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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK BIG PICTURE

The latest installment of MOMA's annual "New Photography" exhibition is the best one in years, and not just because it's the biggest. By including six young photographers, the curator Eva Respini ups the odds that there will be interesting work on the walls, while exploring "what it means to make a photograph in the twenty-first century." For the artists here, it means pushing the medium to its

breaking point and leaving conventional images behind. They make photographs about photographs—pictures that are at once painfully self-conscious and wildly experimental, brainy, and brash. Walead Beshty, Carter Mull, and Sterling Ruby favor collagelike abstractions and spectacular digital or darkroom displays. Leslie Hewitt, Daniel Gordon, and Sara VanDerBeek photograph ephemeral arrangements or constructions full of subtle personal, political, and art-historical references. Some

of this stuff is way too arty, but it all looks damn good together, and it's a big step toward regaining "New Photography" 's former heft and purpose.

—Vince Aletti

