

STEVEN
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If Barbara Loden directed a film using Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Stills, it would begin to approximate the photographs in Marianna Rothen's recent "Shadows in Paradise" series, on view at Steven Kasher Gallery. The images elicit a sixties noir and depict women in various guises in isolated scenes of distress, eroticism, and introspection. The series's title takes its name from Remarque's 1971 novel; the book appears in one of the photographs, laid open across the lap of a distracted reader. Rothen's use of it may reference the woman's (or, more generally, women's) feeling of a simultaneous absence and doubling in her life: that her identity and her body—physically and psychologically—are always circumscribed by social and cultural forces, so that she becomes two people, neither one of whom, perhaps, she recognizes. In one of the works, in which two photographs are set side by side, the image on the left shows a woman gazing out a window at an overturned chair, a dress, shoes, and a wig on the lawn; the image on the right shows the same scene, but the woman at the window now inhabits the dress and wig and lies prone on the ground, as though dead. Rothen has said that her photographs reference *Persona*, *Three Women*, and *Mulholland Drive*, and too often she wears those influences on her sleeve, but, to me, these are images that couldn't have been made by a man. Rothen shows an appreciation for the subtle variations of women's predicament that can only come from having known it herself.