

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

a figure with rearranged body parts, a car driving across a Solar System littered with garbage — and I shall scream!

What a pleasure then to find a photographer doing something both very old and very new, in a manner which takes time, technique, and thought. Vera Lutter, a German artist who has resettled in New York, takes photographs the very old-fashioned way, with a pinhole camera — except that her camera is an entire room which she has blocked from light except for an aperture created at a window or doorway. This allows the image seen from that aperture to be projected into the room, a set-up known as the camera obscura, a centuries-old technology. The difference is that Lutter captures this image directly on photographic paper, creating large photographs sometimes over six-foot wide.

This exhibition focuses on her work in Venice, Italy. She spends months at a time there, renting different rooms in different parts of the city. Those familiar with Venice will recognize some major landmarks — Piazza San Marco, La Dogana, Santa Maria delle Salute — although the image is in the negative, since the prints are direct, it sometimes takes an adjustment in viewing to get it.

These exposures were four to eight hours long, and while she's been employing this technique for several years there's still some experimentation, according to the artist. Thus, each black-and-white print becomes unique,

not only because of different exposures, but because different things occur in the outside world while the exposure is being made.

In several prints, including *Corte Barozzi XIV* and those taken opposite the *Ca Del Duca Storza*, the foreground shows those ubiquitous wooden pilings, fixed and steady

in the water, while the blurry shadows of boats are moored among them. These boats would appear and disappear during the long exposure. Meanwhile, across the canal are an array of stately Venetian palazzi, also looking ghostly since they are in negative. In *Ca del Duca Storza, Venice, XXXIII*, we take in a wide view, and see in a building under scaffolding and sheeting, one of the frequent renovations necessary in this sinking city. It looks strangely modernist next

to the palazzi.

A key element of Lutter's talent is finding subject matter that lends itself to her technique. They must be in some sense monumental — she has done Manhattan skyscrapers and she has shot inside an airship hangar — and often incorporate moving and nonmoving objects. As for Venice, she is interested in all the water and the reflections of light. Tellingly, is what she once said in an interview with Peter Wollen. "The first time I created a camera obscura, after I had realized how long I had to sit in there to adjust my eyes to the darkness, to see the projection, which is about 20 or 30 minutes — I thought I'd seen God. When I saw the first projection, it was an epiphany."

In the Venetian series, Lutter shares with us her sense of epiphany. Her photographs capture that beautifully spectral and haunting, even decaying, quality of Venice — a city which has always struck me as half life, half afterlife. Time is passing, things fall apart, but somehow, beauty remains.

—Scarlet Cheng



Vera Lutter, *Corte Barozzi, Venice, XIV, March 8, 2005*

### VERA LUTTER

Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles

ART PHOTOGRAPHY and Photoshop seem to go hand in hand these days — the digital revolution has brought ease of shooting and ease of manipulating the image, leading to a tiresome glut of "art photography." One more clever mix-and-match juxtaposition —