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Uta Barth

**Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, through
Nov 16 (see Chelsea).**

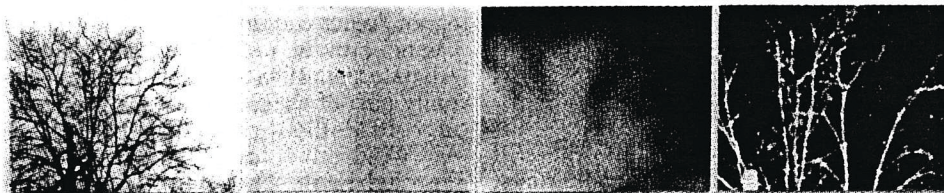
One needn't look far back in the history of art to find examples of artists who have turned out endless series of works on a single subject. In the 1890s, Monet returned again and again to the Rouen Cathedral to depict its portal draped in shadow, bathed with light and accosted by rain; in the 1960s, On Kawara produced one small painting a day, consisting of the current date in white block letters set against a black background. For Uta Barth, a German artist based in California, photography is the medium best suited to the exploration of memory, perception and repetition, those issues with which seriality is inextricably engaged.

Barth's latest project addresses these themes through a kind of scientific Minimalism. Her subject is a solitary tree, photographed repeatedly over a period of months, from more or less the same angle and distance. The ensuing

images, which circle the entire gallery, form a seductive sequence of out-of-focus tangles, crisp pastel stains and vibrant shadows. At times, Barth gives a nearly documentary view of the tree—its twisting branches adorned with a few stubborn leaves and crisscrossed with thick power lines. In other cases, the photograph morphs into painterly abstraction, the background infused with a buttery yellow or fiery orange and the tree reduced to spidery veins. In keeping with her past projects, Barth's intention is to emphasize the act of looking rather than to offer a clearly meaningful or spectacular image. Here, for the first time, though, she has digitally manipulated her pictures, so that

in addition to subtle changes of focus and time of day, they register elements that have been removed, doubled or inverted. In Barth's hands, these digital interventions magnify and render explicit the physiological mechanisms of human perception, rather than critiquing the ostensible veracity of the photographic image.

If there is an unexpectedly pleasurable melancholy involved in viewing these photographs, it is because they momentarily arrest vision's split-second ephemerality. Barth presents us with images that, whether singular or endlessly repeated, already feel like memories, ghosts of seeing, captured like so many blinks of the eye.—*Johanna Burton*



Uta Barth, *Untitled*, 2002.