

Los Angeles Times

Friday, October 25, 2002

Loaded questions amid the treetops

By HOLLY MYERS
Special to The Times

Uta Barth has long trained her camera where most people forget to look: the corners of empty rooms, the borders of windowpanes, the ledges of bookshelves.

At the Acme gallery, in a new series of photographs, her gaze ascends from domestic life to hover amid treetops and power lines. It is a bold and visually breathtaking body of work.

The installation consists of several dozen identically sized

photographs hung at the same level, though in varying intervals, around the perimeter of the main gallery. Each depicts a slightly different view of what appears to be the same grouping of trees, their bare top branches silhouetted against a cold, white sky. Interspersed with these images are several flat, solid fields of white, gray and muted color (a coral pink or a yellowed beige, for example).

The images vary subtly: Some are perfectly focused, others slightly blurred; some are pixilated, some positivized; some double-exposed and some softly tinted with color. Barth seems to be playing with the notion of the photograph as an imprint — an imprint of light onto paper as well as an imprint of figure onto ground — in this case, skeletal tree branches against a white sky. In her shifting, sharpening, softening, overlaying and reversing, it is as though she's testing the malleability of that imprint.

The result feels like a flickering of visual consciousness. As one stands at the center of the

gallery, images float in and out of the white like phantoms. The character of the white itself also seems to fluctuate, from limitless to flat, alternately signifying presence and absence.

There is something existential about this vaulted space: It pulls one's attention out of the personal and raises questions about the nature of the emptiness beyond. The tree is a loaded symbol and its appearance here suggests a sort of purgatory in which these questions might be considered — a space not unlike that of art itself.

*Acme, 6150 Wilshire Blvd.,
Space 1, L.A., (323) 857-5942,
through Nov. 16. Closed
Sundays and Mondays.*