

Luke, Ben. "All about the look." *The Evening Standard* (April 30, 2015): 42 [ill.]

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Shiny and pristine: Melko laughing by Christopher Williams is a reconstruction of an image from a 1965 Kodak instruction guide

All about the look

EXHIBITION

**CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS:
THE PRODUCTION LINE OF
HAPPINESS**

Whitechapel Gallery, E1

★★★★☆

BEN LUKE

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAMS must be fed up with being called a conceptual photographer. The American artist has chosen to present the 50 works taken from across his career in this show without any explanations next to them; no wall texts, not even titles

and dates. It's an interesting strategy, because he is, well, conceptual in his approach. Take the picture above, made in 2005. It is, we imagine, a woman after a shower or bath, with towels around her head and body. But it's much more than that: a reconstruction of an image from a Kodak photographic instruction guide from 1968, the clue being in the colour chart to the left of the photograph. Williams is using the language of advertising photography to point out the fakery that goes into getting it shiny and pristine.

But you don't need the back story to get this: the colour chart instantly

smacks down any suggestion that that smile is real or spontaneous.

Williams's idea is inspired: with no text, this show's all about looking, drawing your own conclusions and connections. For all the complex references to the history and the mechanisms of photography, these are also often beautiful, immaculately shot images, whether of a headlamp in a Citroen car, a dam in Switzerland or the back of a dishwasher.

I came away thinking that Williams genuinely loves his medium, as well as wanting to unpack it.

■ *Until June 21 (020 7522 7888, whitechapelgallery.org)*