

ARTFORUM

New York

“The Material Image”

MARIANNE BOESKY | UPTOWN

118 East 64th Street

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With few exceptions, the artists in “The Material Image,” curated by Debra Singer, eschew straight photography, favoring instead sculptural, painterly, and collagist approaches to the medium. Process—not narrative or documentation—is foregrounded, and the results are oftentimes carefully constructed, seemingly hermetic, self-referential compositions. While some, including Amy Granat and Nick Mauss, employ nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century procedures such as the cliché verre and the photogram, others, such as Lucas Blalock and Marina Pinsky, combine analog and digital techniques to achieve fantastical, multilayered worlds. For many, the studio (with its attendant tools) is not only the site of production but also the subject of their work. This is true of both Michele Abeles and John Houck, who upend wonted figure-ground relations to create uncanny staged still lifes.

At the center of this abstract, intermedia turn in contemporary photography is Barbara Kasten, a champion of László Moholy-Nagy who since the 1970s has produced quasi-constructivist photochemical abstractions. Of her four works on view (one for nearly every decade of her career), *Architectural Site 3, June 14, 1986*, 1986, an electric, unmanipulated photograph for which she used color gels and mirrors to turn New York’s postmodernist Equitable Building topsy-turvy, is a standout. One can’t help but see the pictured Benday dots of a still-discernible Roy Lichtenstein mural as auguring the imminent arrival of the digital pixel—the miniscule dot responsible for the unchecked proliferation of images and, some might argue, end point of photographic novelty. The stakes have been set for the artists at task.

— *Natalie Musteata*