

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY



### Vera Lutter at Gagosian Gallery

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The use of the negative photographic print as a means of evoking the uncanny, unsettling or other is a trick so often played at this point — overused by everyone from Dadaists and Surrealists to hippies and punk-rockers — as to be a cliché almost beyond redemption. But New York-based, German-born Vera Lutter manages to freshen up the negative, both experientially and intellectually, by anchoring it in both a conceptual framework and a direct process. Lutter's incorporation of inversion in her method deals not in the obviousness of effect, but in slippage and subtlety. She turns architecture into a tool for photographing architecture — converting rooms into pinhole cameras by ratcheting down light from the outside to a tiny aperture and lining the walls with photographic paper. Her show at Gagosian comprises massive photos — each a unique print — of Venice, Italy, taken during visits in 2005, '07 and '08. Shot during the off season, and utilizing long exposures so that passing people or boats turn to smudges at best, the photos transform a city that for centuries has been a busy port and an anthill of tourists into a darkened ghost town. One rationalizes the emptiness against the initial perception that these are late-night scenes, with only a few arcades and windows illuminated against the stone and water, but such is the inversion of shadowed colonnades and doorways in what is actually broad daylight. Stranger still is the sense

one gets from a shot of the Piazza San Marco during seasonal flooding. With the thin layer of water over the piazza floor substantial enough to reflect, but thin enough so that the details of the stonework beneath remain crisp, the reflections seem almost as if emanating from the stone itself. In other images, the tight detail of the building façades along the canals gives the sense of an instant in time — the click of a shutter — but the long exposure allows the ripples and wakes on the water to even out into what seems an opaque, velvety expanse. Lutter manages to produce images that are exacting and even clinical, while also romantic and dreamy. It's work that resonates as much with the discourse of post-Düsseldorf School photography as it does with the 19th-century English artist and critic John Ruskin's musing about the city, so simultaneously splendid and shabby that he felt it might simply melt into the water "like a lump of sugar in hot tea."

*Gagosian Gallery, 456 N. Camden Drive, Beverly Hills; Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Sat., 12-5 p.m., through September 12. [gagosian.com](http://gagosian.com).*