

Visions of Seduction, Repulsion

ART REVIEWS

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

LOS ANGELES TIMES

ART

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Sleight of Hand: It is difficult to imagine the work of either **Brian Moss** or **Warren Neidich**, juxtaposed in a witty two-person exhibition at the Annex at Jan Kesner Gallery, without the example of Sherrie Levine.

Levine's project, which involved rephotographing images by well-known male photographers only to present them as her own, has come to figure the highly theoretical practice that dominated in the 1980s. Into Levine's critique of the intertwined pieties of originality and authorship, Moss and Neidich insinuate a bit of computer-generated sleight of hand.

The result is work that is technically and conceptually slick, though rather more flippant than its forerunner. If Levine hints at what critic Harold Bloom has called the exhaustion of being a "latecomer"—one who arrives on the scene once everything seems to have been said and done—Neidich makes this exhaustion explicit.

A group of archival photographs of Surrealists, Italian Futurists, Andy Warhol and the Factory retinue are presented salon-style. One dark-haired mustachioed fellow pops up in every picture, transcending time, space and, presumably, artistic style. This figure is the very slippery, very determined Neidich.

Assisted by a simple computer program, he gleefully deletes Richard Pousette-Dart from Nina Leen's 1951 photograph of "The Irascibles" and substitutes himself. He erases an unidentified member of the Bauhaus so he can hang out with Walter Gropius and Paul Klee. With tongue-in-cheek precision (and a serious debt to Woody Allen's *Zelig*), Neidich enacts the romance of trespass. He enters the sacred realm of creativity, while paying only cut-rate dues.

Moss moves in the opposite di-

rection, taking familiar images from the history of photography and removing certain elements entirely. This is not so much to rob the images of their meanings, but to reveal meanings that have long been obscured. What makes this endeavor resonant is that Moss begins with images whose veracity is already questionable.

The protagonist is eliminated from a 1936 Robert Capa photograph, "Death of Loyalist Soldier," leaving behind nothing but a barren landscape. According to the story, Capa asked the soldier if he could take his picture, only to record the latter being shot by a sniper while posing.

An abandoned gun is the centerpiece of an altered version of Alexander Gardner's 1863 "Sharpshooter's Last Sleep, Gettysburg." Moss has removed the figure, thereby mimicking Gardner, who is said to have moved the dead body to a more picturesque spot expressly for the purpose of the photograph.

Like Neidich, Moss plays a restyled game of hide-and-seek. In both bodies of work, this game becomes the mechanism by which to suggest that the dialectic of presence and absence is the only "truth" a photograph ever promulgates.

■ *The Annex at Jan Kesner Gallery, 164 N. La Brea, (213) 938-6834, through July 9. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*