

Dec
05

Day Two, Miami Art Fairs: Picture this

► Art Fairs, News etc., Photography

By Alicia Eler

Identity-freezing photographs

There's so much to see in Miami that you either have to create your own lens or look through a camera's. Photos caught my eye at the art fairs this year, perhaps because in a sea of constantly moving people and new art around every booth wall and corner, savoring a pre-recorded gift is not only refreshing, it's a necessary means of survival.

Cindy Sherman's newest work is not just fitting, but perfect for Miami, the city of botoxed lips, fake boobs and women dressed hyper-feminine enough to seem like performed versions of themselves, projected back through a palm tree-lined lens. Featuring selections plucked straight from her current show at Metro Pictures in New York (runs through December 23), these works at Art Basel Miami Beach show an aging Sherman still up to her constantly evolving, though conceptually sound, themes of gender performance. In one "Untitled" (all works "Untitled," 2008) the artist uses a cheesy fairytale-like photograph of a lush green forest, using Photoshop to insert herself inside an open valley, thus creating a vignette. The low-neck of her mint-green dress seems to form a heart shape, and pearl earrings around her neck suggest her wealth, but the purposefully thick brown drawn-on eyebrows that don't match up with her real eyebrows cause an uneasiness, exposing the ways that women try to hide their aging process. Keeping in line with the evolving photography process, but avoiding lackluster photography that focuses solely on techie Photoshop tricks, Sherman once again smartly updates her trademark work.



Dealer Luis de Jesus of San Diego's Seminal Projects (Aqua Wynwood) plucked three photos from Estonian-born Marliss Newsome's performance series "Flatfield," in which men and women perform a winterized-version of a nudist ritual. As a group of naked people perch on saddles, instructing their horses to ride around in a circle, four others stand back-to-back in the middle of the thumping horses, all facing out onto the snowy flatlands. Calling to mind a ceremonial performance, the photos catch this artist tribe in the midst of something secret, sacred and mysterious.

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There's no snow falling in Miami, of course, but at the Bass Museum the powerful show "Russian Dreams..." not only sends shivers down our spines, but represents perhaps one of the most well-curated non-art fair shows in town. Post-Cold War Russia is a dark, foreboding place, something that's reinforced by lining the walls with choppy wooden fencing, appropriately painted dark gray. Light comes into the space, but it's the harsh fluorescent kind that stings your eyes, burning your retinas. "Défile" (2000-2007), a series of lightbox photos by the AES+F Group, question consumer culture by literally dressing the dead in haute couture, making Vik Muniz's corpses pale in comparison. These fresh corpses, perhaps only five hours old, seem to float midair, their eyes sinking back into their skulls, the blood in their hands and feet stopped completely. Curator Olga Sviblova writes: "They remind us of the tragic and sublime fate of mankind, stressing the vanity and meaninglessness of life where consumerism and arrogance reign above all." Viewing these works at an opening where most of the crowd is wearing haute couture (not to mention Calvin Klein, who we spotted making his way through the exhibition), some of the dead really will dress like this.

Peregrine's tip of the day: If you're going to drink with the Russians in Miami, bring a flask of vodka. Mixed drinks cost \$14-and-up.