

ARTFORUM

Siebren Versteeg

MICHAEL JON & ALAN

255 NE 69th St

September 10, 2016–October 8, 2016

Siebren Versteeg's "Middle Ages" is a new take on an old tale: Narcissus at the pond, gazing at his reflection, struck and stuck by his own beauty. Three crude steel figures retrofitted with web cameras as eyes view the exhibition and its visitors, producing generative screen-based content. Stand in front of *Seer* (all works 2016) and a monitor will present pictures of people that resemble your guise. *The Secret* faces a white wall, mysteriously sourcing images of beaches and blue skies. While *Surfer (With Head)*, with a towel thrown over its top, gazes down at an electronic tablet in its hand, constantly trolling the internet at random. Abstract paintings on the walls were created with similarly random searches, via algorithmic codes that cull a tangle of images. The works are reminiscent of both the giants of modernist painting and the subsequent artists who defied such narrow strategies.



The effect may be experienced as playful or light, even comic, but littered throughout the gallery are cement cinder blocks modified to look like skulls, perhaps hearkening back to those memento moris of medieval times when the Court Fool capped his scepter with a miniature skull. Applied now to our own personal middle ages, with these reminders laid literally at the feet of images of self absorption, Versteeg suggests a warning against the narcissism inherent in our media-bound world; tied to our devices and stuck in a reflective feedback loop, we risk drowning, like Narcissus, in our own reflections. Political, social, indeed all discourse outside the self expires due to our constant desire to gaze back. If you've ever Googled yourself then you understand.