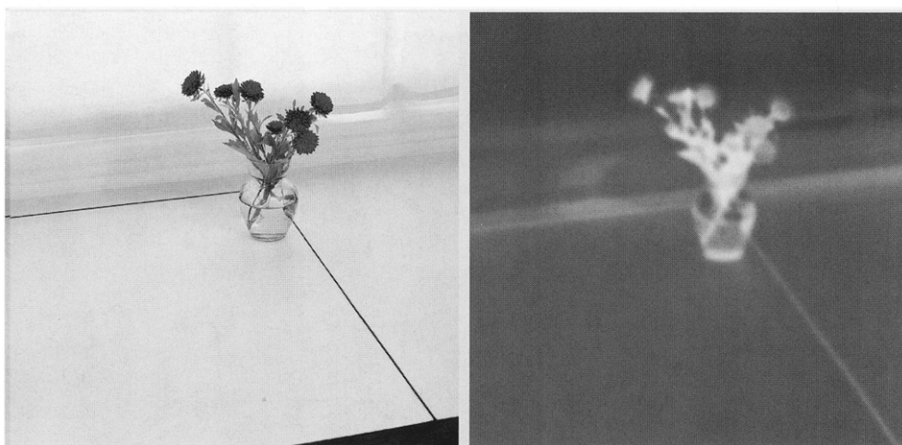




Uta Barth, *Untitled*, 2005, two color photographs, 30 x 64" overall.

UTA BARTH

TANYA BONAKDAR GALLERY

In her latest body of work, Uta Barth has turned away from the peripheral spaces that she spent the last fifteen years photographing: a patch of sun scored by the shadow of a windowpane; the blurred corner of a room; a nondescript fragment of landscape viewed from inside. Here she surprises with deliberate, colorful foci: vases of flowers, each placed near a shaded window on a counter inscribed with the dark outline of a square. The images suggest domesticity yet feel coolly Minimalist, juxtaposing the organic and the geometric, the kitsch associations of still life and the pristine plainness of Conceptualism. While the subject remains quotidian—the setting could be a kitchen; the arrangements are modest and casual—the presentation of an isolated object shifts the emphasis from the indifferent gaze to the attentive stare.

Barth's work has always been painterly: Mounted between two sheets of Plexiglas, her photographs have the heft of paintings on canvas; lent a matte finish (and often shot out of focus), they deliberately forgo the perfect detail that is photography's forte. They seem calculated to take advantage of the best of both media, capturing time spent and slowly passing as well as the fleeting moment of the shutter's snap. In her new work, the pale imprint of daylight through stirring curtains renders the moment an "anytime," while fallen petals and the intrusion of the everyday (keys, a paper clip) insist on the specificity of the shot. Each work comprises two or three panels separated

by gaps that suggest brief time lapses or the periodic refocusing of the drifting eye. In some panels, Barth approximates the afterimage that remains on the retina after a long look, creating quasi silhouettes of the juxtaposed quiet tableau in white on glowing red.

In her previous photographs, Barth aimed to embody the disinterested gaze: Refusing to choose a subject, she carelessly pointed her camera around her home, out the window, or out-of-doors. But subjects necessarily remain—none of the images is abstract or even unidentifiable—and though her fatigued gaze might be re-created within the photographs, it is met with the determined attention of an interested viewer. In her new work, Barth acknowledges this disconnect, finding an analogue within the image for our attentive regard of the photograph itself. The square on the counter and the flower arrangements work together to stand in for the work of art: both a geometric object and an object of contemplation. They act as foci within the interstitial setting, and their changing relationship to each other and the frame of the picture further complicates Barth's project.

Perhaps the kitschiness of the flower arrangement as subject renders it transparent, stared at but unseen. And the shots that Barth manipulates to approximate an afterimage acknowledge the futility of attempting to present the unmediated gaze, asserting themselves as doctored pictorial objects, as aestheticized interpretations of reality: in short, as art. This arresting series demonstrates Barth's insight into her own ongoing project and breaks difficult and rewarding ground.

—Nell McClisten