

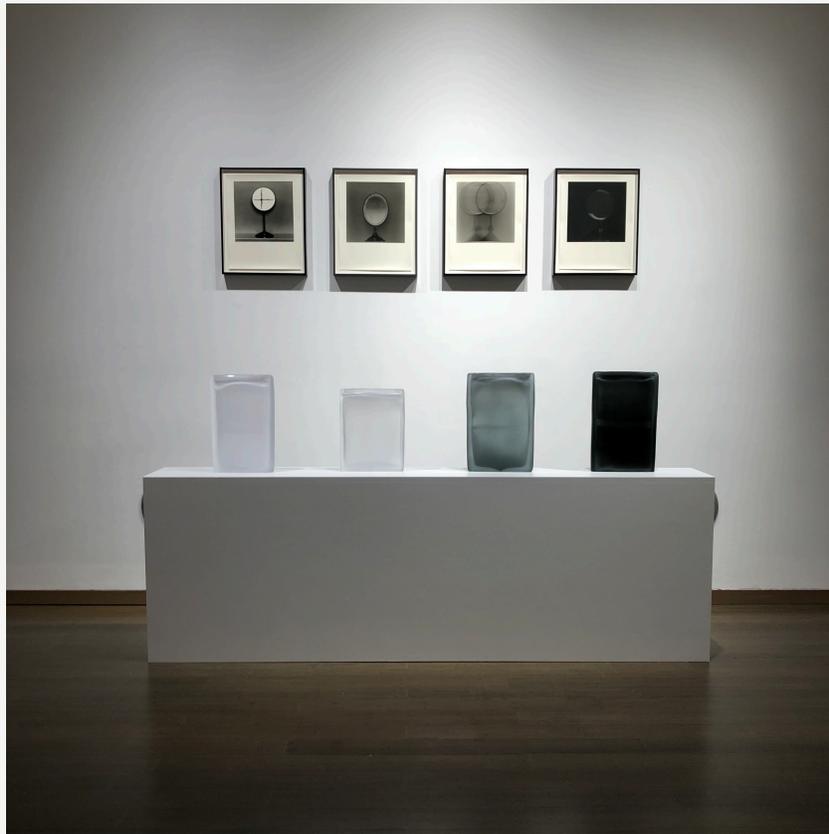
The Hudson Review

ARTS REVIEW

At the Galleries

by Karen Wilkin

At James Barron Art, in Kent, Connecticut, the beautifully installed “[Jeannette Montgomery Barron/Laura de Santillana: Mirrors and Glass](#)” paired works by an American photographer and an Italian sculptor. Montgomery Barron’s minimalist images of smallish round or oval mirrors, poised on slender bases, ranged from soft silver gelatin prints to crisp, lushly-hued pigment prints. Rather than reading as austere still lifes, the photographs of these anonymous, everyday objects become “portraits,” heads on slim necks, sometimes confronting us, sometimes turning away. They seem introspective, self-contained, as if Montgomery Barron had captured her sitters unawares. That mood was intensified by the proximity of de Santillana’s subtle, reticent sculptures: blunt, compressed rectangles of hand-blown glass enclosing stacked blocks of color. The vaguely head-like proportions of these elegant objects reverberated with Montgomery Barron’s “mirror portraits,” but the trapped, translucent hues within the rectangles also had associations with the larger world—with the sky, water, and light of Venice, where de Santillana lives and works, for example. Seen frontally, her glass pieces seemed connected to abstract painting—perhaps Rothko, scaled down and luminous—but from an oblique view, where the thickness of the enveloping clear glass became visible, these seductive objects were at once declaratively about their material presence and evanescent.



The two very different bodies of work entered into a fascinating conversation. De Santillana’s pieces underscored the physical properties of Montgomery Barron’s subjects in new ways, reminding us of the “glassiness” of mirrors, while the understated geometry of the photographs—the nuanced relationship of ovals and circles to the rectangles or squares of the field—made us consider freshly the shape and proportions of the sculptures’ color blocks. That color was ravishing, but among the most memorable pairings in the show was a group of de Santillana’s sculptures celebrating the power of transparency and silvery greys, with a selection of Montgomery Barron’s ephemeral silver gelatin prints. Who ever thought that color had to be chromatic to be expressive?

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