

M+B

PDN PHOTO
OF THE DAY

Mining 'Color's Mother Lode'

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"Self-Portrait," 1984-1987. © Ellen Carey / Courtesy M+B Gallery, Los Angeles

Ellen Carey has been working with a large-format Polaroid 20 X 24 camera since 1983, using it to continue her explorations of abstraction and self representation. A collection of images she made with the camera, mostly in the late 1980s, is on view at M+B in Los Angeles until January 16. Unlike images from her later "Pull" series, which spread photographic emulsion into a parabolic shape, or the tangled lines she made with penlights, these images are representational, the last of several sets of series of experimental self-portraits dating back to the late 1970s.

Here, images of her own head and body, lit with saturated, contrasting colors, are overlaid with arrays of mathy, op-art patterns, transforming Carey into a sort of bright, lush, psychedelic icon. "I am digging deeper into color's mother lode," writes Carey in a statement about her work. Made in the era before Photoshop, the images foreshadow the concern with optics of younger artists like Jessica Eaton and Mariah Robertson, who also show at M+B and push the limits of analog material.

Carey, who is also a writer and curator, cites an earlier explorer of abstraction and material, Man Ray, as an influence. In a 2011 article she wrote in *Aperture*, Carey describes discovering the surrealist's signature in a 1935 light drawing titled "Space Writing." "The artist cultivated an aura of mystery about his personal history and identity—an avant-garde form of the game Hide-and-Seek," she writes. As she told an interviewer, "In a way, Man Ray was my spiritual mentor, looking down at me from art heaven. His work gave me permission to explore these synchronicities and trust my prescient, visual awakenings, to use my intuitive powers in combination with my own innovations, inventing new nomenclature along the way."