

The New York Times

MICHELE ABELES

Through Dec. 18. 47 Canal, 291 Grand Street, second floor, Lower East Side; 646-415-7712, 47canal.us.

Several of contemporary photography's favorite arguments and concerns are addressed, either obliquely or directly, in Michele Abeles's smart, seductive show "Zebra," at 47 Canal. One is the difference between objects and images, which has been thrown into question by 3-D printing. Ms. Abeles sticks mostly to a 2-D format, but a couple of works here are encased in large white ceramic tiles, blurring the lines between photography and sculpture.

Another idea is the continuing encounter between images and text. Like the "Zebra" of the show's title, which is neither black nor white, Ms. Abeles observes in a pleasingly cryptic news release that "Zebra is a word that reads like an image." The gallery's website includes the word "Zebra" emblazoned vertically down a screenshot of the New York Times home page, accentuating the way images and text work together to deliver messages.

Photography's historical role as a commercial medium is suggested in photographs of retail worker's hands, which Ms. Abeles uploaded to a tablet, applying hand lotion, water, paint or spit to the screen and rephotographing the images to achieve a painterly effect. Several of the image-objects here also have large black spirals sprayed onto their surfaces, suggesting the works as literal vortexes into which you might be pulled.

These "artistic" interventions imply the hand of the artist. After all, art, Ms. Abeles reminds us, is in competition with a universe of other images. It had better be wild, enigmatic and arresting. Ms. Abeles's work continues to be.

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