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ART PRACTICAL

REVIEW

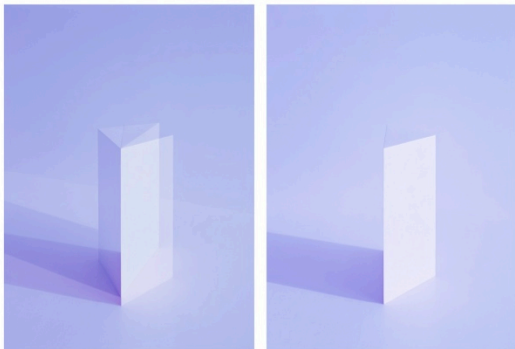
Sara VanDerBeek: *Ancient Objects, Still Lives*

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. *Chorrera*, 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

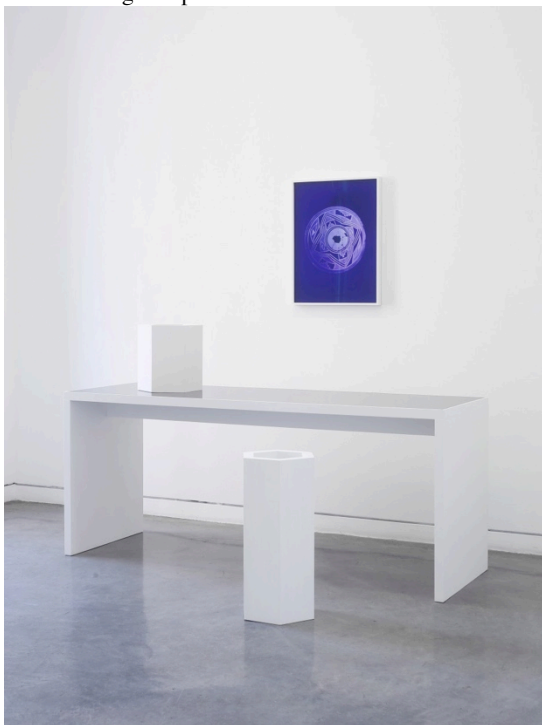
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mirrors the often-abstract forms in her photographs, providing dimension to what previously appeared flat. A similar pairing of object and photograph, *Lunar Calendar*, anchors the whole back gallery, though the relationship between the components 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 *Chorrera*—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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<http://www.artpractical.com/review/sara-vanderbeek-ancient-objects-still-lives/>