

uta barth

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery
New York

The obsessive repetition of a single subject gains elegiac beauty in the hands of Uta Barth. In her current installation, a series of identically sized photographs of the naked branches of a single tree (photographed several times over a period of months) wraps around the whole room. The blurred image of the branches is the point of departure; then through digital manipulations of the negative, colors are altered, inverted or erased to leave a barely perceptible trace. At times the image is substituted altogether by a bright field of color—red or yellow or white. In the predominately monochromatic ensemble, these color squares stand out, as does the occasional appearance of strikingly scarlet birds at flight or at rest on branches. Since the beginning of her career, the Berlin-born artist has pushed the boundaries of photography, exploring the conventions of image taking in order to subvert them. She has photographed simple domestic interiors, the urban landscape, the country—anonymous subjects that she further distances from the viewer by making the images barely readable. In traditional photography, the object of



interest is normally in focus while what surrounds it, beyond the camera focus, is blurred. The blur hints at something else, something the photographer has deemed not interesting enough to make into a centerpiece. This "something else" is what has always interested Barth. The unimportant, the unadorned, the ephemeral have been her constant fascination: a blurred image of a hanging lamp that could be a backdrop for someone reading in an armchair or eating at a table; a blurred image of green foliage beyond a window that could be the distant setting of a scene from a Medieval painting, or the fleeting impression of a passerby. In this recent series, even the single frame becomes insignificant in itself, as it is lost in the

sequence. But the rhythm of the constant recurrence of the denuded branches and their progressive disappearance interrupted by the sudden color fields confers the work an unexpected, almost classical, harmony.
Micaela Martegani