

The Mechanics of Expression:
Vera Lutter, Sameer Makarius & Otto Steinert
April 6 – May 13, 2017



Vera Lutter, Clock Tower, Brooklyn, unique gelatin silver print, June 29, 2009

NEW YORK – In 1949, a group of avant-garde photographers banded together in Germany to revitalize creativity in photography, which had been deemed degenerate by the Nazis. Founded by Otto Steinert, the group became known as Fotoform. By picking up where the Surrealists and the Bauhaus left off, Fotoform became a movement and spread internationally.

The experimental vision and spirit of the Fotoform group is on view in *The Mechanics of Expression: Vera Lutter, Sameer Makarius & Otto Steinert* at Howard Greenberg Gallery from April 6 – May 13, 2017. The exhibition explores work by Steinert and his Fotoform group, as well as Sameer Makarius (1924-2009) who formed a photography group in Argentina, and contemporary artist Vera Lutter. Although living in different countries at different times, the artists exhibit a similar visual vocabulary. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, April 6, from 6 – 8 p.m.

From its origins, the medium of photography has held out the promise of enhanced vision, of eyes outside our bodies, in the words of László Moholy-Nagy. It has enticed its practitioners into realms of experiment and speculation, and inspired them to produce works that are equal parts science and self-expression. Even as the medium evolved artistically toward a documentary precision and a fidelity to appearances, it developed an alternative history, a tradition of testing the boundaries of the visual.

The artists in the exhibition have carried that tradition forward in dramatic ways. They have given free rein to photographic processes, embraced abstraction, explored extreme ideas of form, and adapted the oldest photographic tools to new uses and formats.

Profoundly influenced by Moholy-Nagy, Otto Steinert led an effort after World War II to revive the investigative essence of Bauhaus photography. Forming the Fotoform group in 1949, Steinert organized a series of exhibitions that broke with the conventions of documentary realism that largely defined the medium. Championing what he called subjective photography, Steinert and the Fotoform artists sought to reforge the links between photography's experimental, nonobjective elements and the inner experience of both viewer and photographer.

Egyptian-born Sameer Makarius established his own photography group, Forum, in Buenos Aires. Makarius was one of Argentina's premier documentarians but also one of the medium's most radical practitioners. Also influenced by Moholy-Nagy, he merged painting and photography through the use of cliché verre – creating his own abstract negatives on glass.

The contemporary work of Vera Lutter (b. 1960) has embodied this experimental spirit in photography by looking forward and back simultaneously. Lutter has revived the prephotographic device of the camera obscura to create large, one-of-a-kind negative pinhole images of cityscapes. Her focus on industrial sites evokes a city of labor and production, but one long since undergoing transformation.

By playing with reality, the photographers at times cause the viewer to question what they are seeing. In the exhibition, Steinert's experiments with textural vasselike forms turned horizontal from 1955-56 are juxtaposed with his early 1950s industrial smoke stacks. An extraordinary level of experimentation can be seen in Makarius's 1961 amorphous splattered abstractions. Lutter, who credits the Fotoform group as an influence, is represented by her depiction of bold architectural forms in her 1996 Fulton Ferry Landing and 2015 Brooklyn Bridge photographs.

The photographers in *The Mechanics of Expression: Vera Lutter, Sameer Makarius & Otto Steinert* offer viewers a new role – as explorers of visual worlds far beyond the range of normal seeing. As Steinert wrote, "Photography gives us for the first time a feeling of the structure of things with an intensity which the eye, limited by its accommodation, had hitherto been quite unable to perceive."

About Howard Greenberg Gallery

Since its inception over 30 years ago, Howard Greenberg Gallery has built a vast and ever-changing collection of some of the most important photographs in the medium. The Gallery's collection acts as a living history of photography, offering genres and styles from Pictorialism to Modernism, in addition to contemporary photography and images conceived for industry, advertising, and fashion. Howard Greenberg Gallery is located at 41 East 57th Street, Suite 1406, New York. The gallery exhibits at The ADAA Art Show, The Armory Show, The Photography Show presented by AIPAD, New York, Photo London, Art Basel, Paris Photo, and Art Basel Miami Beach. For more information, contact 212-334-0010 or info@howardgreenberg.com or visit www.howardgreenberg.com.

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Vera Lutter, Brooklyn Bridge, unique gelatin silver print, June 11, 2015

About Vera Lutter

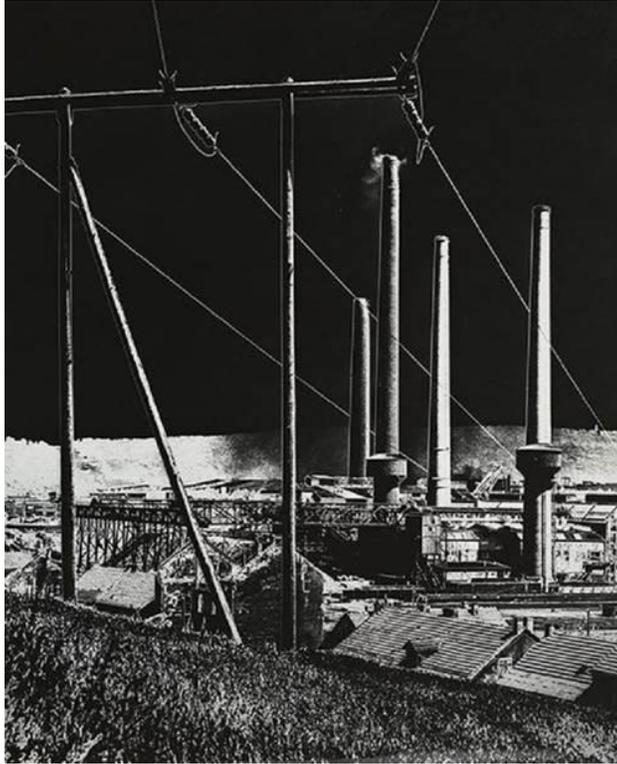
For Vera Lutter (b. 1960), New York is a recurring subject in her photographs. She employs the technique of the *camera obscura*, or pinhole camera, in projects around the world where she has photographically rendered architecture, shipyards, airports, and abandoned factories, focusing on industrial sites that pertain to transportation and fabrication. Vera Lutter was born in 1960 in Kaiserslautern, Germany. She graduated in 1991 from the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich, and received her M.F.A. in 1995 from the School of Visual Arts, New York. Lutter's photographs are in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among others. She currently lives and works in New York City.



Sameer Makarius, Betsabé, gelatin silver print from a cliché verre, 1961

About Sameer Makarius

Sameer Makarius (1924-2009) was born in Cairo to a German mother and Egyptian father. He grew up in both countries as well as in Hungary during World War II, where he studied painting and sculpture. In 1944, he exhibited at the First Non-Figurative Art Exhibition in Budapest. He later settled in Argentina and was known for pioneering a new understanding of photography. He founded a group of photographers known as Forum dedicated to promoting photography as fine art. He wrote the first essay published in Argentina on photography from 1840-1981 and published several books of his photographs. His work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate, London; and Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires.



Otto Steinert, Saarlandische Industrielandschaft II, gelatin silver print, 1950

About Otto Steinert

Otto Steinert (1915-1978) was born in Saarbrücken, Germany. He studied medicine and was a medical officer during World War II. In 1947, he abandoned medicine to become a portrait photographer. Lacking formal training, he was unbound by conventions and explored experimental techniques. As the founder of Fotoform, he promoted creative decision making. His group of photographers mostly focused on abstraction, using close-up images from nature or manipulating negatives and prints. He mounted numerous influential exhibitions of photography, taught photography, and became the director of the Staatliche Werkkunstschule where he worked from 1952 until his death in 1978. His work was recently seen at Tate Modern, London, in a 2015 exhibition and is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Museum of Modern Art, New York.