

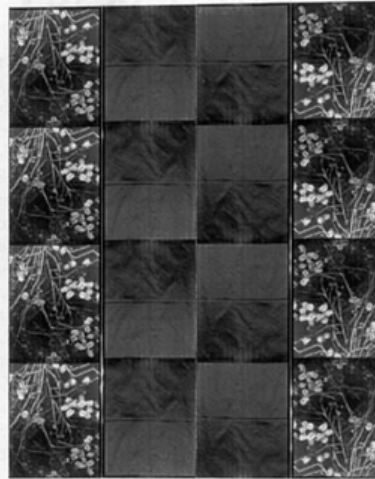
Fabric, a Photo Booth, and Liz Rideal

When reporter Clark Kent slipped into a closet-style telephone booth, then emerged as Superman leaping off the sidewalk skyward, all it took was a jump cut. British photographer Liz Rideal performs a similar act of transformation, making autobiographical art in a commercial photo booth. For more than 15 years, the automatic fixed focus, pop flash, and narrow four-picture strips have set the limits that induce her imagination to soar.

The seven color collages in her first New York solo show, "Liz Rideal: Photographs 1996–1998," at Lucas Schoormans in Chelsea last fall, capture instantaneous gestures of fabrics tossed in the air against anonymous white or black grounds. The pure sensuality of translucent, draping silks and rainbow layers of pastel tulle netting, and allusive titles like *Medioni Diptych* and *Pig's Ear*, separate her intentions from the minimalist grids of Agnes Martin or the spontaneous happenings staged by Allan Kaprow, with which they have been compared, although the work clearly involves both formal structure and random chance.

Rideal mounts multiple strips on board, similar to miniature postage-stamp quilts. She also rephotographs composites into banner-sized enlargements. In *Green Veil 1-6*, chiffon dances seductively in two dozen frames. Closeup details suggest a playful striptease, abstracted on film. The variation in sheerness, shading from kelly to forest to sea green, leads to comparisons with the stain paintings of Morris Louis. Rideal's fascination with drapery also is reminiscent of work by Lia Cook that investigates the properties of cloth, with special reference to Old Master painting.

Personal references underlie the surface pattern and texture of the pieces. In a 1995 series, Rideal mimicked the elaborate iron grillwork on the balcony of her grandmother's house using shots of her own hand. Notation on a score of baroque music inspired other pieces that resemble drawings. Tulle and Indian silks retain strong associations, suggesting both fetish objects and feminine sentiment (the magic of a dress worn on a triumphant occasion). Her latest work bears the imprint of a trip to Japan and pushes graphic



Kimono, 1999; C-print (edition of three); 59 by 39.4 inches.

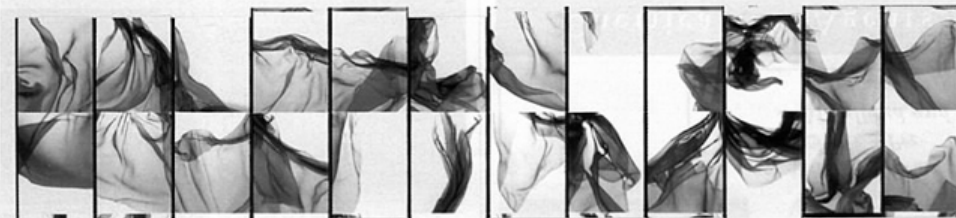
illusionism even further, concentrating on textile patterning in Indigo blues, for example.

Andy Warhol, who began his silk-screened portrait blowups at a Times Square photo booth, influenced many younger artists. For *Identity* (1985), Rideal enticed 1,200 people into a photo booth at London's National Portrait Gallery and then superimposed her own self-portrait over a gigantic collage of these strips. Like color photocopies and faxes, photo booths proved

something of an art fad, but Rideal persists in exploiting the machine creatively on a more intimate scale than was seen in earlier collaborative projects. Current interest in movements of the 1960s and 1970s make the order, fragmentation, and serial imagery in this beautiful exhibit freshly relevant.

—Pamela Scheinman

Pamela Scheinman teaches textile design at Montclair State University and is a docent at the International Center of Photography.



Green Veil 1-6, 1997; C-print; 53.1 by 236.25 inches. To create this image, Rideal tossed green chiffon into a commercial photo booth; arranged the resulting strips of photos into a collage; then photographed and enlarged a portion of the collage. Photos courtesy of Lucas Schoormans, New York, New York.

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