

Wendy Small

New Math



January 12 – February 18, 2023

Morgan Lehman is pleased to present “New Math”, an exhibition of new photogram collages by Wendy Small. This marks the artist’s second solo show with the gallery.

New Math is the name of an experimental teaching methodology from the 1950s–1970s that ran parallel to the more conventional American education system. New Math was touted by experts and followers as providing “an enlightened emphasis on understanding”. It was also the name of a now-closed gallery on the Lower East Side, a neighborhood where Wendy Small returned to live in the 1980’s to attend art school.

Small has long considered the cyclical connections between analog and digital photography mediums, and the slippages that occur between these worlds. “New Math” represents a departure from the artist’s usual process of working, which was always invested in the material properties of print photography but adhered to a more conventional rectangular format. This new body of work was made as a way to play alongside what Small considers her usual projects.

During lockdown, Small found solace and relief in the simple act of cutting and collaging existing photogram prints and scraps, managing the primary shapes and stacking the forms into spirited constructions. These “New Math” collages soon took over the table in the artist’s living space in the way that a puzzle might sprawl over the floor of a family room, with additions and adjustments being made each day, an ongoing process.

The works are geometric in form but organic in their somewhat loosely grid-based structures. Each piece incorporates a focused color palette usually dominated by one or two hues, with other chromatic inflections breaking up the all-over image, which is further disrupted by the white spaces of the negative areas that have been cut out. In standing before these works, the viewer enters into the subtle modulations and depth of the photographic images while enjoying the collage’s unmistakable physicality.

Across Small’s output over the years there has always been an emphasis on abstraction. Whether photographing the shadows of birds or domestic objects, or creating kaleidoscopic patterns out of the silhouettes of plant life, the artist relies on an almost romantic pictorial language of formal transformation and obfuscation. This latest body of work takes Small’s vernacular one step further into a sort of self-determined abstraction, where forms are created by cutting up and reorganizing the component parts of her darkroom materials.

Wendy Small received a BFA in Painting from The School of Visual Arts. Small began working exclusively with the photogram process in 2002. Exhibitions include Morgan Lehman Gallery (NYC); Sears Peyton Gallery (NYC); Von Lintel Gallery (CA); and Huxley Parlour (London). Her work is included in the collections of New York Presbyterian Hospital (NYC); Fidelity Investments (MA); The Capital Corporation (CA); and The Cleveland Institute of Art (OH); among others. Small has enjoyed two summers at the Vermont Studio Center Residency and has participated in the AIPAD, NADA, Pulse, and Photo LA art fairs. The artist lives and works in New York City.