

The New York Times

June 9, 2011

ART IN REVIEW

'ALWAYS THE YOUNG STRANGERS'

By HOLLAND COTTER

Published: June 9, 2011

Higher Pictures
764 Madison Avenue, near 66th Street
Through July 9

If all of the coming summer group exhibitions are as good as this early bird, we'll have reasons to stay in town.

The show signals its ambitiousness in its title, borrowed from a roundup of new-talent photographers organized by Edward Steichen in 1953. Yet to call the work of the 16 young artists at Higher Pictures photography seems iffy. It doesn't touch what is salient about Letha Wilson's "Hug Grand Tetons," a wall sculpture with a photograph encased in concrete, or Aspen Mays's little constellation of punched-out holes in photographic prints.

Basically the artists here are taking whatever genres they want and bending them, photographically, to their will. Ann Woo's colored "Sunsets" are abstract paintings without the paint or the name. "The Brightness" by Jessica Labatte looks like a cut-paper collage, photographed and blown up large.

Carrie Schneider presents a nocturnal landscape with an eerie story locked inside, while Kate Steciw puts the great outdoors through a high-speed blender, as Yamini Nayar does in domestic interiors packed with leopard-skin patterns and half-seen running figures. There's portraiture, sort of: the men in Erica Allen's "Gentleman" series are strictly cut-and-paste. And there's one example of overtly political work, in LaToya Ruby Frazier's photolithograph of a fund-raising letter for a community hospital that she hand-annotates with critical comments.

Historical references crop up, to Duchamp (in Talia Chetrit's "Abstract Nude"), to minimalist sculpture (Jessica Eaton's "Cfaal 35"), and to digital art of the future (in Andrea Longacre White's "Pad Scan 10"). So does performance. In two videos by Cortney Andrews, bodies move; in Polaroids by the artist team of MPA+Katherine Hubbard, bodies pose, but with wearable props and appurtenances so inventive as make this work a species of fashion photography.

The point is, there's a whole lot of hope-inspiring activity going on here in Higher Pictures's two teensy rooms. Maybe if downtown brings itself uptown to take a look, Chelsea's wide-open, ex-garage spaces will offer something more appealing than air-conditioning in the weeks ahead.