

ART & DESIGN

Review: Barbara Kasten's 'Set Motion' at Bortolami

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER APRIL 23, 2015

Like her current retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, Barbara Kasten's show in Chelsea includes both old and new work that serves to highlight connections and continuities across several decades. In the back room are black-and-white photographs from the 1979 "Amalgam" series, inspired by Bauhaus and Russian Constructivism and reminiscent of photograms by Moholy-Nagy and Gyorgy Kepes. At the entrance is a recent large-scale photograph with geometric planes of primary color recalling Mondrian. "Sideways" (2015), in the middle gallery, is a video installation featuring slow-moving planes of light and shadow, not unlike '60s structuralist films.

To make her work, Ms. Kasten builds large models in the studio and photographs or films them. The results are "amalgams," as the early title suggests, of sculpture, photography and painting. But architecture plays a role, too: Ms. Kasten has photographed actual buildings, and the images here conjure both real and imaginary spaces as well as the interior chamber of the camera itself.

The burning questions, of course, are why Ms. Kasten slipped under the art world radar and why she is pertinent now. The last decade's obsession with process and abstract photography is one explanation. (In the catalog for the retrospective, Ms. Kasten is interviewed by Liz Deschenes, a leading light

among younger conceptual abstractionists.) But Ms. Kasten's work is also reframed somewhat here.

Where some of her '80s photographs are saturated with garish color and shapes, like a new-wave music video or Ettore Sottsass design, the late-'70s work is muted and austere, asserting its ties to classical European Modernism. And yet, as cycles of taste continue to revolve, Ms. Kasten's more baroque work is also finding an audience with younger artists for whom '80s garish is good.

Bortolami

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