

ARTFORUM

NEW YORK

Shirana Shahbazi

SWISS INSTITUTE / CONTEMPORARY ART

38 St Marks Pl

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This exhibition is the largest US presentation of Zurich-based Iranian artist Shirana Shahbazi's photographs to date. It is an assembly of archetypes, offering still lifes, portraits, and landscapes rendered with a formal clarity that corresponds to received notions of Swiss precision or bracingly crisp Alpine air. The photographs, taken together, evoke the lyricism that suffuses Roe Ethridge's landscape pictures and the variations-on-a-theme investigative depth associated with Christopher Williams. Whereas the cases made for the conceptual underpinnings of those two artists' work are, respectively, plausible and sturdy, it can be frustrating to try teasing meaning from Shahbazi's constellation of images. One wishes that the relationships between photographic archetypes, printing techniques, and the subjects' geographic origins were more clearly articulated. (One *vanitas* wall painting, executed by an anonymous team of Iranian artists after a photograph by Shahbazi, seems not only out of place but also late to the game: Francis Alÿs, among others, has handed off work to local artisans to greater effect.) But what images: Black-and-white prints of butterflies; a fully abstract gradation, from pink to white, soft as cotton candy; an orange-pink orchid set against an azure backdrop; a flat Texas landscape where the depth of field stretches seemingly to the horizon: Like diamonds, each offers a glittering specificity. In years past, her photographs were both smaller and framed; Shahbazi is one of few artists whose work benefits from the increased scale to which success has allowed her access, as this ravishing if imperfect exhibition indicates.

— Brian Sholis