

# ARTFORUM

New York

**Martin Beck**

**47 CANAL**

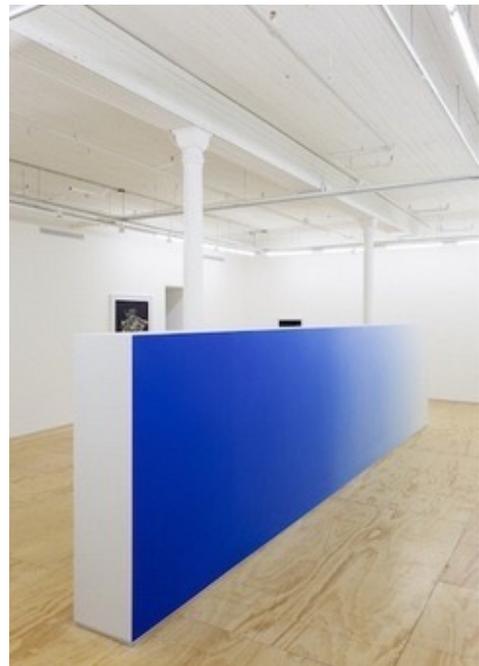
**291 Grand Street, 2nd Floor**

**April 16–May 17**

In the photographs that compose Martin Beck's *Flowers (set 4)* and *Flowers (set 5)* (both 2015), a bouquet sits in various states of completion, quite corporate in its prim pose, housed in a clear vase and floating in a field of black: This is the empty dream-space of stock photography, where portraits twinkle like Platonic ideals. At first, the arrangement is a bustle of white blooms (the better to slice against the black), while later stages burst into yellow, bloodred, and pink. These are not pictures of flowers but of cleanliness, of bureaucratic pleasantness, of the sanitized cheer kept up by those manicured hands that crane delicately from beyond the frame to fondle the petals and stems. Here at last is the utopia dreamt up by HR manuals and company retreats, a no-place of smiling industriousness and aseptic bliss.

This show sparkles with a glassy politesse that reaches its apex in *Strategy Notebook*, a video installation in which words such as “question,” “recall,” “reduce,” and “hold back” fade on and off a screen of alternating colors—the terms themselves were lifted from a 1970s “problem-solving” manual. Spliced with the limpid C-prints, the scene is one of workplace bubblyness, bourgeois incentives, and the hardening of entire states of mind (“memorize”) into techniques to be launched at the vaporous challenges that face a whole droning class of white-collar meaninglessness. The words—“chart,” “simulate,” “search”—dissolve and materialize on the cheerful flatness of digitized space, bobbing so gently there that it's easy to forget what they are: commands.

— *Tobi Haslett*



View of “The thirty-six sets do not constitute a sequence,” 2015.