

# Interview

## Virginia OVERTON

By CHRISTOPHER BOLLEN

Photography GRANT DELIN



In developing her latest series of sculptural light pieces, 39-year-old artist Virginia Overton simply followed her instincts. When a new copy machine arrived at the studio of artist Wade Guyton, whom she assists, Overton acted on the urge to stick her head in the machine and press COPY. “Don’t tell my boss,” she laughs. What may seem like a bit of studio hijinks is actually endemic of Overton’s gutsy and resourceful creative process. The Tennessee native is probably best known for constructing sculptural barriers made out of raw, traditionally masculine materials such as Sheetrock mud and wood beams. They are often rigged in spaces with either

## MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

vertiginous dexterity or deceptively sound stability. “I think the roughness of my work comes from the fact that I grew up on a farm,” Overton says. “You learn to use and reuse the same materials in a pretty thrifty way.” Nevertheless, the results of Overton’s encounter with the copy machine led to a much more sensuous turn in her practice. Her wavy blond hair, first rendered in black and white on the copier and later in color with the use of a scanner, serves as a translucent pattern for paper-plastic sheets wrapped around florescent-light tubes. This particular light source has long been associated with minimalist artist Dan Flavin, but Overton has managed to render what is essentially a cold, institutional fixture into a sexually charged, highly oneiric, and hauntingly personal statement. Overton’s tubes are reminiscent of Eva Hesse’s overthrow of the male-dominated minimalist scene in the 1960s with her own overtly feminine approach. “I didn’t think of it as a feminine gesture when I started using my hair,” Overton says, “but I can’t look at it and not see it that way now.” The artist is currently experimenting with the length of the neon tubes, but the occupational hazard to this process is her own sore neck. “I’ve thought about using other people’s hair, but I can put myself into stranger positions. Laying with your head in a scanner takes a lot longer than laying with your head in a Xerox machine.”

*Photos: Left: Virginia Overton’s Blonde Hair, 2010.*

*Right: Virginia Overton’s Untitled (blonde), 2010, Fluorescent Light Fixture And Inkjet Print on Polyethylene.*