

the village

VOICE

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Sometimes photography imitates art: Decapitated Greek statuary . . .

PHOTOGRAPHY

By Ben Lifson

DAVID KULIK, FRANK MAJORE, KEN PELKA, PAT PLACE, RENE SANTOS, BRIAN WEIL. Artists Space, 105 Hudson Street, 226-3970; through December 20.

Four of the seven photographers at Artists Space ask their works to approximate the conditions of painting. Brian Weil chooses surface over detail when he blows up his pictures of sado-masochistic couples and threesomes into fuzzy, contrasty muddles. You can't tell who's doing what to whom, or even if Weil has copied these pictures from bondage magazines or staged the scenes—all you know is that it's vaguely nasty. Ken Pelka's small and slightly out-of-focus colored still-lives crowd lots of hard-to-name stuff into the frame as they sacrifice description for color and, vaguely, form. Frank Majore tries to do without form as well as he puts dark silhouettes of people or buildings against even darker backgrounds, turning his work into almost uniform fields of color which are dull to look at. And Kevin Noble, who seems to be influenced by New Image painting, reduces his gesturing and embracing subjects to black silhouettes, then further abstracts them with black brush strokes, and prints them on large sheets of

. . . and New Image painting, which obscures whatever may have happened in front of the camera



KEVIN NOBLE

dull-gold mylar. In every instance, however, even the vestiges of photographic description refer you to what was originally in front of the camera. And with your curiosity thus excited, nothing about the design, surface, color, or forms of these four sets of pictures compensates for their lack of information.

Lack of invention deadens Pat Place's more photographic color still-lives with garish plastic lizards; Rene Santos's huge blow-ups of movie stills with fanciful texts suffer from lack of imagination and bad literary style. Place's lizards do little but threaten or bite the pieces of miniature plastic bric-a-brac which surround them, just as the sometimes improbable but always deadpan and awkward texts of Santos's pieces allude to wit.

Only David Kulik looks good. Electron microscope photographs of the lives of cells are the models for Kulik's comic versions of our innermost workings, and when you see scores of separate alfalfa sprouts swarming like sperm toward the bright yellow yolk of a greasy sunny-side-up egg, it's silly not to laugh. Besides, you assume from Kulik's skillful imitation of his sources' ambiguous space and fantastic shapes that he's fond of the transfiguring capacities of straightforward, descriptive photography. And among works which smack of cold, artworld calculation, such affection is charming.