

THURSDAY, AUGUST 5, 2004

ARTS & LETTERS

GALLERY-GOING

Who remembers when seeing *was* believing? Any tactical advantage photography may have had as a medium has long been subsumed into advertising. Faith in photographic realism has been capsized by digital wizardry. Contemporary photographers, jockeying for credibility, assert themselves by playing the jester.

"Drop Out," Julie Saul Gallery's group exhibition of photography and video, emphasizes sight gags and post-photography cleverness over nuts-and-bolts picture-making. Only Oscar Palacio is attentive to the world as he finds it. And the most visually complex work—the shadow play of John O'Reilly's black-and-white Polaroid montages—rely on the least contemporary means. (Photomontage dates to early photomechanical reproduction in the 20s.) Chris Sauter likewise uses a textile technique known as reverse appliqué for a handsome, anomalous collage.

The rest—Charles Cohen's digital erasures; Mr. Sauter's photographic cutouts; Oliver Waslow's loopy video and prints; Mel Kendrick's Polaroid spin-offs of his own sculpture—are Rent-a-Concept divertissements.

"Drop Out" until August 20 (525 W. 22nd Street, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, 212-627-2410). Prices: \$300–\$5,000.