

# ARTFORUM

## Miriam Böhm

RATIO 3

1447 Stevenson Street

March 12–April 24

Miriam Böhm's first solo exhibition, "Inventory," consists of photographs of nondescript rectangular packages, mostly wrapped in brown paper and bubble wrap, which the artist has arranged, photographed, cut out, and rephotographed against vaguely bureaucratic backgrounds that evoke the doldrums of office cubicles. The resulting works are like Dutch still lifes reimagined in a UPS store. As the show's title suggests, Böhm's exacting vision is deployed as a critique of the art object: its reification and reduction into so many packages that are distributed via a myriad of avenues both old and new, including shippers, art handlers, dealers, galleries, museums, fairs, websites—in short, all the accoutrements of the ever-expanding art-world machine.

As a grouping, Böhm's photographs read as vanitas paintings for the post-boom age, invoking Barthes's critique of a world become object. In this sense, the work shares its critical edge with Merlin Carpenter's currency paintings (and even with Warhol's dollars, for that matter), echoing neo-Marxist grumblings on the persistence of the (pristine) art object. It's somewhat of an irony, then, that Böhm's works are themselves so alluring. There is a strong painterly quality that emerges in perusal that renders each piece unctuous and enigmatic. In a strange way, this is also the work at its most affecting, as the photographic is haunted by the history of painting. This is evident in the mannered arrangements and trompe l'oeil, with their echoes of Flegel and van Beijeren, as well as German still lifes, and also through her play with perspective in the lure of those impossible spaces "behind." Böhm's is a poetic dissonance that stops short of pastiche, and it is here that the studied banality becomes tremulous, resonating with some of the fundamentals of representation: the fallibility of perception, the rapture of the surface. It proves to be potent magic for such tidy little parcels.



**Miriam Böhm, *Inventory VI*, 2010**, color photograph, 27 1/2 x 20 3/5". From the series "Inventory," 2010.

— Franklin Melendez