

The

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KEVIN LANDERS: Photographs 1990-2007

Elizabeth Dee Gallery



Kevin Landers is a sculptor and photographer whose casual yet obsessive study of the urban environment dates from the early 1990s. In fringe neighborhoods of New York, and occasionally those of international cities, Mr. Lan-

ders has trained his lens upon street grates, Laundromats, newspaper stands, and bodega wares. The camera's power to observe situations and document colorful patterns is an essential part of the artist's distillation of street culture from the sidewalk to his studio.

A 17-year retrospective of Mr. Landers's color photographs on view through this weekend at Elizabeth Dee Gallery gathers together more than 50 vintage color prints of varying shapes and sizes. They hang by clips, salon-style. The informal presentation echoes the commonplace subject matter, and the viewer may experience the show as a walk-in sculptor's sketchbook.

On occasion, Mr. Landers has engaged his practice with the fluid social boundaries of illegal vending by purchasing, say, a three-card monty stand from the card-shark who built it, or a coffee cup that someone used to collect small change. Back in the studio, he carefully photographs these objects like forensic specimens in a bright white laboratory, then prints them larger than life-size. They submit to the photographic interrogation while basking in a fresh identity conferred by the fine art context.

Serenely composed object stud-

ies in the front gallery are followed by a second room featuring street scenes and the occasional passerby. The back room contains portraits that double as sight gags: In one, a woman in a Laundromat presses her naked breast against the dryer's porthole glass door. As if to escalate the sense of touch and taboo, these portraits hang near motifs of entrapment such as bird-cages, chain-link fencing, and hair curlers.

Deadpan and witty at first glance, the photographs' cumulative effect is that of a microcosm all their own. Urban happenstance, trash, and babes map a loose terrain where the artist fragments notions of value — be they artistic intellectual capital, retail consumerism, or illicit transactions — in order to reshuffle them like cards in a game of three-card monty. Whether that effort springs from a gleeful or world-weary critique of art-making and art-marketing, it clearly stokes Mr. Landers's imagination.

By **DEBORAH GARWOOD**

Landers until May 7 (545 W. 20th St., between Tenth and Eleventh avenues, 212-924-7545).