

[Home](#) | [Art in America](#)

Uta Barth

By [Susan Snodgrass](#)  November 3, 2011 11:43am[f](#) [t](#) [t](#) [p](#) [+](#)

In her new series, “. . . and to draw a bright white line with light” (2011), created specifically for her show at the [Art Institute of Chicago](#), [Uta Barth](#) continues her exploration of the nature of seeing, offering atmospheric tableaux that challenge our perceptions of the physical world. Barth’s works have always hovered between the painterly and the cinematic, but the latest also serve as a meditation on photography itself, as suggested by the series title—photography being a means of drawing with light.

ADVERTISEMENT

For the 15 large-format inkjet prints on view (all 38 by 57 inches), the artist captured a swath of summer light as it fell upon a set of drawn curtains. The ray flows from a thin white line to a broad wave across the images, which are often combined as diptychs and triptychs, creating filmic sequences that suggest time’s fleeting moments. The horizontal band of light intersects with the vertical folds of the drapery, rendering the geometric compositions nearly abstract, a quality heightened by Barth’s use of compressed depths of field, multiple lines of focus and a pale sepia palette. Thus, the viewer is delivered to a subjective reality, at once familiar and unknown, where the sensorial effects of light extend beyond the purely visual, acting on the imagination. At the same time, one is continuously pulled into deciphering the images presented.

A hand, presumably the artist’s, reaches into two of the works, inserting a bodily presence into the otherwise ethereal scenes. With these works, Barth contrasts further the material and immaterial worlds she explored in earlier series such as “Sundial” (2007), comprising studies in shadow and light upon objects (a vase, a lamp) within domestic interiors at dusk, four examples of which were additionally on view.

Also included were three works from the 2002 series “white blind (bright red)” —observations of a tree outside the artist’s window. Employing her usual sequential format, Barth here juxtaposes sharply focused images of black branches against an empty sky with ghostly imprints of the same scene rendered on red and white panels. There are echoes of the black-and-white pictures of trees by photographer Harry Callahan, who once stated that “the camera can write poetry.” Barth’s photographs, with their optical plays and quotidian phrases, are, indeed, poetic, a kind of visual haiku in which light is the essence of all phenomena, perceptual and otherwise.

Photos: Uta Barth: . . . and to draw a bright white line with light (Untitled 11.2), 2011, inkjet prints, diptych, each panel 37 by 56 inches; at the Art Institute of Chicago.