

Best in Show

**Recommendations by
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Art

Focus Here!

Last year, at the entrance to "Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West," MOMA curator Eva Respini mounted one of Richard Prince's *Untitled (Cowboy)* photos. Originally shot by Sam Abell for Phillip Morris, it's an arresting image—and probably the only one in the exhibition originally created for advertising. Respini's choice was canny and mercenary, akin to Prince's original appropriation. What other image would've lured you 40 feet down the hallway into the ghetto of MOMA's photography department?

The preternatural allure of media images was, of course, a primary lesson of Pop and Pictures. But once artists had this information, vigilance was required, like wearing Hazmat suits around radioactive materials. Biography, beauty, and sentiment were forbidden. A prominent '80s art dealer best summed up the defensive ethos: "Expression embarrasses me."

The past decade, though, saw photographers groping toward embarrassment. Forays into abstraction, spirit photography, and early photo techniques served as preliminary gestures. Now, the commercial and personal are being reconciled, and the critical no longer precludes beauty and expression.

You see this in "New Photography 2010" at MOMA (11 West 53rd Street, through January 10), where Amanda Ross-Ho has taken a perforated drywall screen and created a mini-display of framed photos—everything from abstraction to portraiture to advertising still-life. The catch is that among the images are photos taken by her parents, one of whom is a professional photographer.

The slickest work in "New Photography" is by Roe Ethridge, who cruises effortlessly between formats and photographic realms, repurposing his commercial images for art's exigencies. A misty, neo-Pictorialist portrait of a model posed next to a tripod hangs alongside a trompe-l'oeil photo of a pumpkin sticker, fashion photos with eerie digital interventions, and a folksy-gorgeous still-life with moldy fruit, originally used as a *Vice* magazine cover.

Elad Lassry's MOMA display is extended in an overhung solo exhibition at Luhring Augustine (531 West 24th Street, through December 18). Basically, Lassry is a very talented Ethridge, Prince, Christopher Williams, and Jack Goldstein redux who leans heavily on gimmicks like printing his photographs the size of a magazine spread. (Um, why?) Nonetheless, perusing his genre-bending lineup of images is like thumbing through a competent DJ's album collection: vintage advertising, snapshots, auteur and Hollywood cinema, conceptualizing setups—it's all here.

Annette Kelm, at Andrew Kreps (525 West 22nd Street, through December 22), is also very much in the Ethridge mode, with some Josephine Pryde thrown in. There's genre slippage and trompe-l'oeil trickery, but Kelm's use of craft and kitsch objects—a thrift-store driftwood lamp,



Courtesy the artist and Elizabeth Dee, New York

No more denial: Miranda Lichtenstein's *Untitled #20*, 2008, at Elizabeth Dee

bandanna, and casino-themed scarf—creates a kind of well-lit, post-New Age surrealism.

Collier Schorr is the elder stateswoman of this round-up, but her current offering at 303 (547 West 21st Street, through December 4) is notable for its turn away from the conceptual-essay format into autobiographical mining. Like virtually everyone mentioned here, she's eschewing seriality: The installation looks like a group rather than a solo show. It's also richly optical, with images of cut flowers tied back into landscapes and ad hoc formalist compositions, such as a mottled wall that recalls modernists like Aaron Siskind.

Dan Torop's exhibition at Derek Eller (615 West 27th Street, through December 23) is autobiographical, too, but in a rustic, neo-romantic way. Scenes from a camping trip suggest cast-off snapshots that wouldn't have made the photo album—only these are cased in tasteful walnut frames. Torop's show isn't as pleasingly weird as his last one, but it's defiantly unplugged and meditative.

Expression is captured and distilled by Miranda Lichtenstein at Elizabeth Dee (545 West 20th Street, through December 18). There's singing, dancing, decaying flowers, allusions to early film and modern aesthetic utopias—all compressed through the post-postmodern filter, which is to say, effectively refracted and transformed, rather than appropriated and reproduced (or re-anything'ed). Criticality takes on a new form here. Because, in the same way Respini covertly got me to admire that Prince/Abell photo, on a purely formal level, Lichtenstein shows how the postmodern beauty-and-expression embargo was essentially a form of denial: Advertising's magnetic aesthetics, after all, were often crafted by freelancing "fine" artists. Irony was good for the '70s and '80s, but too much has happened since then, both in photography and life, to maintain that stance. With Lichtenstein, the stubbornly "resistant" artwork gives way to a primordial, yet contemporary, admission: Images contain magic.