all these different elements that I have been interested in for some time. For me, the practices of weaving and piecing together quilts are connected to photography in that they are all evolving technologies that are based in historical practices but are continually being adapted to contemporary materials and existences.

Sara VanDerBeek "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms," 2016

In regard to the weaving together of digital and more traditional practices, the works in this show, probably more than any others, are embracing the strengths of both. I photograph using film and daylight, and I scan those negatives, but then, working very closely with my photographic printer Julie Pochron of Pochron Studios, we create the final colors through an amalgam of chromogenic and digital processes, by using Photoshop and some darkroom techniques to push the color spectrum that is in the natural light captured by the film. We try to maintain the gradients and variation of color found within the singular images of the sculptures I photographed once they were then layered into the patterns that formed the larger compositions. Simultaneously, the color of each image is being worked throughout the printing process. We revise it several times; it's not a single pass but a continually evolving process up to the final printing. Often it begins in one place and then shifts. I enjoy this change, because it becomes a collaborative process as well. I think that ties it to quilt making — there can be many individuals involved in creating a quilt.



Sara VanDerBeek "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms," 2016

There are elements of the original sculptural object within the final images as well, and so I think of these images as being a meeting of the actual and the imagined too. There is an actual object — it has depth and form and creates these shadows — but then through the capturing of it or the layering of it, the object begins to transform and change. With these works, I pushed that process so that the objects begin to shift within our sense of what

is actual, what is spatial, what is color, pattern, and shadow.

I've heard you talk about the actual and the imagined before. Through your printing process, the object you're photographing begins to dissolve and merge with the background — it becomes illusory. In your 2015 photo "Crepuscule," for instance, it's hard to tell where the object ends and the background begins. What is your interest in collapsing those two aspects of the image, the actual and the imagined?

Sara VanDerBeek "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms," 2016

Sara VanDerBeek "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms," 2016

My interest in that is the question of whether or not you can create an image that is continually shifting. An image that isn't so concretely defined but that, even when fixed and framed and layered and set, contains aspects that are always changing. How can you do that with photography, which is more traditionally about a decisive moment of capture? I think that illusiveness has a lot to do with experience. I'm trying to translate to the viewer that sense of how your experience of something is always evolving. For me it's similar to the way we think about memories and how they shift and change over time. "Crepuscule," a work I made recently and which is related to these works in the show came out of e.e. cummings's poetry. I was studying his poetry and the various stages of his manuscripts thinking about how his work translates his experiences into this beautiful, succinct — but also abstract and layered — language. I think often about how photography can emulate a poetic practice, which, to me, is about acute observation and looking at the world, but leaving it open enough so that the viewer can come at it from different angles. I'm interested in that moment when something comes to coalesce for an instant, then just as quickly dissipates back into the atmosphere. With this work there are elements of that, but there are also more hard edges and cuts involved in their layering that were made in reference to the sometimes collage-like quality of pieced quilts.

What about the color of the works? In the past you've overlaid blue and pink pieces of Plexiglas on your photographs, which invoked cyanotypes and other forms of early prints, as well as the hues of the film itself. But with these works, it doesn't seem like those same references are necessarily at play. Why is it important for you to work within the same blue-to-pink color spectrum?

It's something I think about a lot because I'm continually drawn to those colors. For me, they represent the transitional moments at the

beginning and the end of the day. All those colors meet at those times— you have hot pinks and yellows coming in at the beginning of the day, and then you have that pink-blue crepuscular mix at the end of the day. These are both moments of transition. I primarily photograph more towards the end of the day because I like the colors of the light then and the way in which shadows turn blue at dusk. A lot of the examples of quilts and textiles I saw in my research were also within that color spectrum — perhaps I sought them out. For example "Camino Real," in this show — the color pallet and composition for that work was inspired by an Anni Albers weaving which is made of pinks and reds, and was originally commissioned by Luis Barragan for a hotel in Mexico City. I adopted Albers's title to provide a direct connection to that piece.

Sara VanDerBeek "Pieced Quilts, Wrapped Forms," 2016

The piece in the center of the show, "Labyrinth"is made of two parts and is inspired by a passage in "American Patchwork Quilts" by Lenice Ingram Bacon that describes what was considered the height of quilt-making in the 1800s, which were white-on-white quilts. It intrigued me because many of my sculptural forms explore this same layering of white on white. The passage talks about how the quilts became very much like labyrinthine reliefs because of the subtle relief between the stitched white layers. Sometimes though, at the outer border, some practitioners would insert a different color. I was interested in that slight disruption of the pattern, but wanted it to be subtle, so I used the pink that was occurring within the shadows of the larger pattern. Learning of the white quilts was intriguing to me because you think so much of quilts being about strong color, but over time many have faded and often turn more muted and subtle in their mix of colors — that's where the softer pallets and tones come from here. I hope that the colors also emphasize the sometimes temporal or fleeting nature of these works. For this show, I also thought about the movement of light throughout the day as the works are arranged in the gallery. Within the show, the works move gradually from colors referencing the beginnings of the day, to bright midday light, to a dusky color spectrum, and then end with the deep blue of night.

I am quite excited that there's some yellow coming into these works.

Radical. [Laughs.]

For me, it is! [Laughs.] I'm excited to explore it more.

With your photographic-based work, you often exaggerate the objecthood of the print. Even more so with some of these new works, which are collaged — the photographs are actually three-dimensional or sculptural, in a sense. Do you think your sculptures or textiles are photographic in any way?

I come at all my work through photography in a way, so I'm very interested in that moment when objects and space begin to take on photographic qualities. Shifting planes can collapse and create different perspectives. I think a lot about the arrangement of the

objects in an exhibition space and that comes from my practice of arranging these objects when I'm photographing them. With the sculptures, particularly with the cast concrete works and their pigments and textures, they have within them physical references to some of the original ceramic and cast forms I was also looking at during my research. Their materiality is different to that of the photographs, which is important. In some ways they recall original moments of inspiration when I am photographing or researching at a site, but they are also about translation and abstraction, which the photographs are about too.

With this exhibition, I'm showing more sculptures than I've ever shown before. It's a kind of collection and accumulation of forms that I've been exploring for several years now. Some of them have been made recently and are in direct connection to the particular patterns found in quilts. It was exciting for me to bring together all of these different elements and see them in the one space together and think about the relationship between the objects and the images that I create and how they inform and impact each other. In some ways the sculptures become echoes — or casts, in a way — of the photographs, and in other ways they are the starting point and the initial source that creates the images. But it is important to clarify that none of the objects that are being shown are the things that I've used to make the photographs. They are definitely related in shape and form but are created at a different scale because they are intended to be experienced in person.

Why is that important for you, not to show the works you've photographed alongside the photos they appear in?

I'm interested in how photography changes your sense of scale of time and space, but I'm not so interested in creating a didactic system of references between object and image. I like the more open and loose set of connections in a memory of a particular object. I enjoy the curiosity and mystery that an image of an object can create, as well as that sense of transformation. And a sense of the illusory — I liked your use of that word — and the illusive that comes along with photographic processes.

For me, your work often dramatizes the illusory qualities that are embedded in photography, which we tend to take for granted.

I recently did research at the Ransom Center in Austin, Texas which is has an extensive William Henry Fox Talbot collection. A lot of Fox Talbot's salt prints have this beautiful, purplish-blue mix that I call upon a lot in my own work. These early images ratified my sense that, at the foundations of this medium, there is a complex mix of illusion, abstraction, and observation. Talbot's prints are detailed rendering of things from the world — he was making contact prints of objects in some cases— but what was being printed and depicted was often melding with the larger atmosphere of his images. I think that's really quiet a fascinating and strong aspect of photography, that it is so elastic, and expansive. It is an inclusive medium, involving many different practices and practitioners; it can be a concrete, decisive movement, a depiction of something, but it can also be incredibly abstract or illusive, and it can be all these things at once. For me, it's the images that are a combination of both —the actual and the imagined — that are the most compelling.

I think photography is the medium of our time. We are in a moment that's not very fixed, that is continually changing. Photography's presence now via cellphone cameras and our

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continuous use of this technology that is increasingly being woven into every aspect of our lives is fascinating. I don't think the omnipresence of pictures diminishes the power of photography or photographic images; I think it strengthens it. The ubiquity of images now, and our frequent and intensive use of images to communicate, is incredibly exciting. It empowers the medium.

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Hatt, Etienne. "The Movement of Memory," *art press*, February 27, 2015

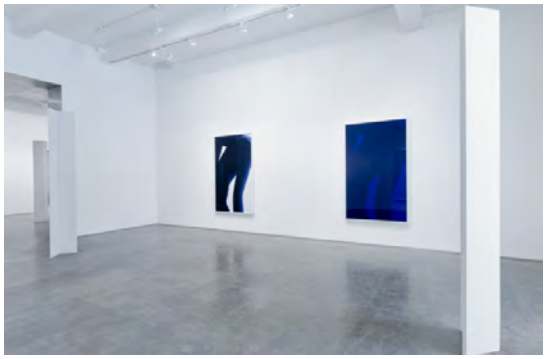
art press

The Movement of Memory
An Interview with Sara VanDerBeek
By Etienne Hatt
February 27, 2015

Installation view, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2011

Etienne Hatt: Does « abstraction » make sense in photography, generally speaking, and in your work?

Sara VanDerBeek: I visited an incredible archive recently at the University of Texas, Austin that has a significant photographic collection including what is considered to be the first photograph by Niepce. I was there to look over a number of early salt prints by William Henry Fox Talbot as well as a small group of manuscripts by EE Cummings. The images were gauzy, and ghost-like. Things were not fully legible at first, nothing was immediate, the forms, the subject, and the spaces depicted arose slowly to the surface and I began to think about how at its foundations – such as the fixing of light or the framing of the world – photography is inherently abstract. Abstraction and/or the abstracting of a subject is innate to the photographic process even if it is the sharpest, largest most legible digital image possible such as the one released recently by NASA of Andromeda. The question of abstraction is challenging. I enjoy it because it pushes me to consider further what is involved in the act of creating a photograph. I consider abstraction's different definitions in relationship to my work, and probably lean most towards the idea of an image as an abstract of a larger whole. I am less interested in defining a stance on abstraction than in considering how an image can reach a balance of the actual and the imagined.



Installation view, Metro Pictures, New York, 2013

EH: In recent shows such as a solo show at Metro Picture in 2013 or Ancient Objects, Still Lives *at Altman Siegel in 2014 you exhibited together representational (for instance ancient sculptures) and non-representational pictures. All of them had not naturalistic colors. Are manipulated colors a mean to reach this balance of the actual and the imagined?*

SV: Color, and manipulating certain colors within my prints was especially important for the two projects you have mentioned. I work with the existing or ambient light for most situations I photograph including when I work in the studio. When photographing the ancient figures in Europe, many of the collections in which they were displayed had mixed lighting so I was able to remove the yellow from the display lighting during printing to push the sculptures to a pink tone reminiscent of what I imagined was their original polychromatic state. In doing this, my hope was that my photographic image would rest simultaneously between multiple states of being. It was captured in the present, and created using a mix of contemporary film and digital imaging practices to emulate something ancient. I was also interested in the photographs resting somewhere between image and object. I saw the original painting of the ancient sculptures as an act of communication – of ideals, and of reverence – drawn out on marble bodies that have since been dispersed throughout the world in their physical form and through a multitude of depictions over the course of thousands of years.

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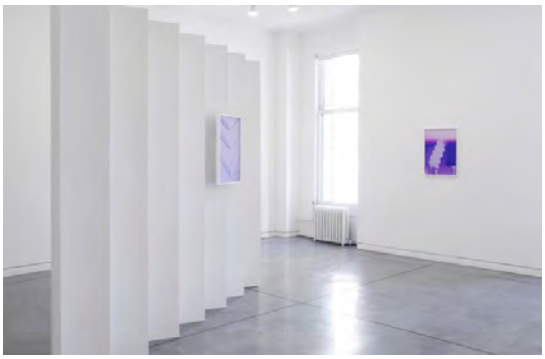

Installation view, *Ancient Objects, Still Lives*, Altman Siegel, San Francisco, 2014

The images in *Ancient Objects, Still Lives* were created in response to my work in South America with the fascinating pre-Columbian collection at Casa del Alabado in Quito. I had a similar intention to conflate multiple times/experiences at once. Additionally the coloring within these images was inspired in part by the vibrant textiles and architectural details I experienced during my time in Ecuador. More importantly within two works, *Ancient Solstice* and *Shift*, the bright flare of pink was meant to speak to the other states of consciousness in which many of the ritual objects I was studying were meant to aid or guide their user towards. I also saw this flare as symbolic of the great change that occurred within the pre-Columbian world with the arrival of European colonists. The color is like a rupture, a mark of an event flashing across the structures.

EH: How would you define your connection to Barbara Kasten's work?

SV: I admire Barbara Kasten's work immensely and equally I am inspired by her practice and her continued experimentation with various forms of photographic capture, printing, installation and performance. I especially enjoy her recent works*Scene* and *Studio Constructs*. Glass, mirrors, light, and screens accumulate into these compelling compositions of actual things – you can tell these are objects creating the patterns shapes, and shadows – yet the final resulting images feel more mythical or deeply internal like depictions of a psychological space. Or perhaps to say it more succinctly, the images feel elemental. They remind me of Talbot's salt prints in their simplicity of recording light, shadow and form but they are dynamic with sometimes jagged edges and scratched surfaces that speak very much to a contemporary existence. It is one most likely lived in a city filled with fractured planes. Her recent images speak of the fragmented lives we live now yet they also recall earlier histories. Within Barbara Kasten's work there is a sense of a continuum, a connection to the past and a reflection of the present. I connect to this. In many of her still lives, there is an incredible attention to detail, every element feels deeply considered and composed yet there is also a great sense of movement and freedom – and again experimentation that I admire greatly. I hope to achieve a similar result within the photographic images I create as well as the overall installation of images and objects within an exhibition space.

EH: How would you explain you enlarged your practice by combining prints and sculptures? What are the spatial and phenomenological relations you are looking for with these combinations?

SV: I studied at a school that encouraged a cross-disciplinary approach to art and worked under some teachers who had studied under Bauhaus professors. I admire the Bauhaus as well as other modernist movements and schools such as Black Mountain College for their attempts to integrate various ways of working into a more total and expansive practice. I think this has had a continued impact on my practice. I began making images by creating assemblages that were mixes of materials and found imagery. There was a performative aspect to this process in that they were created for the camera and then destroyed – they were also made with the camera's perspective in mind. The studio table became in some ways like a small theater and the works were theatrical in ways with strong lighting and bright colors of late 20th century reproductions.

I think a lot about time as well as language and in particular poetry and how my practice could emulate a poet's economic use of language, as well as their intent consideration of structure, phrasing and rhythm. Poetry is also a very acute observation of the world. My most recent projects have been working in response to a particular place or experience. I am very much grounded in the studio but often go outside of it to begin a project. I photograph a large number of images and bring those images back into the studio to work from – some become inspirations for sculptures and others become final images.

I think my interest in creating arrangements of images and objects in an exhibition space is an attempt at transposing my original experience as well as that within the studio -mixed with an interest in poetry and performance – to create a final resulting installation that is again somewhere between the actual and the

imagined. I mention poetry because I would like the movement between the images and the objects to be focused and considered like a phrase in a poem. And also like poetry, I would like my work to encourage observation and to cause the viewer to think about observation, experience, memory, time and being in the present.

EH: Your next main show will open in Baltimore (Baltimore Museum of Art, April 12-September 2015). Does the city where you were born belong to the particular places you just mentioned? How will the city appear in the show?

SV: Yes, it is a city in transition and it has been interesting and moving to revisit Baltimore having moved away from it nearly 20 years ago. There are constants and there are elements of significant change. Sometimes as I was going around the city it felt as though I was navigating a dream.

The city will appear through certain reoccurring materials such as marble and concrete that overlap between the sculptures and the photographs that will be on view. Mixed into this will be images of dancers that I am revisiting from an earlier project I captured in Baltimore three years ago. I have been inspired recently by dance and minimalism and was interested in drawing a connection between found movement and found materials in my exhibition after finding *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* edited by Gregory Battcock in Baltimore during one of my trips in which Yvonne Rainer published her well known text “A Quasi-Survey of some Minimalist Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A”.

Overall the installation will be loosely arranged around an idea of staging or interpreting the movement of memory – as a distillation of the chance, process, physicality, reflection and recollection involved in the creation of the exhibition.

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ARTFORUM

Mangini, Elizabeth. "Sara VanDerBeek: Altman Siegel," *Artforum* (November 2014): 284.

SAN FRANCISCO

Sara VanDerBeek

ALTMAN SIEGEL

The apparent movement of the sun across the firmament is nearly impossible to measure with the naked eye, but human cultures have nonetheless used the changing quality of light to quantify time for millennia. The resulting concepts of "day" and "night" are entirely geocentric constructions, yet they persist. The conceit of a day/night separation structured "Ancient Objects, Still Lives," Sara VanDerBeek's two-room show of new photographs and sculptures, but, like the lived experience of a sky's darkening, the diachronic movement was perceived almost exclusively in hindsight. Shot on film and then scanned, her digital C-prints connoted the passage of time, gradually shifting from light lavender in the front room (day) to dark Tyrian purple in the back gallery (night). (VanDerBeek manipulates the printing process by removing the yellow from CMYK to achieve these tones.) However, the possibility of reading a straightforward chronology in these works was intentionally thwarted by the artist's divided approach to making the images, which are at times highly constructed (featuring forms made and staged in the studio) and at other times more observational (portraying found objects or architectural elements in situ). The two sculptures on view contained both high modernist and pre-Columbian references, adding further complexity to the exhibition's temporal play.

Sara VanDerBeek, *Ancient Solstice*, 2014, digital C-print, 24 × 17 ¾".

Some of the first photographs encountered—geometric abstractions that varied slightly from one piece to the next—resembled Neo-concretist efforts. Here, systems of figure-ground relationships played out across several works. The diptychs *Synthetic Geometry* and *Incidence* (all works 2014) evince VanDerBeek's manipulation of light and shadow cast over the volumes of a parallelogram and a triangular form, respectively, to produce soft edges, subtle contrasts, and flattened picture planes. Like László Moholy-Nagy's filmed and photographed experiments with objects and light, VanDerBeek's images strain the limits of their own legibility as photographs, reading instead as drawings, aquatints, or watercolors. Lest one think geometry was the province of the moderns, however, *Chorerra*, a photograph of a patinated jug with pentagonal sides, interjected with ancient evidence of modernism's primitivist roots. Consumed with the task of deciphering each image, the viewer hardly noticed the progressive darkening of the prints.

Ancient Solstice (also in the front room) is a more obvious studio setup. Here, geometric forms coalesce into an image of a staircase, with dramatic shadows and contrasts typical of high noon. A sculpture of similar ziggurat-style steps turned on their side bisected the front gallery, reinforcing the theme of passage from one of the exhibition's temporal moments to the next. *Turned Stairs/Pyramid Steps* was at once a sculptural object and a hanging wall for a single photograph of low concrete steps: *Pyramid Steps, Day*. The doubling here felt needlessly self-reflexive, but the wall served to move the viewer along toward another modernist screen—a chain-link fence photographed at nightfall (*Civil Dusk*).

Once the setting sun first touches the horizon, it takes only minutes for its trailing edge to disappear, and so it follows that dark hues dominated the back room. The draped fabric pictured in *Loose Structure* shimmers and seems almost to move with the indeterminacy of twilight, making it hard to look away. In *Cyclopean Night*, the surface geometries of *Incidence* or *Synthetic Geometry*—the "daytime" studio shots—solidify into dense volumetric forms with the application of deep purples, while only faint streaks of white trail across a field of indigo in the show's final diptych, *The Visible Universe*. In the end, any disjuncture between photography and sculpture, or staged and straight photographs, supported the slippery nature of VanDerBeek's real subject matter: time. Part of photography's appeal, after all, is the way it arrests temporal experiences and renders an instant visible, even tangible. Not unlike the ancients who used ritual artifacts to help map the inconstant moon, VanDerBeek employs photography as a contemporary means to track the passage of time through the interaction of objects and light.

—*Elizabeth Mangini*

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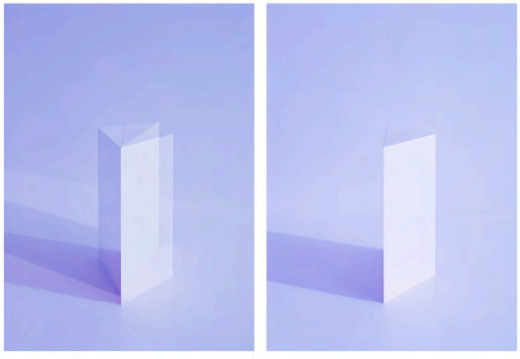
Willard Sachs, Danica. "Review: Sara VanDerBeek: Ancient Objects, Still Lives," *Art Practical*, July 2014.

ART PRACTICAL

REVIEW
Sara VanDerBeek: Ancient Objects, Still Lives
By Danica Willard Sachs

Sara VanDerBeek: *Ancient Objects, Still Lives, installation view*. Altman Siegel. Image courtesy of the Artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco.

Sara VanDerBeek's photographs in her latest exhibition *Ancient Objects, Still Lives* counter any notion that the still life is a staid mode of image making. Rather, her dreamy rose and violet digital chromogenic prints and minimalist sculptures both compress and expand time, revealing formal lineages between ancient and modern forms.



Sara VanDerBeek. *Incidence*, 2014; Digital c-prints, 24 x 17 1/4 in each.

Although many of VanDerBeek's images focus on details of the Pre-Columbian artifacts she photographed during her participation in the 12th Cuenca Bienal in Ecuador, the exhibition is thematically anchored by the more abstract diptych *Incidence* (all work is from 2014). Hung on the gallery's central wall, each of *Incidence*'s panels depicts a white triangular prism hovering in flat, periwinkle-hued space. In the image on the right the polyhedron appears stationary, one of its stark white faces parallel to the picture plane. The image on the left, however, is doubly exposed, showing the same angle as the right panel with the polyhedron also pivoted several degrees around its front vertex. With this simple juxtaposition of perspectives, VanDerBeek "animates" the image, fleshing out the volume of the form and revealing the still life as both a static moment and as an index of the time it took make the image.

Sara VanDerBeek. *Chorerra*, 2014; Digital c-print, 24 x 18 1/4 in.

The few carefully positioned sculptures in the exhibition amplify the themes in the photographs. Dividing the first gallery in two, *Turned Stairs/Pyramid Steps* combines a minimal white folding partition with a photograph of concrete steps hung on one of its sides, the angular geometry of the sculpture and image mirroring each other. Steps repeatedly appear in VanDerBeek's images—as in *Ancient Solstice* and *Shift*—so the zigzagging wall physically

mirrors the often-abstract forms in her photographs, providing dimension to what previously appeared flat. A similar pairing of object and photograph, *Lunar Calendar*, anchors the whole back gallery, though the relationship between the components is less clear. *Lunar Calendar* couples an image of a kind of calendar used by indigenous peoples to track the position of the moon and stars in the night sky with a sleek white table with a reflective black surface and two hollow hexagonal prisms.

Sara VanDerBeek. *Lunar Calendar*, 2014; Wood, glass, plaster, digital c-print, dimensions variable.

The split between the two rooms in the gallery is meant to evoke the division between day and night, a transition that registers as a shift in the color palette of the prints from the lighter purples and pinks in the beginning of the show to the brooding, deep indigos in the back gallery. More compelling, however, are the formal continuities between photographs of artifacts, as in *Chorerra*—a close-cropped view of a pre-Columbian ceramic vessel with hexagonal faces—and more contemporary objects, like the aforementioned concrete *Pyramid Steps* or the chain-link fence of *Civil Dusk*. The mirrored forms and repeated geometries of hexagons, angular steps, and squares suggest that the past and present are not so easily partitioned when placed under VanDerBeek's careful aesthetic watch.

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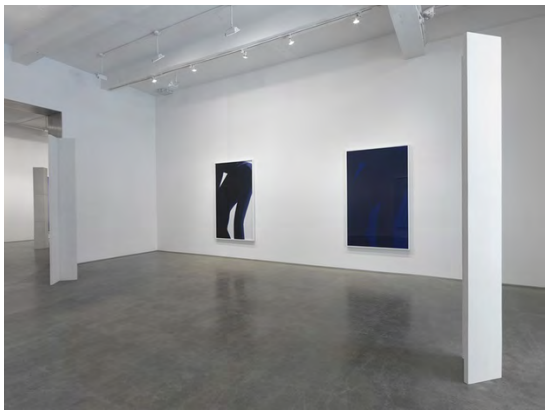
Sholis, Brian. "Interview with Sara VanDerBeek," *Aperture*, May 6, 2013.

aperture

Interview with Sara VanDerBeek
By Brian Sholis
May 6, 2013


Installation view, Metro Pictures, New York, 2013.

For her first solo exhibition at Metro Pictures, on view through June 8, New York–based artist Sara VanDerBeek made photographs at museums of antiquity and archeological sites in several European cities. These images have been given unique frames and are paired with cast-concrete sculptures similar to those VanDerBeek photographed for her earlier work. Brian Sholis, who wrote about VanDerBeek's work in Aperture #202, spoke with the artist by phone.

Brian Sholis: In recent years you've made work in several US cities—Detroit, New Orleans, and your hometown, Baltimore. What are some of the differences you noticed when working in cities like Paris, Rome, and Naples?

Sara VanDerBeek: One big difference was in the way I navigated them. In America I chose to walk around and respond to the outdoor environment. I chose sites and spaces that resonated with the life of the city, or an impactful event in its recent past; for example, I made images of building foundations in the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans. But in Europe I worked mostly indoors, in various museums and collections. I'm not sure whether my familiarity with American cities allowed me to explore them with more confidence, or whether it was in part because I traveled to Europe with the specific purpose of exploring some of these pre-eminent collections of sculpture.

I will say, however, that I feel like history—as a larger, more abstract idea, as something taught and learned—suffuses European cities and museums, whereas a more specific and tangible history is present in the surfaces of American cities. That's part of why I chose to focus on the ancient and neo-classical sculptures that are the subjects of some of the photographs in this exhibition. I wanted to explore figures that are already iconographic. Although they are three-dimensional, I think of them almost as images. I did engage and connect with the contemporary life of these European cities—I met and befriended a number of young artists and curators, and was very intrigued by their perspective on both the current and historical nature of their cities. But something about this whole endeavor led me to become focused on certain aspects of the past as they connected to the present. As I was photographing these sculptures and visiting different sites, I considered the changing depictions of the body, and how those depictions reflected larger changes in the cultures of their creation. The repetition of the figures was very intriguing to me, too. Most of all, I was interested in discovering, through the arrangement of the objects and the images in the show, a way to create an experience that in some way translated my original experience of visiting these sites.

BJS: Were you cognizant of being under the spell of these environments? Did you try to respond to them in terms other than those handed to you by art history books?

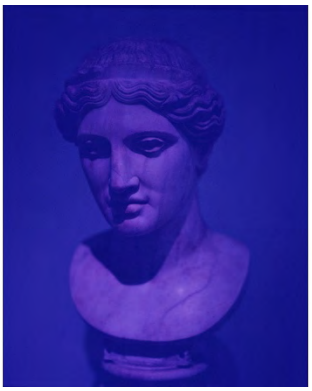
SV: I think "under the spell" is a good phrase. I was very inspired, or even mesmerized, at times. Sometimes the environments were dreamlike; at the very least they are different from what I have experienced of American institutions. Smaller collections in Rome, for example, allowed me extended time alone with the objects. I felt a connection to these figures, could begin to make sense of their gravitational force; I was able to move around them and study them intently. I was able to slow down, and I spent lots of time with each object so that my idea of them was formed out of direct observation and the camera's view.

BJS: You also were not encumbered with a lot of equipment.

SV: I had a camera, but no tripod, and I used existing light. I tried to embrace the specific qualities of the objects emphasized by their environments, to understand how they were lit and staged. The tableaux are fascinating. However, after working in the museums, I did a lot of things during the printing and framing processes to alter the colors in the imagery, to

try and re-create the imaginative, dreamlike way I experienced them.

I really enjoy the simplicity of this way of working. It was just me, with my camera, out in the world—I was trying to be present in the moment. This initial phase is the most exciting and invigorating part of the process; it's when I get the ideas from which everything evolves, the sculptures, the overall installation, and the quality I hope to achieve in the final printed image.



Sara VanDerBeek, Roman Woman I, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.

BJS: Let's talk briefly about the presentation at Metro Pictures. The show marks the first time you've exhibited a large number of your sculptures in New York. You have also made very specific decisions regarding framing. The show can be understood as an exploration of the relationship between images and objects. Though you were working simply, you are not presenting straight, "documentary" photographs.

SV: When I began exhibiting the sculptures I had previously used only for my studio-based photographs, I was encouraged to further consider the photograph as an object. I have often thought about how prints themselves fluctuate between image and object, and I wanted my photographs to have some other, possibly three-dimensional quality.

I had been exploring these questions during the last year, but hadn't worked out the details until I began thinking about how classical sculptures had at one point been painted. They were themselves a meeting of image and object. The paint, its colors, was a means of communication, a literal and symbolic adornment. Today we see these figures without most of their color. They have changed over time, and to see them now is to be able to contemplate those differences.

Coloring the photographs by placing them behind semitransparent Plexiglas emulates the original act of coloring the sculptures. The Plexiglas I chose is quite a dark, deep blue. The figures become more like shapes or apparitions; they are semi-abstract textures and forms, though still legible as figures. I have also used mirrored glass for the larger, abstract photographs I'm presenting in one room at Metro Pictures. With them I'm trying to create a fleeting, ephemeral experience, one that mirrors what I felt while trying to capture particular moments in these sites. I wanted images that would change and fluctuate. Your reflection in the mirrored glass does that, but the color and texture you can see behind it will change, too. I keep going back to notions of dreams, of dreamlike images. Dreams, too, are specific but not fixed.

BJS: You mentioned earlier that this careful calibration of works in Metro Pictures's three separate galleries is an attempt, on some level, to re-create your experience of these museum collections in Europe. Can you explain that further?

SV: I tried to take into account shifts in scale, and the viewer's relationship to the objects and photographs as he or she moves through the galleries. Some objects are composed of human-scale modules, while other sculptures are a little bit larger than human scale, as were the figures I saw in Naples, at the National Archeological Museum. I was surprised to discover how large some of the classical sculptures were—in particular the figures that had adorned the Baths of Caracalla in Rome. I had never seen classical figures that large, and I hope that in my exhibition you get a sense of the proportion and mass that I felt when viewing these sculptures, as well as the quality and changes in your sense of scale as you move around them.

I have always been interested in how photography affects the reading of scale, time, and place. It can be disorienting or confusing to encounter a photograph of something, but it can also usefully enlighten some little-perceived aspect of real-life experience.

BJS: It was sometimes difficult to discern the actual size of the studio-based constructions you photographed earlier in your career. Can you speak about the contrasts between your early work, which was primarily in the studio, and your recent work, which has mostly taken place out in the world?

SV: I enjoy mixing different ways of working. Working out in the world involves a level of reactiveness, of

being open to chance, that wasn't as much a part of my earlier practice. When shooting in these European museums and gardens I was moving fairly quickly, responding to the qualities of light I encountered. Despite this dependence on context, the process can be as gestural as creating and staging tableaux in the studio. And it has changed my work in the studio, as well. Today when I create still lifes in the studio, I often work with natural light, shoot fewer frames. And I'm more open to trying alternate vantage points. For the early photographs of layered assemblages, made circa 2005 or 2006, I would shoot rolls and rolls of film. I've become a little bit more focused now, and I think that has come from lessons learned while shooting out in the world.

The studio now functions for me in a manner similar to my understanding of these classical figures: it's a meeting point of different times. I take images, print them out, bring them into the studio, and consider them alongside sculptures or other, earlier photographs—it creates a "still life" of various pasts in the present. We all recognize that the present is imbued with the past; what I hope is that the exhibition itself communicates a sense of the feedback loops I experience while working, whereby sculptures generate images and images generate sculptures. That loop is itself a metaphor for the continually evolving process of thinking, making, and interpretation that is any artist's or individual's experience in life. We are continually trying to understand and process our past as we address ongoing issues. I feel these works are representative of that kind of grappling, of coming to terms with the foundations on which we build.

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Sholis, Brian. "Sara VanDerBeek: Compositions," *Aperture*, Spring 2011.

Sara VanDerBeek COMPOSITIONS

BY BRIAN SHOLIS

Sara VanDerBeek's contribution to the Museum of Modern Art's *New Photography 2009* exhibition was *A Composition for Detroit*, a quartet of photographs made that year. Like the photographs she had been exhibiting for the previous half decade, it is made up of images of images: each panel depicts a geometric scaffold, erected against a dark backdrop in the artist's studio, to which she affixed reproductions of other photographs, including ones by Walker Evans and Leonard Freed. Unlike her earlier works, however, *A Composition for Detroit* also includes images VanDerBeek herself shot while visiting Motor City. Some of these component parts are in the background, obscured by the scaffolding or a painted pane of glass hung on it; others are depicted whole. VanDerBeek has said that the idea for the work came from a bank of broken windows she saw in Detroit, and the blank spaces in her composition—both within and between the four panels—deftly evoke that inspiration and give the work a syncopated rhythm. *A Composition for Detroit* is a threnody for a place laid low by the mid-century flight of manufacturing and its middle-class tax base, a place now grappling with the additional traumas of the current economic recession. With its inclusion of careworn photographic reproductions and its spacing across multiple panels, the work is also, more broadly, a meditation on time and entropy.

The photographs for which VanDerBeek first became known were, like the piece exhibited at MoMA, created in the studio with techniques borrowed from sculpture and collage. Most feature a single, somewhat rickety construction, laden with both photographic reproductions and talismanic objects—feathers, necklaces and chains, ribbons, and the like. The pictures are themselves invocations, calling forth the spirits of modernist precursors, from Constantin Brancusi and Alexander Calder to László Moholy-Nagy and Max Ernst; of classical cultures and historical figures; and of the artist's father, the experimental filmmaker and artist Stan VanDerBeek, for whom the canny juxtaposition of images was second nature. Sara VanDerBeek brought together items ripped from the pages of art-history surveys and mass-market magazines or extracted from her father's archive or from her own collections, placing them in exquisite if somewhat precious arrangements that she bathed in dramatic light. The resulting photographs, with evocative titles like *A Different Kind of Idol*, *Ziggurat*, and *Mrs. Washington's Bedroom* (all 2006), are long on atmosphere and rich in allusions: each fragment is a keyhole into another world. Everything is suspended within shallow, anonymous spaces. These images, while possessing the qualities of a dream, are also commentaries on the erosion of boundaries in today's media environment and on the instantaneous retrieval of historical information made possible by modern technology. They present history as image, or as a palimpsest of images. VanDerBeek

makes calculated use of light, shadow, color, and the boundaries of the picture plane. Yet the prints are unusual in a distinct way. Each image is a one-to-one-scale replica of its subject: that is, a tabletop arrangement of twenty-by-sixteen inches results in a print of approximately the same dimensions. Each photograph is not only an index of something that once existed in the world; it is a direct copy of that worldly presence.

Having developed a unique pictorial language, VanDerBeek spent several years honing it, a process that first entailed the stripping away of extraneous elements and later the near total exclusion of photographic reproductions. The busily referential works she exhibited in 2006 gave way to a series of increasingly spare compositions, such as *Eclipse I* (2008). In that image, two photographic reproductions of ancient sculptural figures are affixed to a vertical, white-painted wooden pole. Also affixed to it is a thin metal ring from which emanates a series of string "rays" (likely the source of the work's title). Subtle details animate the composition, reminding viewers that they are looking at a sculpture in space, not a flat image composed on a screen: one of the classical reproductions is affixed to the side of the pole and one to its front face; the entire arrangement is not perpendicular to the lens but slightly off-kilter; the "rays" slice diagonally downward, while the shadows the construction projects onto the white backdrop canter off in the opposite direction. *After* (2009) achieves a similar complexity without recourse to other images, relying instead on the play of angles and simple washes of paint over plaster and glass for incident.

In more recent works, color too has been drained from the image—VanDerBeek shoots with color film but prints in black and white. *Caryatid* (2010) is one example of this technique. A column of six cast-plaster forms rests on a sun-dappled wooden floor between two windows. The light streaming through them washes out the upper corners of the composition, leaving an inverted *T* to offset the thin vertical presence in the center of the image. Mirrors resting on the floor reflect VanDerBeek's caryatid, hinting at Brancusian endlessness. Such a simple figure seems to aim for the impassiveness and iconicity of an architectural column or a totem pole, yet the handmade quality of VanDerBeek's construction remains evident. Here is something stark and timeless, yet expressive of an individual maker.

VanDerBeek's series of reductive gestures approaches an endpoint with images like *Treme* (2010). Two blocky forms, white over blue, rest against a neutral gray and white background; they too are cast in plaster, and have been painted in simple vertical washes. Despite its reticent minimalism and its genesis within the walls of VanDerBeek's studio, the picture has a real-world referent: its juxtaposition of colors mimics the stairway outside an abandoned modernist schoolhouse the artist encountered in the Treme neighborhood of New Orleans.

Treme is part of *To Think of Time*, the three-part suite of new photographs (all 2010) comprising VanDerBeek's first solo exhibition in a museum, presented last autumn at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art. In advance of that show, VanDerBeek returned to the field, this time visiting two new sites that lend themselves to meditations on past and present: New Orleans, which was then about to mark the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, and Baltimore, the artist's hometown. The locations symbolize VanDerBeek's attempt (begun with the work created after her foray to Detroit) to examine how both private and public memories are encoded in the physical environments we inhabit. Inspired by the observational acuity and sensitivity of Walt Whitman, from whom two of the exhibition's photographic arrangements draw their titles (*Song of Myself* and *Sleepers*), the roughly three dozen small-scale images present fragments, whether captured in the field or constructed in VanDerBeek's Brooklyn studio. In the image *Treme School Window*, one windowpane opens to reveal a metaphorical black hole at the center of the composition. Another, *Baltimore Window*, depicts an antique leaded window, exhumed from dusty seclusion in the basement of the artist's childhood home, resting in a slot carved into a rectangular block of plaster; a narrow shaft of light cuts through the window and falls directly behind it onto the wall.

Such resonant images, gathered into a halting frieze around the Whitney's first-floor gallery, were punctuated by nearly abstract photographs of building foundations in New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward. The concrete slabs carry evidence of the houses they supported, such as rust-caked holes into which rebar once slotted, and the scrapes and gouges left behind by the storm. As VanDerBeek told exhibition curator Tina Kukielski, "I felt when looking down upon them for the first time that these foundations retained in their surfaces the entire history of our civilization. They reminded me of early pictographs, and with their pale fragments of color and texture, they echoed the images of fractured frescoes or ancient Greek or Roman art." The works' grayscale tones are joined by hints of dusky blue or sunrise pink, indicative of the natural light in which all the images, whether shot inside or outside the studio, were made. The light itself is a subtle indicator of time's passage. Reading the installation from left to right, the amount of light in each image gradually rises and then dissipates. It would be easy to extrapolate from this sunrise-to-sunset narrative a tragic tale of decay: urban infrastructure enters into terminal decline, its only remaining function to bear noble witness to the lives lived in its midst. But to do so would be to neglect an idea that the generative, studio-based half of VanDerBeek's work speaks to: around the corner there is always a new dawn.

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Putting Memories to New Use

By CAROL KINO
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Christian Hansen for The New York Times
Sara VanDerBeek, whose first solo museum show is at the Whitney.

WHEN the photographer Sara VanDerBeek was growing up in Baltimore in the 1980s, she yearned for the vanished art world of 1960s New York, in which her father, the experimental filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek, had played an important role. Mr. VanDerBeek, who died when Sara was 7, had collaborated with artists like Claes Oldenburg and Merce Cunningham, and worked with Bell Labs to create some of the first computer animations. Before and after his death, Ms. VanDerBeek said, friends from the old days often visited and talked about the excitement and experimentation of that time.

Mr. VanDerBeek's first wife, Johanna, was a regular. An artist herself, she had participated in his films and in performance events, and "still has a paper dress and bra that Rauschenberg had printed for one of them," Ms. VanDerBeek recalled. "She would always tell us stories about their life in New York and the artists and the scene."

A hunger to reanimate that long gone scene helped lead Ms. VanDerBeek, 33, into the project that first made her name, the Guild & Greyshkul gallery in SoHo, which she founded and ran with her younger brother and a friend from 2003 to 2009. It was celebrated for nurturing young artists and providing a creative gathering spot that seemed a welcome antidote to the rampant commercialism of the time.

And some sort of hunger or longing also seems central to Ms. VanDerBeek's own work, which she began showing seriously four years ago. It's especially evident in the installation of about 30 photographs made this year that appear in her first solo museum exhibition, "To Think of Time," which just opened at the Whitney Museum of American Art and runs through Dec. 5.

Some works in the show depict three-dimensional still-life assemblages that she builds in her studio. In "We Will Become Silhouettes" two plaster casts of Ms. VanDerBeek's face suggest a double-sided death mask, while "Blue Caryatid at Dusk" makes a pint-size Brancusi-esque column look like an outsize funerary monument.

Others show architectural details, like the close-ups of decaying windows and foundations she encountered on a recent trip to New Orleans. And many of the most poignant found their source in Ms. VanDerBeek's childhood home in Baltimore, now up for sale. The show opens with "Blue Eclipse," a photograph of a photograph of the 1969 lunar eclipse that she discovered while cleaning out the basement, and closes with a grouping that includes an enigmatic image of light falling through the house's windows onto a wall.

Ms. VanDerBeek came to New York in 1994 to attend Cooper Union, her father's alma mater. After graduation she worked in London as a commercial photographer for three years, shooting subjects like artfully composed stacks of toilet paper for the grocery chain ASDA. "There was a lot of tabletop work," she said, "which somehow translates into these still lifes that I am doing now." In her off hours she roamed East London, taking photographs of Brutalist postwar apartment blocks, which fascinated her, she said, because of "a disparity between the idealism of the architecture and the reality of living there."

Sara VanDerBeek; Metro Pictures, New York and Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco

After returning to New York in 2001 Ms. VanDerBeek became interested in another sort of melancholic streetscape, the makeshift memorials that sprang up throughout the city after 9/11. The idea of making pictures of structures similarly studded with photographs and mementos began to infiltrate her imagination.

In 2003 she and her brother, Johannes VanDerBeek, opened Guild & Greyshkul with the artist Anya Kielar, another Cooper Union student. They wanted to provide a locus for their friends from school, inspired by their "idealistic view of the art world of my father's generation," Ms. VanDerBeek said. "We saw among our peer group a similar need to gather and show."

Until the gallery closed, it advanced many careers, including those of Ernesto Caivano, known for intricate drawings, and Mariah Robertson, whose photographs were included in the last "Greater New York" show at MoMA P.S. 1. And in 2008 they reintroduced Stan VanDerBeek to the art world by giving him a well-received retrospective. Ms. VanDerBeek and her brother now manage his estate.

At the same time Ms. VanDerBeek was making her own work. While producing the pictures for her first solo show, "Mirror in the Sky," at d'Amelio Terras in 2006, she thought back to those impromptu Sept. 11 mementos mori, she said, and "the whole tradition of holding onto images of people

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and things that have been lost." Many depict photographs and other objects suspended from metal structures that apparently float in space, as in "A Reoccurring Pattern," for which Ms. VanDerBeek collaged magazine photographs, bits of fabric, her own family snapshots and other talismans against a chain-link fence.

Sara VanDerBeek/Metro Pictures, New York, and Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco

Ms. VanDerBeek said that she saw the layering in those photographs as being similar to "the way our mind organizes our memories, at different depths, one superimposed over the other, and constantly shifting." The resulting works, with their Dada and Surrealist overtones, struck a chord and curators began visiting her studio in the gallery basement.

One was Eva Respini of MoMA, who put Ms. VanDerBeek's work in the "New Photography" show there last fall. "Although Sara is a photographer, I like to think of her practice as multidisciplinary," Ms. Respini said, because she usually makes a multimedia sculpture before taking a photograph, and is "very interested in the space of sculpture, the space of theater." And by opening a gallery and representing her father's estate, she added, Ms. VanDerBeek was "involved in a larger artistic dialogue."

For MoMA Ms. VanDerBeek created an installation of four photographs based on images of Detroit, a city she regards as embodying long-term change, good and bad, rather than urban decline. Similarly her new Whitney project, loosely inspired by Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," is something of a meditation on America during a time of social transformation. And like that poet, who reshaped and expanded on his opus throughout his life, Ms. VanDerBeek's intention was to create a project that could remain in flux. She continued tweaking every aspect of "To Think of Time" until it opened, and intends to recombine the images and add new ones over the years. "My hope is to have it grow and evolve over time," she said.

Sara VanDerBeek/Metro Pictures, New York, and Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco

The project also owes much to her personal history. Two years ago she and her siblings began cleaning out the family home so that their mother, Louise, who has multiple sclerosis, could move to a nursing home. As well as uncovering long-lost family mementos, like the plaster life masks her father encouraged them to make each year, they also found decades of his previously unknown work.

While their discoveries were "like sifting through history," the process of clearing them out was "like a physical manifestation of change," Ms. VanDerBeek said. "I hope my work is as much about the positive and inspirational aspects of change as it is about loss or melancholy."

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