

# ARTFORUM



Barbara Kasten, *Parallels I*, 2017, fluorescent acrylic, 32 x 98 x 96"

Barbara Kasten  
BORTOLAMI  
39 Walker Street  
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"My underlying question," said Barbara Kasten in a 2012 interview, "is whether it is possible to make an abstract photograph." Influenced by Bauhausian interdisciplinarity, which sought to combine all visual mediums into "total artworks," the eighty-one-year-old Chicago-based artist trained as a painter before shifting to photograms, painted with liquid developing chemicals or the photo's emulsion. For her first studio photography pieces, Kasten made sculptures of found industrial materials such as mirrors, Plexiglas, and sheet metal. These temporary "constructs," as the artist calls them, were shot with lighting that was itself sculptural; lush film-noir shadows almost physically rest against geometric neons reminiscent of a James Turrell light projection, or *Miami Vice* night scenes starring the "3-D pipes" screensaver redone in stucco and frosted glass.

Kasten's interest in abstraction continues at her current exhibition, "Partis Pris." The show's title is an architectural term that refers to the organizing principles behind a particular design. In the "Collisions" series, 2017, overlapping fluorescent acrylic shapes turn photographs into deep, recessive spaces. "Progressions," 2017, seemingly borrows the contents of "Collisions," but adds Plexiglas relief elements. With the sculpture *Parallels I*, 2017, fluorescent acrylic beams balance on top of one another like transparent Jenga blocks. Considering the near-monochrome palette of an earlier series, "Studio Constructs," 2007–12, "Parti Pris" is a return to color, with hot yellows, greens, and pinks, à la Skrillex at the Ultra Music Festival. Instead of a schematic that flattens difference or puts us on an endless dialectical loop, Kasten's pieces suggest a finite genericism containing infinite and infinitely contradictory variations.