

CORKIN GALLERY



Barbara Astman, *I as artifact*, 2008-2014

I as artifact is a collection of arresting, face-like constructions isolated by a dense void of deep black. Bearing no specific markers revealing gender, race, or age, the features are intimated by the negative space encased by patterned skin textures.

The eye sockets, whose angular holes don't suggest a lack of sight, but rather protective veils against complete self-disclosure, dominate the image. The compression of the face onto a flattened surface is relieved by the nose, which provides dimension to the image. However, it is the mouths that complete the animation of these images. As if paused momentarily while speaking, or singing, or exclaiming, there is an almost overwhelming cacophony of resounding silence. It is in this moment that their individuality appears.

These masks look out of the dark and take command of the entire picture space to create a universal micro- world. This dynamic tension is made especially palpable by the indeterminate vantage point. Are we witnesses to these translucent forms, or are we inhabiting them? When encountering other beings, we would normally use learned, socially acceptable inquiry to detect the underlying nature of their character. If the mask is ours, then like all masks, it becomes an extension of the face, a protective barrier against others reading the multitude of innate consistencies and contradictions. Implicit in this anonymity is the potential catalyst into a secret cosmos of psychological fantasy.