

BOMB

Sheree Hovsepien

by Haley Mellin, March 2017



Untitled #21, from the series Haptic Wonders, 2013, unique silver gelatin photogram, 20 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

Iranian-born, American-raised artist Sheree Hovsepien's work involves drawing, sculpture, and assemblage. Her conceptual expansions of photographic abstraction manifest in series such as *Sleight of Hand* and *Haptic Wonders* (both 2011–ongoing), which primarily focus on the photogram. Hovsepien foregoes the camera and in her studio exposes photosensitive paper to light. She makes these photograms by partially obscuring the paper surface with a sculptural arrangement of opaque materials or by moving found materials across the photosensitive paper's surface. The activity of making photograms in the darkroom is a performance, and the resulting prints chronicle her actions. Each photogram/photograph is singular; none can be replicated. The images are sculptural documents referencing the three-dimensional objects that occluded the light, and they are draughtsmanlike in the way they are etched with shadows. Hovsepien's "alchemical" performances create traces of bleak and beautiful surfaces.

In a current series, titled *Material Gesture*, Hovsepien introduces wall-based assemblage to her photographic practice. Shown as part of her 2016 residency at the Drawing Center in New York, *Material Gesture (A Meditation on Latency)* combines fabric, paper, and a large photogram. The title refers to the latent state of an image to be captured on film. The fabric veiling the

photogram references the artist's physical movements to cover and uncover the light-sensitive paper in the darkroom. Hovsepien's nascent assemblage process often includes macramé, woodcarvings, and ceramics, all handmade by the artist. Her creative impulses are released in an intuitive, unmonitored way. When I visited her studio last year, Hovsepien told me, "I feel an urge to work with my hands in an additive process as opposed to the way I see straight photography. I approach materials from a kind of naïve perspective that I experience as very freeing and in contrast to photography, which is more about precision and control."

Hovsepien addresses current matters in her work, but she does so in a vocabulary that moves beyond binaries and beyond Western mentality, one that follows a different way of thinking and feeling. The processes she has developed are, in turn, self-developing. In today's climate of increasingly fixed identities, Hovsepien creates an alternative path by building a vocabulary that avoids one dominant visual language. Her work is marked by grace, agility, and power. Rather than dwelling in irony and cynicism, she cultivates notions steeped in generosity. The work is benevolent.

Hovsepien will present her work in two upcoming solo exhibitions: at Higher Pictures, New York, this spring, and at Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago, in 2018.

Haley Mellin is an artist who works predominately in painting. She lives in San Francisco and New York City. She is an American conservationist.