

ARTFORUM

San Francisco

Sara VanDerBeek

ALTMAN SIEGEL

**49 Geary Street, 4th Floor
November 12–December 23**

In an installation that recalls an elliptical rebus, the fourteen photographs in Sara VanDerBeek’s first West Coast solo show are infused with dusky, steely blue color schemes and simple geometric forms that suggest vast artistic and celestial arenas—modernist sculpture, American poetry, the cosmos. Recurrent images of arrowlike angles (a blue neon sign in *Gwangju* [all works 2010]; a Walker Evans-ish print of a pitched-roof building turned on its side in *Druid Hill*) gently direct the viewer’s gaze and attention from one work to the next, compounding poetic juxtapositions that are at once absorbing and elusive, warmly autobiographical and coolly distant.

VanDerBeek explores dimensionality as she creates sculptures—vertical objects that often riff on Brancusi’s 1918 *Endless Column*—solely in order to photograph them. In *Ghost*, for instance, a double-exposed image of stacked modular boxes appears to waver, as if a pair of 3-D glasses would provide a filter to give the form a more emphatic identity. It’s one of several sculptures in the show that were photographed on the tin-clad rooftop of an urban building, and the setting adds an intriguing matte reflectiveness that shifts depending on the position of the sun. *Caryatid II*, a slightly larger photograph showing a more striated sculptural form seen in harsh daylight, is an almost icy image with a complex range of shadows.

A room is devoted to a selection from “Song of Myself,” the Walt Whitman-inspired series that was part of VanDerBeek’s recent exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and here the allusions are more architectural. Images of building details—many shot in Baltimore, the artist’s hometown—alternate with images of sculptures involving sentimental and structural elements found while clearing out her former home. That the sculptures aren’t present is less important than the way VanDerBeek confidently builds meaning from objects meant to be destroyed.

— **Glen Helfand**



Sara VanDerBeek, *Gwangju*, 2010, color photograph, 30 1/8 x 19”.