

THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA SHOWCASES BARBARA KASTEN'S PHOTOGRAPHY

Text by Hannah Martin | Photography courtesy of Barbara Kasten | February 9, 2015



Architectural Site 17, August 29, 1988, 1988. Silver dye bleach print (Cibachrome), 48 x 61 in. The photograph depicts the High Museum of Art in Atlanta designed by architect Richard Meier.

Artist Barbara Kasten's abstract geometric photographs gained traction amid the spirited postmodernist climate of the 1980s. Mashups of color, shape, and shadow, the pictures represented sculptural assemblages of objects and props in a two-dimensional format. Now, in "Barbara Kasten: Stages," the first monographic exhibition of her work, approximately 80 pieces from the 1970s to the present are on view at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania. The show traces the artist's early cyanotypes and works in fiber to her more recognized photo constructs and set design pieces, many of which have found inspiration in modern and contemporary architecture.

In the 1960s Kasten visited Le Corbusier's iconic chapel, Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, France. Mesmerized by the way planes of color from the stained-glass windows floated into the space, she later simulated the effect in her 1980s series "Constructs"—assemblages of Plexiglas, fiberglass, mirror, and plaster that, when photographed, created geometric compositions. For a later '80s series titled "Architectural Sites," Kasten visited postmodernist structures—Arata Isozaki's Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, Richard Meier's High Museum of Art—which she shot using studio mirrors, gels, and a cinematic lighting crew, deconstructing the buildings into abstract forms without any digital intervention. Even for her geometry-driven foray into set design, architectural features such as the pyramid or the classical column are prominent.

For this exhibition, Kasten explores architecture once again with the museum as her stage. In a site-specific video installation tailored to the ICA's space, she projects images of props—cubes, a pyramid, an axial form—against the walls, urging their forms to interact with the museum's interior to create new compositions.