

## BORTOLAMI

**Barbara Kasten**

***SHIFT***

**4 March - 30 April 2022**

**Opening Friday, 4 March from 6 – 8 pm**

Bortolami is pleased to present *SHIFT*, Barbara Kasten's sixth exhibition with the gallery. Featuring four bodies of work, the show connects her little-known sculptures from the 1970s to her most recent output. Each artwork is tied to her experimentation with fiberglass window screening, a material she began using in the early 1970s and throughout her forty-year career.

Initially trained as a painter in the 1960s, Kasten shifted to textiles in her graduate years in the 1970s studying with renowned fiber artists Trude Guermonprez and Magdalena Abakanowicz. Window screening, a ubiquitous and utilitarian industrially-produced woven material, presented myriad possibilities. Taken by its physical nature and optical effects it produces when lit, Kasten also used the material as a basis to create not only sculptures but also her ethereal cyanotypes in the 1970s, another medium she has revisited intermittently over the last few decades.

Kasten's *Reconstructions* are wall-mounted sculptures of folded window screening—*Pouf* and *Diamond* are recreations of pre-existing works destroyed in the 1980s, while *Lama Glama* is an entirely new form. Originally created in 1974, these sculptures sprang from an interest in devising three-dimensional forms from a two-dimensional plane. Kasten utilized her background in textiles to fold, stretch, and pull the material into three-dimensional space with the illusory properties of the material in mind. Illuminating the forms is a crucial step for Kasten, who insists that without light, the *Reconstructions* remain flat and once lit they transform into volumetric forms, their shadows creating the illusion of moiré. Rather than being mere physical, material objects, their shadows operate as a medium through which viewers can alter their perception of space.

The multi-paneled 1977 *Photogram Paintings* are two from a series of nine. Inspired by a László Moholy-Nagy photogram of crumpled paper, Kasten manipulated silver gelatin mural paper by twisting and tearing the material before arranging window screening and boxes atop its surface and exposing the arrangement to light. She developed the exposed paper in the darkroom, adhering it to untreated canvas stretched over custom-made supports. The artist then applied oil paint in precise lines and careful washes, drawing attention to the printed shadow and geometry, purposefully taking her cues from mid-century painters challenging the traditional notion of the medium by using shaped canvases and unconventional modes of display.

Grids provide an important tool and vehicle for abstraction. In Kasten's new *SHIELDS* and *PLANS*, the rigid pattern becomes an undulating moiré or a framing device. The *SHIELDS* also represent the revitalization in her use of cyanotypes, a medium she returned to in her backyard after her studio's lockdown in 2020. Beginning with paper as she did in her works from the 1970s, and pivoting to raw linen, chosen for its color and texture, the new cyanotypes point to her early interest in textiles. Using scrap metal grids, Kasten exposed the cyanotype-saturated linen to the sun and affixed a different scale metal grid to the stretched canvases. Once lit, the mesh casts a shadow on the cyanotype, creating a temporary photogram atop a fixed one. The artist's new *PLANS* consist of studio photographs of intersecting scrap metal printed on raw linen, in which both the print and the support become part of the work's imagery. Both *PLANS* and *SHIELDS* represent a material research just as much as an aesthetic or structural one.

## BORTOLAMI

**Barbara Kasten** (b. 1936 in Chicago, Illinois) lives and works in Chicago. She received her BFA from the University of Arizona in 1959 and MFA from the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1970. Her work has been exhibited across the United States and Europe. Most recently, Kasten was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, and the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany, which will travel to Sammlung Goetz, Germany in 2022. Other recent exhibitions include *Women in Abstraction*, Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain, and Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; The 2020 *Busan Biennale: Words at an Exhibition—an exhibition in ten chapters and five poems*, South Korea; *Shape of Light: 100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art* at the TATE Modern exhibition; *Sharjah Biennial 14: Leaving the Echo Chamber*, Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE; and a retrospective at the ICA Philadelphia that traveled to the Graham Foundation in Chicago and LAMoCA. Her work is featured in the collections of MoMA, The Whitney, Guggenheim, Tate Modern, the High Museum in Atlanta, The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, The Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. among many others.