

LONDON

Harm van den Dorpel

Wilkinson Gallery // March 2–April 22

TO SOME, IT'S a given that seeing an exhibition in the flesh results in a greater aesthetic experience than what one might glean from its online documentation, but Van den Dorpel's work maintains an idiosyncratic connection to both. Bearing a unique, insightful relationship with the real and the virtual, or the actual and the digitized, the artist hierarchically privileges neither but waxes philosophical on the nature of both.

In his first exhibition in the space, Van den Dorpel takes large sheets of Perspex bent into spherical formations and suspends them by jewelry-scaled ball chains from the gallery ceiling. The Perspex sculptures, UV-printed with images of necklaces, wires, chains, scanned canvas, and other objects that bring to mind interconnectivity and simple networks, represent physical executions of ideas originally manifested as digital 3-D renderings. Although their physical counterparts are titled "Assemblage" and bear content lines like "digital UV print on hand-cut synthetic glass, spray paint," their virtual versions should not be considered sketches. To Van den Dorpel, that connotes a secondary status that fails to appropriately contextualize his digital output. "There are no sketches. Everything is the work," he says.

While Van den Dorpel's free-floating Perspex constructions look strangely sci-fi, resembling space-age chest plates and helmets, the rest of the exhibition is anything but. A component of the artist's four-part collages (and the lead image for the exhibition) is appropriated from the popular alternative social networking-cum-art portfolio Web site Deviantart.com. The emotive, incarnadine image has one blackened outstretched palm superimposed on a crimson one; a shadowy, oval vignette imposes from the borders. Though the inclusion of an image from Deviantart—a site used



by pubescent artists with little to no knowledge about the market-driven international contemporary art world, digital Sunday painters of sorts—may seem like a tongue-in-cheek gesture, it is quite the opposite. The image and its corresponding four-paneled collages are inarguably beautiful, well crafted, impeccably layered, philosophically rich, and continue to unfold, aesthetically and conceptually, upon an extended look.

If anything, Van den Dorpel reminds us that the impact of an image is mediated by the context in which it is seen more than by its original source. This exhibition represents precisely what the infrastructure of the art world could learn from the Web in 2012—a considered, egalitarian *modus operandi*. —Karen Archey