

SARAH CHARLESWORTH

GORNEY BRAVIN & LEE

From a distance, Sarah Charlesworth's new photographs appear to depict shimmering fields of haze. Closer inspection reveals subliminal images: a cup, a skull, an open book, a seated Buddha. These sentimental icons are suffused with a blank fog that suggests an emptiness at the core of meaning. The peace found in these images is not produced by their spiritual graphics, but in their elision of representation through a merger with the void.

These lush, gauzy visuals may surprise those who remember Charlesworth's classic photographs of media stereotypes isolated against monochromatic fields. However, the recent photos' aura of levitation and diffusion harks back to the earliest phases of her career. In previous works, pale reprintings of old Italian still-lives, women suspended in mid-air, decontextualized newspaper shots, and ad fragments all floated in blank nether-worlds. Charlesworth has always conjured illusionary tricks where patrimonial gravity and its visual logic disappears. In these pieces however, the undifferentiated space where language is generated from, not only surrounds and dislocates the signs but permeates them so that they fade away.

A new model has emerged from the syntactical displacements Charlesworth once engaged in. Where she once ruptured fetishistic images, now, as a more established artist, she allows her oeuvre to work through capitalism's magic instead. This strategy veers close to decoration but viewed through her rigorous history, it seems like an acknowledgment that everyone needs some illusions to get by. The meditative quality of the photos offers a sense of redemption, even as the images suggest that such myths are crafted from nothing firmer than morning dew. We no longer see information as hard-edged and exact but as slippery and fluid, like the unconscious. Charlesworth transforms signification into an archive of vapors where the binary opposition between presence and absence dissolves.

Michael Cohen