

The New York Times

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2007

Miranda Lichtenstein

*Elizabeth Dee
545 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Nov. 24*

The best moment in Miranda Lichtenstein's fourth gallery show in New York comes at the beginning of her first foray into video (and repeats at the middle). We see a mossy, shadowy wooded glen, where scale and camera distance are indefinite. They remain so even as a small figure in a white dress begins to climb through the undergrowth. Is she a girl, a woman or a tiny creature out of an English fairy painting? While it lasts, the mystery is spellbinding, like a bedtime story might be to a child.

The video, titled "Everything Begins and Ends at Exactly the Right Time and Place," follows the woman through the woods — twice — to snippets from the soundtrack of "Picnic at Hanging Rock," creating sinister and not-so-sinister versions of the same action. But mostly, the attention is held by Ms. Lichtenstein's camera work and her ability casually to evoke the natural sublime and also play with scale. This has always been one of the strengths of her photographs and it is present in those that, along with less straightforward photo-based works, fill out the show.

Ms. Lichtenstein connects to nature in several photographs of immense, shattered trunks, and also in some transparently fake images of the shadows of unseen plants. But the varied strategies largely summarize those of post-modern photography. (Jack Goldstein, James Welling, Cindy Sherman all come to mind.) It is hard to know if Ms. Lichtenstein wants to prove that she can do anything she wants with a camera, or if she just can't make up her mind. Either way, this is a puzzling show, filled with a sense of talent underused.

ROBERTA SMITH