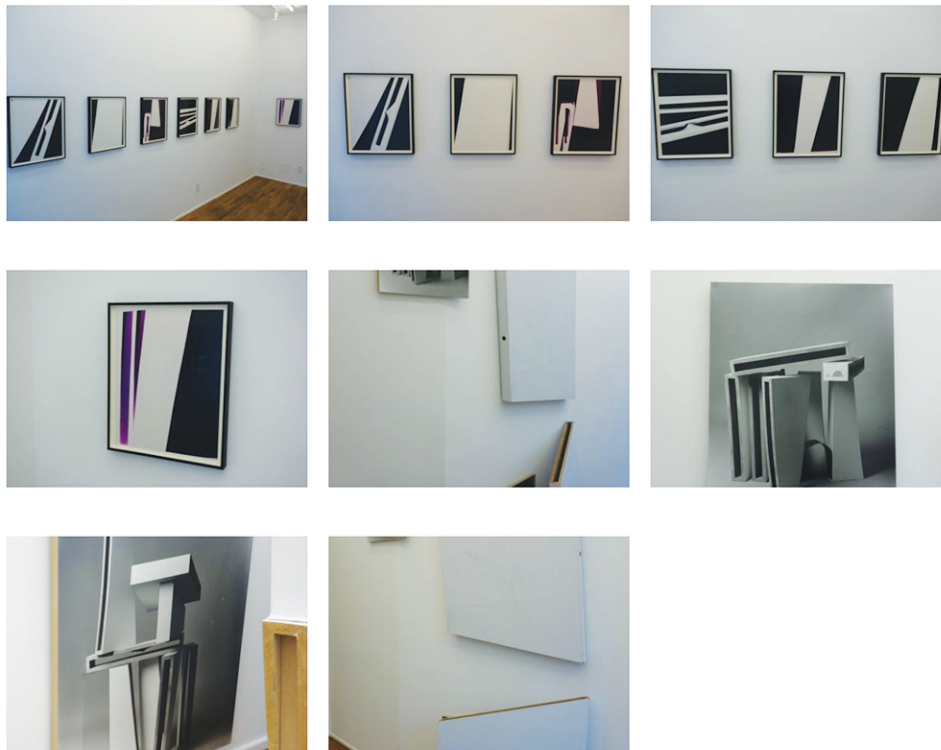


Cati Bestard, decrease @Ulterior

By Loring Knoblauch / In Galleries / February 27, 2019

JTF (just the facts): A total of 9 photographic works, alternately framed in black and unframed, and hung against white walls in the main gallery space. 7 of the works come from the Light series (3 c-prints, 4 gelatin silver prints), made in 2018. Physical sizes are 20×16 inches each, and all of the works are unique.

The 2 gelatin silver prints from the System series (from 2018) can be individual works or combined with the sculptural MDF works nearby into one larger installation. The prints are sized 24×20 inches each, and are available in editions of 2. The two-part MDF work is sized 44x35x3 and 40x38x3, and is unique. (Installation shots below.)



Comments/Context: Photographers who are interested in exploring the image/object dichotomy of the medium often find themselves falling into nested layers of iteration. The progression is relatively straightforward: it starts with a physical object, then a picture of that same object, and then perhaps another picture that combines the two, and so on, and so on. Artists have made this simple framework their own in a variety of ways, and the broad availability of aesthetic options has catalyzed continued innovation in this area of contemporary photography.

For many, the iterative process is by definition an additive one, where each increment ultimately builds up into something larger or more complex. But for the Spanish photographer Cati Bestard, the process works in the opposite direction – she uses deliberate reduction to peel back layers of representation, using deconstruction to head toward something more abstract and elemental.

All of the works in this show are descendants of an eight-foot sculpture that Bestard made, which itself was based on a photograph of a corner in her apartment. She cut the sculpture into geometric sections of doubled

hollow sheetrock, which she piled into new arrangements and then photographed. Individual sections were also placed in the gallery, creating a layered installation that marries the physical subject matter and the photographs. While we don't ever see the original sculpture, the jumbled and stacked pieces give us a sense for the breakdown that has occurred.

Bestard then moved into the darkroom, making photograms from the cut sections, turning their bulky physicality into echoes of form. The works are studies in planar abstraction, with areas of high contrast dark and light transformed into minimal stripes, angles, and flat geometries. Given that this artmaking process occurs in the dark, deliberate intention gives way to improvisation and performance, where control is looser and arrangements are more susceptible to freedom and chance. Compositionally, she's using both black and white and color (the lone inclusion of bright magenta), the addition of the single unexpected purple adding a pop to the formal balancing taking place. In some cases, she's opted for a pared down aesthetic of fundamental shapes, while in others, the forms get more crowded; in a few cases, the wispy curve of a peeling photograph (that was originally mounted inside the sheetrock) smartly intrudes on the strict order of the lines.

The spark to be found in this show comes in its intentional embrace of reversal and removal as artistic strategies. By using different processes to take away, she's exploring the nether zone where representation becomes abstraction, and that twilight of recognition creates attractive friction. These ideas could easily iterate further, using digital techniques, photocopying/scanning, or simply going back to physicality and allowing the 2D/3D battle to continue for a few more rounds. Deliberately straddling the span between photography and sculpture gives Bestard some white space to redefine, and these first experiments offer promising pathways to extend even further.