

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

### Artist of the week 136: Vera Lutter

**Ghostly forms float around Vera Lutter's pinhole-camera shots, mixing modern imagery with antique photographic technology**

By Skye Sherwin



Taking shapes ... Red and Bent Pyramids, Dahshur: April 14, 2010, from Vera Lutter's Egypt series. Photograph: Vera Lutter

Will-o'-the-wisps seem to dart around New York-based artist Vera Lutter's uncanny photographs of cityscapes and ancient sites. In her latest black and white series, Egypt, contours of pyramids jut from the paper like wall reliefs. You could almost touch the empty deserts they rise from, dotted with pebbles or rumped with sand dunes. And the photos fade to white at the edges, so the tombs and sphinxes resemble sculptures stranded on plinths.

One of the reasons Lutter's images feel tangible and yet weird is that they're realised in negative, so that light forms auras where shadows should be cast and the sky is always black. But it's also the way she makes them, using one of photography's simplest and oldest devices – the pinhole camera. This is time-consuming business, requiring long exposures so that the film not only records the outlines of buildings but the ghost-like forms that move in and out of the frame as the clock ticks on. They can be crafted from anything: Lutter has used an old trunk for some of her work, but she's regularly worked with room-sized boxes to create huge, one-off images.

In addition to Egypt, Lutter has photographed the Renaissance architecture of Venice and London's St Paul's. But many of her best-known works use antique techniques to capture fast-changing urban landscapes, including glass-fronted buildings and buzzing highways. For Frankfurt Airport VII: April 24, 2001, she placed a huge pinhole camera next to an aircraft stand and let the image take shape. The planes that parked there appear as overlain traces of each other, so that they seem to judder on the page.

While Lutter's photographs appear to pay homage to mankind's achievements in stone and metal, they're really monuments to time, where the only certainty is that all things pass.

**Why we like her:** Rheinbraun, III: August 24-25, 2006. At almost 2.5m x 6m, this four-panel photo of a vast mine complex in negative is chilling, turning its luminous round HQ – with octopus arms of walkways and massive drills – into an industrial demon under a limitless black sky.

**Jazz-tech camera:** For one of her first experiments with pinhole cameras, Lutter turned her bedroom into a camera obscura, so that the camera effectively photographed itself.

**Where can I see her?** Vera Lutter's Egypt is at the Davies Street branch of Gagosian Gallery, London W1, until 21 May.