

GRACIE MANSION GALLERY

# Art in America

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## Hope Sandrow at Gracie Mansion

In her first New York solo show, in 1983, Hope Sandrow's photographs showed partly identifiable figures or objects blurred in motion, distorted in extreme perspectives or glimpsed through water or foliage or dazzling light. Her contrasty black-and-white, semi-abstract compositions, in which bold, rhythmic shapes resisted rectilinear balance, suggested a sensual abandon in the buzzing, blooming, beautiful play of shapes.

In later shows, Sandrow often juxtaposed two or three increasingly fractured "views." Sometimes she extended abstract shapes from one photo to another. By 1988, she emphasized the shapes of the photos as objects, arranging them along the wall in odd, jutting configurations, protruding to various degrees and wrapping around the corners of the room. Formal comparison to John Baldessari began to seem as appropriate as comparison to her teacher, Ray Metzger.

Her recent show included, in this vein, an installation of small back-to-back pairs of photographs atop pedestals arranged like a prehistoric stone circle. Where once she insisted that her masterfully printed photographs be framed without distracting glass, now she mixes a variety of protective materials: glass, Plexiglas, waxed and sprayed coatings. She seems to be groping for a Post-Minimalist materiality in photography.

At the same time, this show of 1989 works returned to a clearer subject: water. In *Rainwater: Drinking Water*, water streams off a figure's long hank of hair to lustrously overflow a glass and the hand holding it. Similarly, in *Beetles*, *Leaf in Water*, the liquid is contained only momentarily in cupped hands as it pours over a body. In *Spider*, *Beetle*, *Egg Carton*, water itself is the container in a photo of a tiny figure swimming in a vast sea. Images of people and water are strangely mixed with insects and plastic objects. Sandrow explains that the series was taken at her seaside summer home, where an alarming amount of plastic debris washes up. The insects, adapting to life in the garbage, mirror what is increasingly a human condition. The abstract syntax of her work, though, doesn't really communicate these connections. The strength of Sandrow's subjective style is seen instead in expressions of the sensuous human bond with water. These idyllic moments are reminders of a naturalness that is being lost.

—P.C. Smith



Hope Sandrow: *Rainwater: Drinking Water*, 1989, silverprint, 47 by 32½ inches; at Gracie Mansion.