

Art Reviews

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Magical Forms: One of the best things about Sarah Charlesworth's gorgeous new photographs at Margo Leavin Gallery is that you can walk right up to them and still not know what you're looking at.

Although immediately you recognize what these nearly monochromatic prints depict—a book, Buddha, a bowl, a human skull and a pair of coiled snakes—you have no clue about what the artist did in the studio to get these objects to appear to hover, like ghostly apparitions, in the space between the picture-plane and your body.

Way beyond old-fashioned, Charlesworth's uncanny photographs give stunning physical form to the primal magic of representation. In their presence, it isn't difficult to imagine the terror-laced fascination some tribal peoples experienced when European explorers first showed them mirrors, or what it must have been like to be in the audience of the Lumiere Brothers' 1895 short film, one of the first publicly screened movies, which caused viewers to flee in panic when a locomotive headed straight at the camera.

Although your mind knows that Charlesworth has not conjured actual objects by merely presenting their images, your body is not so sure. Even after you have carefully

investigated each of the dozen laminated Fujiflex prints and uncovered the very basic studio tricks the artist used to create them, their mysteriousness remains undiminished.

Charlesworth's pictures of palpable light, given solidity by a few subtle shadows, rank among the slowest photographs being made today. Rather than asking viewers to suspend disbelief, they seem to say, "Stay as suspicious as you want; we'll continue to intrigue you long after our initial thrill has worn off."

It's common today for viewers to get everything they can from a digitally transmitted image in a few spit-seconds. But these mesmerizing prints strike a chord at the base of our brains, down near the spinal