

Art in Review

Michele Abeles

'English for Secretaries'

47 Canal

47 Canal Street, Lower East Side
Through Sunday

Michele Abeles is one of several younger photographers — among them Liz Deschenes, Eileen Quinlan and Sara VanDerBeek — who are extending the innovations of the Pictures Generation into new territory. The photo-based works in her second show at 47 Canal are complex mixes of set-up photography, appropriation and rephotography that are mostly assembled on a computer.

Ms. Abeles's images are radiant, seductive and mysterious. They invite and thwart reading. She weaves images and patterns into collagelike, even quiltlike mashups that are nonlinear rebuses — rebuses speaking in tongues. They cross and recross the line between abstraction and representation, also between private and public, between the natural and the artificial, always reminding us that images deluge every aspect of life.

You can assume that everything you are looking at has a source, not only in the world but perhaps also in previous Abeles works. The mixture of Asian characters on the background of shaded pastels that recurs throughout these images appeared as fabric in the photo-

graphs in Ms. Abeles's first show at 47 Canal, often draped over a platform on which a nude model reclined. This script motif peeks into the corner of two parts of a triptych, each dominated by the same snapshot of a cat sitting on a Persian rug in a backyard, one slightly larger than the other. The third part of the triptych is more abstract, but as you look you realize that elements from it frame the other two parts.

Here and elsewhere you'll find motifs that seem to conjure other art, in particular the early nudes of David Salle and the brick patterns of Kelley Walker. Usually Ms. Abeles combines the pointed and obscure with enough visual pizzazz to keep you interested.

ROBERTA SMITH