

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Campbell, Andrianna. "Barbara Kasten." *Artforum*, 31 January 2015

ARTFORUM

Barbara Kasten

01.31.15



Barbara Kasten, *Architectural Site 17, August 29, 1988, 1988*, color photograph, 60 x 50". High Museum of Art, Atlanta.

Barbara Kasten's photographs are often discussed in relationship to Bauhaus aesthetics, particularly the work of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, who advocated for *Gesamtwerk*, or, for working in multiple mediums, which has always been a critical part of her practice. "Barbara Kasten: Stages," the first major survey of the Chicago-based artist's work, presents a broad view of her oeuvre, including her early fiber sculptures, a video installation, and a selection of photographic works spanning throughout her career. Curated by Alex Klein, the exhibition will be on view at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia from February 4 to August 16, 2015.

LIGHT IS THE ESSENCE OF PHOTOGRAPHY, but it is not what I am after. The important thing about light, to me, is not how it falls on an object, but how the shadow is created. I am photographing the shadow, and not the object that is creating the shadow. I am after another form—one that defines reality, but it is not reality. I am after a phenomenological encounter.

11 DUKE STREET, ST JAMES'S, LONDON SW1Y 6BN

TEL +44 (0)20 7925 2505 FAX +44 (0)20 7925 2506 info@thomasdane.com

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Currently, the sculptural aspect of what I do engages the large-scale involvement of the body in space. My collaboration with Margaret Jenkins Dance Company for “Exact Seeing,” my 1985 Capp Street Project, gave me the initial impetus to work on an even more dramatic scale for my “Architectural Sites,” 1986–90, a photographic series that was made in grandiose lobbies of postmodern buildings with a single exposure and no digital intervention. I included mirrors to generate multiple views in one image. We all have a personal relationship with architecture.

Architecture is about creating an environment that we respond to, that we connect with, and that affects us in some emotional way. *Axis*, 2015, the new site-specific projection I made for this survey exhibition, incorporates the architecture of a thirty-foot-high corner in one of the ICA’s galleries. The architecture becomes an integral element of the video as it is displaced and transformed into other objects. In the 1980s and ’90s, when I showed at the John Weber Gallery in New York, I wasn’t looking at photography for inspiration. I wasn’t trying to break any of the “rules” of photography. I was just looking for a way to combine my interests in sculpture and photography—photography not as way of documenting sculpture but as a way to make a new work. For me, these media function side by side, not as cause and effect.

These days several photographers in their thirties and forties are working outside of the specificity of the medium. I have been fortunate to still be active, so I am not a mentor only to them. I can be part of the dialogue and in discussion with younger artists at the same time. The dialogue is really important. I am not giving advice; it is about an exchange.

Multigenerational artistic exchange was an early part of my career. Working in Los Angeles in the early 1970s, I recognized that the art scene was male-dominated, and the women’s movement was having an impact on female artists. Although I was not an activist per se, I produced a video with the art historian Deborah Irmas, *High Heels and Ground Glass*, which documents five women photographers, then all in their eighties—Lisette Model, Gisele Freund, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Eiko Yamazawa, and Maurine Loomis. This was my feminist gesture and took a decade to complete (1980–90).

The current show is an opportunity for the viewer to see that I have long worked in a variety of forms. It is a reevaluation of my output, especially with regard to the relationship of my work to the body and to space. My photographs are really all that have ever been published. No one knows about my focus on spatial environments, even though they have been components of my work for a long time.

— As told to Andrianna Campbell