

THE NEW YORKER



GALLERIES – DOWNTOWN

Martin Beck

The rigorously composed photographs of this Austrian-born New Yorker depict full or empty vases, sometimes with a hand arranging flowers, sometimes with a full bouquet and a few dropped petals. Each is an updated vanitas for the digital age; they don't express the inevitability of death but, rather, the recession of life into images that are themselves only data. Elsewhere, a computer monitor flashes snippets of corporate-speak cribbed from a nineteen-seventies business manual. Like the minimalist and conceptual-art strategies of that era, the managerial cant Beck redeploys has become our new vernacular, for better or worse. Through May 17. (47 Canal, 291 Grand St. 646-415-7712.)

ARTFORUM

New York

Martin Beck

47 CANAL

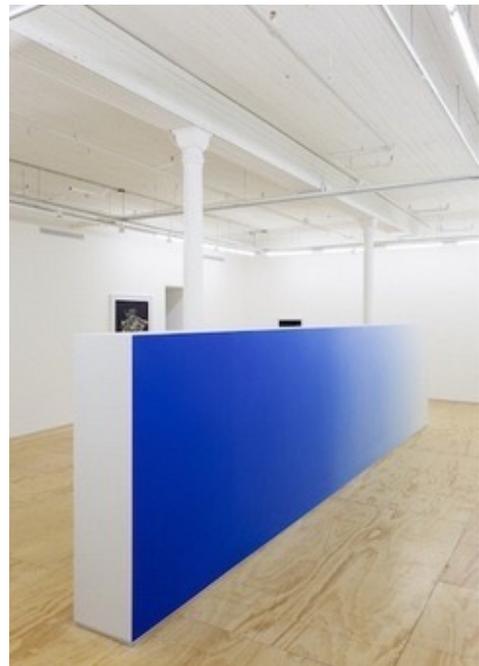
291 Grand Street, 2nd Floor

April 16–May 17

In the photographs that compose Martin Beck's *Flowers (set 4)* and *Flowers (set 5)* (both 2015), a bouquet sits in various states of completion, quite corporate in its prim pose, housed in a clear vase and floating in a field of black: This is the empty dream-space of stock photography, where portraits twinkle like Platonic ideals. At first, the arrangement is a bustle of white blooms (the better to slice against the black), while later stages burst into yellow, bloodred, and pink. These are not pictures of flowers but of cleanliness, of bureaucratic pleasantness, of the sanitized cheer kept up by those manicured hands that crane delicately from beyond the frame to fondle the petals and stems. Here at last is the utopia dreamt up by HR manuals and company retreats, a no-place of smiling industriousness and aseptic bliss.

This show sparkles with a glassy politesse that reaches its apex in *Strategy Notebook*, a video installation in which words such as “question,” “recall,” “reduce,” and “hold back” fade on and off a screen of alternating colors—the terms themselves were lifted from a 1970s “problem-solving” manual. Spliced with the limpid C-prints, the scene is one of workplace bubblyness, bourgeois incentives, and the hardening of entire states of mind (“memorize”) into techniques to be launched at the vaporous challenges that face a whole droning class of white-collar meaninglessness. The words—“chart,” “simulate,” “search”—dissolve and materialize on the cheerful flatness of digitized space, bobbing so gently there that it's easy to forget what they are: commands.

— *Tobi Haslett*



View of “The thirty-six sets do not constitute a sequence,” 2015.