

## NEW YORK

## NEW PHOTOGRAPHY 2009:

Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek

Museum of Modern Art, NYC

"NEW PHOTOGRAPHY" is an annual exhibition opening each fall at the Museum of Modern Art in which a selection of contemporary artists using photography are introduced to museum audiences. The artists who have been selected for this showcase over the years have used photography in myriad ways ranging from the traditional to the experimental. This year's exhibition focuses on the experimental, even touching on camera-less photography. According to the curator Eva Respini, the six artists "blur the lines between photography and other artistic disciplines."

That new is never really new, especially within a museum context (as all the artists have had significant gallery showings), leads one to ask is the new here about new methods like the use of digital technologies within this traditional medium? Photoshop and other computer-based programs used in the making of new photographs are just a tool, and like other tools — pencil, paintbrush, hammer — their use should not be the sole content of the work.

All of the artists in "New Photography" make large-scale color photographs, many that incorporate appropriated imagery that is used in the construction of the final image. That all of the images are constructed is what ties them together in this exhibition. The works are as much about the process as they are about what the image might convey. Walead Beshty exposes rolls of color paper making photographic works that allude to color field paintings. Daniel Gordon's photographs are of the sculptured figures he creates by assembling bits and pieces of images of bodies found in magazines and on the Internet. Sarah VanDerBeek carefully composes archival as well as contemporary images and objects into wall-sized structures which she then photographs, allowing the 3D space to collapse in a 2D image. Carter Mull and Sterling Ruby use Photoshop to distort and

embellish the images that are used as base material. For Mull its the *Los Angeles Times*, for Ruby it ranges from photographs of walls of graffiti to snippets of photographs of nature. The original image is drawn upon, cut into and obscured, yet presented as a seamless single image. Leslie Hewitt is the only artist whose work appears to frame reality. Her still life images, however, are carefully composed scenarios whose meaning is extracted from noticing difference and subtle juxtapositions between the photos. Hewitt's images (a diptych and a triptych) are presented upside down, drawing attention away from the scene in order to focus on the spatial construction.

In previous incarnations of "New Photography," content was the motivating factor in the inclusion of the selected artists. Here the discussion of form and format obscure any meaning that can be culled from the imagery. As the use of digital technologies becomes the norm, hopefully the focus on process will fade in favor of the aesthetic, political, social or art historical relevance of the image.

—Jody Zellen

Daniel Gordon, *Red Headed Woman*, 2008



THATER: HAUNCH OF VENISON, LONDON, 2005; COURTESY THE ARTIST AND 1301 PE, LA; GORDON: IMAGE COURTESY THE ARTIST, © 2009 DANIEL GORDON