

Los Angeles Times

By HOLLY MYERS
Special to The Times

Formica never looked so intimate

The world of Uta Barth is a cool, still, contemplative place, devoid of human inhabitants and preternaturally quiet. She photographs the interiors of rooms, as well as rural and suburban landscapes, but her primary subject is the space — or more precisely the air — these environments contain. In past work, she's approached it almost as a character in its own right, focusing her lens on an empty point somewhere midground, reducing all other visible objects to a blur.

In recent years, these objects have entered again — treetops, telephone poles, windowsills — but the air remains charged. It's an eloquent, almost magical presence diffused throughout each image.

In a new series at ACME, Barth narrows her scope considerably, zeroing in on a short stretch of her own desk: a pristine, cream-colored Formica surface backed by a white windowsill and a glowing white curtain. Each set of photographs (some are single, some diptychs or triptychs) approaches this space from a slightly different angle, skewing the desk's L-shaped seam in a subtly different direction, and each contains a single, informal flower arrangement. The light throughout is soft and white, almost beatific — except in a handful of instances in which she pairs an image with its negative, printed in a startling blood red.

It is a sweet, simple, touchingly intimate body of work. The space is so small and the components so few that every detail — the variety of the flowers, the shape of the vase or jar, the arrangement of stems within the vase, a scattering of petals around it — takes on a precious significance. The effect, as with much of her work, is an exquisite sharpening of the senses.

ACME, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., Spaces 1 & 2,
Los Angeles, (323) 857-5942, through May
28. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

E22