

## Fixed Unknowns

Taymour Grahne, New York 14 July – 6 September

The title of the summer group exhibition at Taymour Grahne, *Fixed Unknowns*, curated by artist Ava Ansari and Molly Kleiman, deputy editor at the online magazine and nonprofit media organisation *Triple Canopy*, provides a framework for understanding the show, which features the work of three very different artists: Kamrooz Aram, Shirana Shahbazi and Hannah Whitaker. Each offers a clear lens through which to view their works – nods to art history or references to the physical world, for example – while at the same time denying any understanding of how they are made or what they signify. In essence they are matter-of-fact curiosities that ask you to puzzle over them.

Shirana Shahbazi stands out for *[Komposition-40-2011]* (2011), a c-print on aluminium that looks like a portal into a world in which gigantic colourful spheres have replaced planets in the dark vacuum of space. Although the image looks digitally manipulated, it was created using an analogue camera. Shahbazi turned the spheres between exposures to create rounded edges. She plays with the viewer's

perception in other works to lesser effect. *[Komposition-03-2011]* (2011), a monochrome gelatin silver print on aluminium that appears to be a collage of geometric strips of paper, would look at home in the sterile boardroom of a hedge fund. And *[Diver-02-2011]* (2011) is a print that hangs high up on the wall as if to trick the eye into believing it's something more than a straightforward documentary photograph of a diver midflight.

Iranian-born Kamrooz Aram has lived in the United States for most of his life but remains fascinated by iconography plucked from Persian and Arab culture and used in modern contexts. The wall-based sculpture *Ancient Through Modern: Monument to the Sick Man of Europe* (2014) looks like a cenotaph – three small urns are placed on a platform in front of an abstract canvas that recalls both Constructivism and the pattern on a Persian carpet. Stuck into this canvas are two gold, filigreed Persian earrings. The work suggests more than it reveals. Just who the 'sick man of Europe' is today remains a mystery, but the association of the urns and jewellery

with funerary rites would be familiar to school children learning about ancient cultures.

Hannah Whitaker creates her photographs by inserting paper cutouts into the body of a 4×5 view camera and using them to create optical puzzles. *Blue Paper (Albers)* (2014) looks like an image of an Anni Albers textile printed on a piece of paper and collaged on top of a piece of wood – it takes staring at from the side to be convinced that this is a flat photograph. *Ship of Theseus* (2014) consists of 16 black-and-white framed prints that resemble the photograms of László Moholy-Nagy. The title refers to the conservation paradox posed by Plutarch in the first century: if all of the parts of a ship are replaced, he asked, is it still the same ship? It's not clear what exactly these photographs are replacing – arguing 'reality' would be pat – but even just puzzling over how Whitaker created the layered surfaces in a single print provides enough food for thought. Her works are the highpoint in an exhibition that enlivens the slick, sterile interior of Taymour Grahne with artworks rich enough to inspire more than just cursory contemplation. *Brianne Walsh*



Shirana Shahbazi, *[Komposition-40-2011]*, 2011, c-print on aluminium, 150 × 120 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Taymour Grahne, New York