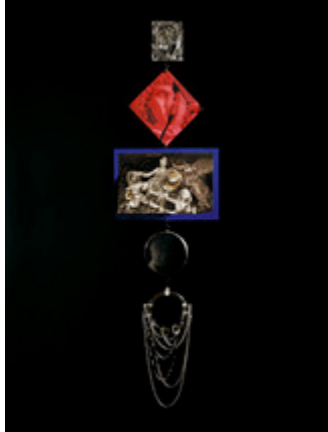


ARTFORUM

"I Am Eyebeam"**GALLERY 400****University of Illinois at Chicago, 400 South Peoria Street (MC 034)****October 16–November 17**Sara VanDerBeek, *Medusa*, 2007, digital C-print, 40 x 30".

Although not on the checklist, James Welling, Dara Birnbaum, Silvia Kolbowski, Louise Lawler, and Victor Burgin are palpably present in "I Am Eyebeam," curated by Melanie Schiff and Lorelei Stewart. While it is difficult to detect "Pictures"-style representational critique in the work amassed here, the twelve participating artists seem aesthetically drawn to their Conceptualist forebears. This strong collection of work displays the artists' preference for the darkroom over the computer desktop, appropriation over subjective narrative, and a constructivist visual language over transcendental beauty.

Arthur Ou's three documentary-style black-and-white prints, from the series "Screen Tests," 2007, depict urban settings marked by blacked-out, graffiti-like spots. Is one confronted with a police photo of criminal transgression or a Baldessari-like art contrivance? Daniel Gordon's *Woman in the Mirror*, 2007, depicts a close-up of a naked posterior. The mirror is small and out of focus, hanging on a distant blue-painted wall. The woman's full nude body is reflected in the mirror, yet it is only her ass that one empirically scrutinizes. Matt Keegan's *Untitled*, 2007, is a digital print of a studio photograph depicting a male figure sitting casually in a trendy modern chair. The male figure is hand-cut from the picture, which collapses the photo paper around the empty silhouette. Here, Keegan returns a sense of originality and auratic objecthood to photography's editioned seriality. Walead Beshty's folded abstractions also collide photography's material properties with its illusionary faculty, achieving a kind of cubist space. Sara VanDerBeek's portraits of artifactlike constructions seem direct descendents of Sarah Charlesworth's critiques of cultural commodification, made twenty-five years ago. Shane Huffman's triangular shapes composed through a series of darkroom exposure tests are so basic that they leave the potential for the critical and theoretical issues embodied in the medium behind. Clearly, subjectivity and originality are no longer aggressively contested in photographic practice, yet the aesthetics that once wrestled vehemently with the modernist paradigm are carried on. "I Am Eyebeam" is a silly and misleading title for a superb exhibition that examines photography after critical photography after art photography.

—Michelle Grabner

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