

MENU



MARCH 2022

"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

Lynn Stern: *Transit of Light* at Erin Cluley Gallery



Installation view, Lynn Stern: Transit of Light at Erin Cluley Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Erin Cluley

Lynn Stern: *Transit of Light*

[Erin Cluley Gallery](#)

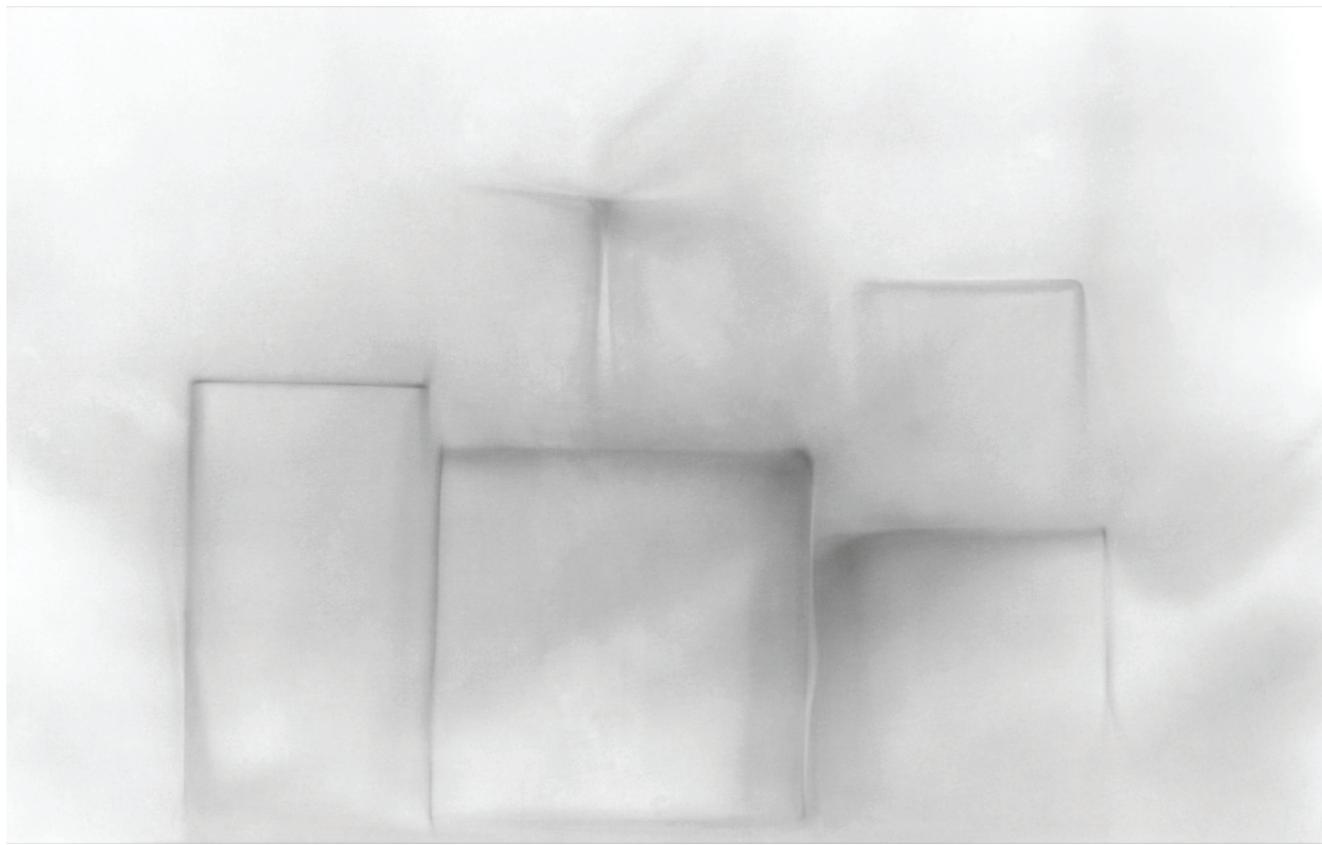
February 19 through March 26, 2022

By CORI HUTCHINSON, March 2022

Working within a history of abstraction in photography that is nearly cameraless, New York-based artist Lynn Stern follows the tradition of László Moholy-Nagy and Lucia Moholy, Man Ray, and Alvin Langdon Coburn to the end of composing images inscribed entirely by the forces of light and shadow. *Transit of Light*, running through March 26, 2022 at Dallas's Erin Cluley Gallery, features works by Stern from three series: *Passage*, *Quicken*, and *Force*

Field. The show's title, recalling the Tate Modern's *Shape of Light: 100 Years of Photography and Abstract Art* exhibition of 2018, stresses the distinct, sifting, and luminous particle vibration of Stern's photographs.

Stern stages spatial ambiguity in various ways. *Force Field*, Stern's latest ongoing series in response to *Quickenning*, utilizes lower-contrast, crowded cubes to manifest the illusion of shadow and illuminated form binding as a single unit. *Quickenning* compositions are more akin to the traditional still life, an object-oriented genre. *Passage*, a continuation of Stern's *White Compositions* series, utilizes only a swoopy, bunched scrim in order to develop pencil-like lines separating light from shadow. The subtle, often wispy, gestures in each photograph necessitate a depth of vision.



Lynn Stern, Force Field #20-54, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Erin Cluley Gallery.

Familiar shapes—circles, blocks, bottlenecks—in Stern's work are rendered unfamiliar, hovering on a faceless plane defined only by the intersection of crease and fold. This is visibly informed by the ideas of painters who practiced geometric abstraction. Piet Mondrian writes in his essay “Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence” of Neo-Plasticism as “a composition of rectangular color planes that expresses the most profound reality...The colored planes, as much by position and dimension as by the greater value given to color, plastically express only relationships and not forms.” Stern’s starker planes, which feature a primary elemental rather than Mondrian’s primary colors, aspire to a similar

expression of universal truth. In a sense, Stern wields natural, indirect, or “bottled” light as a force comparable to color.



Lynn Stern, Quicken #13-27, 2017-2019, archival inkjet pigment print, 38 x 47 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Erin Cluley Gallery.

In *Quicken #13-27* (2017-2019), the print appears damp and cockled due to the represented crease of the scrim, which weaves a continuous, arcane relationship through the forms. Such works are reminiscent of the dual **self-portrait** of László Moholy-Nagy and Lucia Moholy produced circa 1922 in which light striking the subjects' noses, lips, and strands of hair develop one common light-shape in the center of the composition. Further than in Stern's earlier series, *Quicken* forms connections between objects

Alvin Langdon Coburn's *Vortographs* series of 1917 marks the recognized beginning of pure, premeditated abstraction in photography. This series, cited in Alfred Stieglitz's journal *Camera Work*, is referenced by Man Ray in works such as *L'inquietude* (1920). Although Stern detours from the sharp and fractal nature of both compositions, she captures a similar subjectivity made impossible by realism and plays with a striking confusion of depth: foreground or background, concave or convex. Works such as *Passage #02-29-1* (2002-2011) and *Passage #04-15a* (2004-2011) for example, bear the unmistakable lineage of this technical photographic tradition and carry forth a legacy of Luminism.



Lynn Stern, Passage #04-15a, 2004-2011, archival inkjet pigment print, 46 x 32 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Erin Cluley Gallery.

The astronomical meaning of transit refers to the passage of a smaller celestial body across the disk of a larger body, often star or planet, which causes a drop in the brightness of the larger body. Lynn Stern's scrim transits, not by way of reduced size but by reduced opacity, the forms in the photograph, rendering images with ephemeral, celestially altered light. The curtains of Stern's work are drawn in both directions, opening and closing simultaneously. The artist reminds the viewer in her catalog essay "The Pull of Abstraction" of the literal meaning of abstraction: "a pulling away from." Light, through Stern's lens, is as potent and real as a charge emanating directly from the source. **WM**



CORI HUTCHINSON

Cori Hutchinson is a poet, watercolorist, and library assistant living in Brooklyn.

[view all articles from this author](#)