

ARTFORUM

Sam Samore
D'AMELIO TERRAS
525 West 22nd Street, Ground Floor
January 8 – February 19

Sam Samore's most recent photographs immediately invoke a long legacy of appropriative practices, namely those established by artists such as Cindy Sherman and Victor Burgin. Samore's previous work is characterized by open-ended and evocative narrative compositions that are reminiscent of film stills. The present exhibition offers a subtle yet marked shift beyond this precedent. While these photographs still show female figures in vague surroundings, the artist uses formal manipulation—including color adjustment, exaggerated contrast, and unexpected focal points—to enhance and further develop their unsettling content.



Sam Samore, *The Dark Suspicion #1*, 2011,
color photograph, 34 x 60"

The Dark Suspicion #1 (all works 2011), for instance, shows a young woman whose vacant stare and decorated femininity (heavy makeup, etc.) make her resemble the subject of a fashion advertisement. The model is only visible, however, through a gap between two other figures, whose showy lipstick and starkly pale skin seem virtually identical to her own. Although it would be easiest to rationalize the two doppelgängers as mirror reflections of the female figure, such a reading is impossible, given their position in the photograph: between the woman and the viewer. This manipulation of space eschews predictable or concrete explanation and frustrates the viewer's impulse to impose purpose or narrative on figures whose functions might have otherwise seemed clear.

Similarly, in *The Dark Suspicion #4*, a woman wearing dramatic blue eye shadow is subject to the penetrating stare of a figure identical to her, but to whom she appears oblivious. Although the confrontation in the image seems to be internalized, the positioning of the woman's "other" again renders this implausible. Through the contrast between the straightforwardness of their artifice and the impossibility of explaining the situations they portray, Samore's photographs reveal a fragmented and constructed subject that invites interrogation of gender, popular culture, and identity.

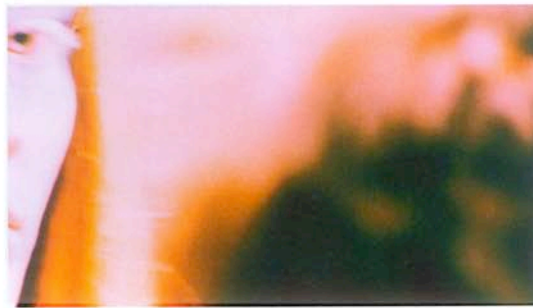
- Britany Salsbury

Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Sam Samore: *The Dark Suspicion #5*, 2011, ink on rag paper, 34 by 60 inches; at D'Amelio Terras.



SAM SAMORE D'AMELIO TERRAS

Sam Samore's carefully composed photographs recently on view at D'Amelio Terras are a far cry from "The Suicidist," the 1973 series for which he is best known. Those black-and-white images depict the young artist posing as if having taken his own life, his body sprawled out on a living-room floor with a vacuum-cleaner hose in his mouth, or slumped in a desk chair after having jabbed himself with an arrow. This series, and a group of photographs that revisited the playing-dead subject 30 years later, made up Samore's first solo museum exhibition in the U.S., at MoMA PS1 in 2006.

Samore has always explored alternative ways of plotting narratives, and particularly narratives that underscore what he sees as the isolated human condition. The "Suicidist" images are only one example of this preoccupation, which has also materialized in shots of random people on the street that he asked other photographers to take for him. Although the images may seem strangely familiar, and

we may muse on their subjects' habits, professions or personal lives, we remain removed from the personalities behind the faces. At D'Amelio Terras, Samore's latest exploration of isolation appeared in a group of fragmented portraits of women titled "The Dark Suspicion."

The poet Max Henry, who has collaborated with Samore, has suggested that the artist's new work treads painterly territory while his prior work looks more cinematic. For years Samore has referred to his photographs as "paintings" and named Caravaggio and Bronzino among his key influences. In "The Dark Suspicion" images, this shift runs deeper than the bright blues, yellows and pinks that have replaced a black-and-white palette. For whereas Samore once aimed to tell a more concrete story, he now asks us to construct the narrative to an extent traditionally specific to painting. We are not shown the plot, as in films. Instead, we are left to author it using the lips, lashes and other fragments provided.

The Dark Suspicion #1 (all works 2011) is a photographic landscape of in- and out-of-focus red lips and eyelids heavily coated with blue eyeliner. Samore's life-size visions of women whose faces we never see in full are like impressions of passersby glimpsed while walking urban streets. It strikes me that this city dweller (the artist divides his time among Bangkok, Paris and New York) aims not only to play down the differences between photography and painting but also to create allegories for our perceptions of people rather than to represent actual people—shades of women as opposed to women.

The straight, red-blonde hair and section of a face cropped by the picture's edge in *The Dark Suspicion #5* may summon our memories of an acquaintance with similar features. But what, Samore may be asking, can we really conclude about this woman? And more generally, what's in an appearance? With this show, the artist continues to refine his work to fewer but stronger touchstones.

—Alex Wolf