



Mon June 2, 2008

Art

**Sara VanDerBeek**

Until Jun 29

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ★

The Approach E2, 47 Approach Rd, London, E2 9LY

Photographs of photographs, patterns made from other patterns – the work of Sara VanDerBeek comes across as a kind of conceptual game: pleasurable and ornate, but also a serious study of artistic traditions and hierarchies.

Each piece is a photograph, in which many other photographs and images are depicted – typically images from art history that celebrate pattern or decoration, from Frank Stella paintings to African tribal masks, or that revel in some kind of visual trickery, such as the double exposure of a film dissolve. Often, the images are collaged together, cut up to form new shapes and patterns – multicoloured, elaborate, geometric things reminiscent of quilt designs or Moroccan zellige tilework. In other works, images are arranged in three dimensions as sculptural displays: shot in dramatic, low lighting, they seem like theatrical props. The idea is to spin a web of visual associations, a montage of the pan-global folk custom of visual art.

After a while, though, this choice of accumulated references can seem a little undiscerning and to the viewer, overwhelming. The best pieces tend to be simpler – in particular the monochrome series, 'Four Photographers'. Consisting of quick, temporary arrangements of modernist plaster slabs, thin planes of glass and more found images, these vignettes suggest subtle ideas to do with flatness and surface, and different levels of representation – with the ultimate photographs exhibited behind glass, acting as the final layer. *GABRIEL COXHEAD*