

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ARTNEWS



Vera Lutter, *333 West 39th Street, XVIII: July 27, 2011*, 2011, unique gelatin silver print, 98¾" x 112".

VERA LUTTER

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The camera obscura has been around since at least the 13th century, but contemporary artists, including Zoe Leonard, Abelardo Morell, Shi Guorui, and Vera Lutter, have recently brought it back into fashion.

Lutter's small but immersive exhibition, featuring six large-scale, unique gelatin silver prints, highlighted her distinctly quiet approach to the camera obscura. The German-born artist has used the technique in her worldwide travels to produce images often composed from rooms or room-size shipping containers, but this show focused on New York, where she is now based.

The works shown here ranged from a 1996 view of the Fulton Ferry Landing, taken from Brooklyn, with ephemeral-looking impressions of the Twin Towers that cannot fail to appear ghostly from today's perspective, to two 2011 views of a construction site on West 39th Street to a 2014 view of the Chrysler Building—a brilliant, compacted cityscape against a deep black background. Rather than printing positive images from her negatives, Lutter keeps the tonal values reversed, so that the images resemble X-rays, or even daguerreotypes. Her exposures can take anywhere from hours to days to produce. As a result, in her earliest photographs, what is recorded is a "depopulated world," as Lutter has called it—still, empty, and a little eerie, like a city that's been abandoned all at once.

JEAN DYKSTRA