

Karl Martin Holzhäuser, Luminous Impulse @Sous Les Etoiles

By [Loring Knoblach](https://collectordaily.com/author/loring-knoblach/) / In [Galleries](https://collectordaily.com/category/galleries/) / June 2, 2023

JTF (just the facts): A total of 19 photographic and video works, variously framed and matted, and hung against white walls in the split level gallery space.

The following works are included in the show:

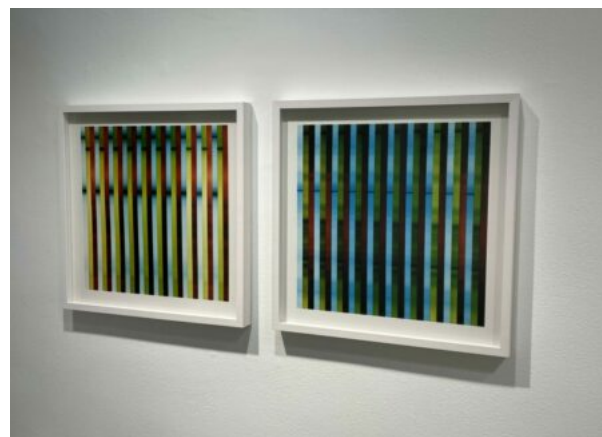
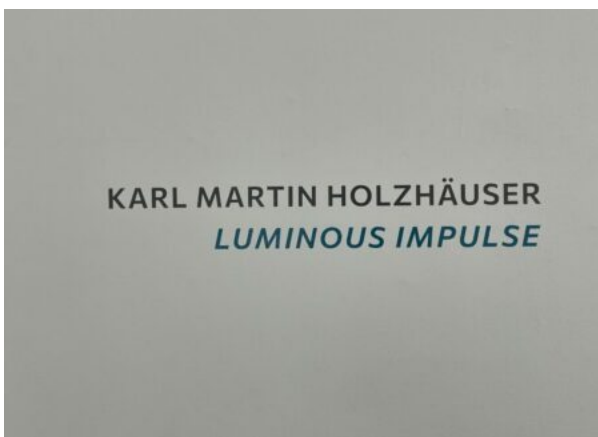
(upstairs)

- 2 chromogenic prints, 2003, each roughly 14×14 inches, unique
- 1 set of 12 chromogenic prints, 1985, each 16×12 inches, unique
- 1 chromogenic print diptych, 1987, roughly 47×20 inches, unique
- 1 color film on PE paper, 1978, 20×20 inches, unique
- 1 archival pigment print, 2008, 47×47 inches, in an edition of 5
- 1 video animation (by Holzhäuser and Gottfried Jäger), 1995, 12 minutes

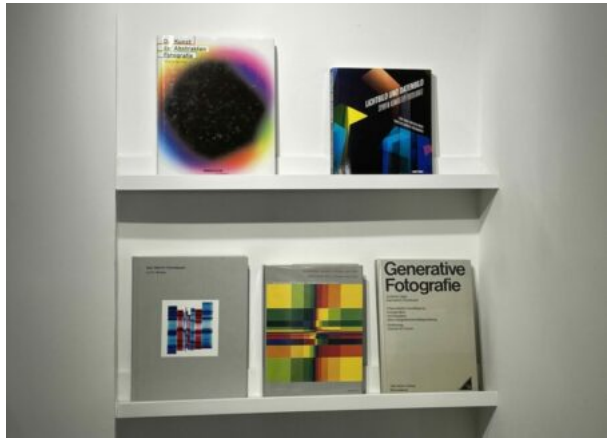
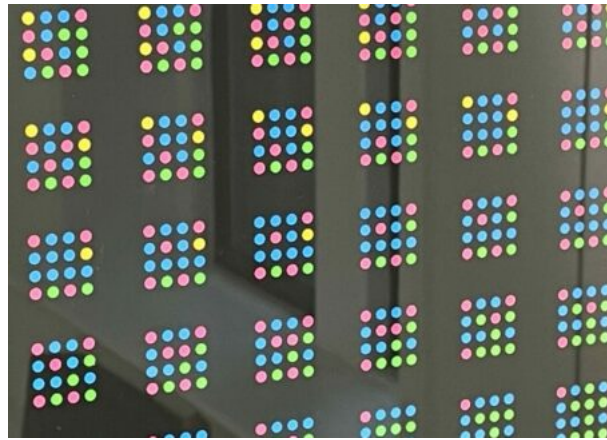
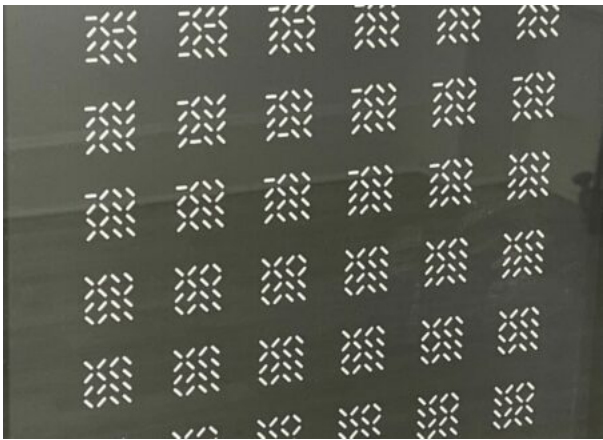
(downstairs)

- 1 color film on Bartye paper, 1974, 20×16 inches, unique
- 3 color film of Bartye paper, 1971, each 11×11 inches, unique
- 1 chromogenic print, 2008, roughly 32×24 inches, in an edition of 5
- 2 chromogenic prints, roughly 16×16 inches, unique
- 1 set of 9 screenprints (by Holzhäuser, Gottfried Jäger, and Walter Steffens), 1977, each 24×12 inches, with audio accompaniment
- 1 chromogenic print diptych, 1987, roughly 47×20 inches, unique
- 2 archival pigment prints, 2008, each 24×24 inches, in editions of 5
- 1 gelatin silver print, 2002, 24×24 inches, unique

(Installation and detail shots below.)







Comments/Context: As computational photography continues to evolve at a breakneck pace, with software-based manipulation, AI-based construction, and generative composition possibilities being developed and released almost faster than we can process them, it makes sense for us to slow down a moment and try to formulate an understanding of the broader historical foundation on which these innovations have been built.

Some of the roots reach back to the structured teachings of the Bauhaus, while others step forward a few decades to connect to the initial experiments in applying mathematics, science, and computer technology to art making. And in particular, the under appreciated Concrete Photography movement, which got its start in 1960s Germany in the works of Karl Martin Holzhäuser, Gottfried Jäger, and others, intentionally turned photography inward, replacing the long-standing photographic idea of creating images that represented the external world with a more self-referential (and abstract) approach, where the controlled application of light was itself its own subject. This conceptual redirection of the medium, and the innovative experimental techniques developed by its key thinkers, set the stage for some of the computationally-driven imagery we are seeing much more widely now.

This gallery show provides a succinct sampler of the works of Karl Martin Holzhäuser, building on a 2019 show (reviewed [here \(https://collectordaily.com/karl-martin-holzhauser-lichtmalerei-yossi-milo/\)](https://collectordaily.com/karl-martin-holzhauser-lichtmalerei-yossi-milo/)) that offered a straightforward introduction to Holzhäuser's work and its wider context within abstract photography. A selection of his works from the 1970s and 1980s have been paired with more recent efforts (largely from the 2000s), offering an instructive survey of some of Holzhäuser's cameraless ideas and aesthetics.

All of Holzhäuser's works are made in the dark, where pre-visualized steps, instructions, and iterative sequences are executed by the artist, with elements of chance and serendipity re-calibrating some of the strict mechanisms and structures that have been designed. An early series of color studies from 1971 finds Holzhäuser experimenting with combinations of color gradients, where light has been blocked or layered, creating flanked compositions that drift to different color aggregations. A few years later, Holzhäuser can be found playing with iterative sequences of light alignment, where small yellow squares wander from crisp central axes to blurred approximations; in another work, the series consists of incremental rotations, where a striped circle spins underneath a veiling of orange, creating different geometric patterns and interactions. This thinking was then further expanded in a 1977 game-like collaboration with Jäger, where arrangements of sticks, dots, and color blocks (made of light) were selected by random numbers and dice rolls.

The 1980s were clearly a period of further process experimentation for Holzhäuser, as exemplified by a handful of works that were also included in the 2019 show. One set of prints features the use of a can with a light inside and different shaped holes in the bottom, which leads to fluttery ribbons of color that wander across the surface of the paper; Holzhäuser then repeated this process multiple times, incrementally adding more colors, resulting in a group that additively builds from a jittering collection of light blue marks to a rainbow of intermingled waves. Two other works feature the outcomes from experiments with Holzhäuser's *lichtrakel* ("light rake"), a long tube with a lengthwise slit from which light was emitted; in the examples here, striped bands of transparent color are then folded, pleated, or otherwise gesturally re-directed, like elegantly tinted window blinds.

When we jump ahead to the 2000s, Holzhäuser's aesthetics change once again, moving to strips of color that look like banded genetic sequences, which he has then layered together in compositions he calls *lichtmalerei* or "painting with light". By overlapping wider swaths and thinner vertical strips, with the dark bands moving up and down, Holzhäuser creates a sense of rhythm and movement within these color stories, like tickers that are streaming by at different speeds. Other photomontage works from the 2000s incorporate flares of light and dark wrapped around strips that hover in the appearance of three dimensional depth; areas "in front" and "behind" lie atop one another, like ever shifting plates.

Holzhäuser's strongest works both reveal some of their internal logic and allow for mystery, pushing the abstractions into almost improvisational territory. The parallels with musical composition and number theory are more than superficial, and many of these projects feel like models or hypotheses that have then been left to run. By allowing precision and chance to tussle within his works, Holzhäuser has created room for uncertainty, and it is in this realm of deliberate friction that his visual magic thrives. Hopefully smart shows like this one will continue to educate new generations of contemporary photographers interested in generative approaches about the many pathways that have already been investigated; by standing on the shoulders of innovators like Holzhäuser and Jäger, they can jump to new problems, rather than resolving ones that have already been thoughtfully investigated.

Collector's POV: The works in this show range in price from \$9000 to \$30000, based on size and number of panels included. Holzhäuser's work has little secondary market history, so gallery retail likely remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.

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April 29, 2023 - June 10, 2023

Sous Les Etoiles Gallery (<https://www.souslesetoilesgallery.net/#tab:slideshow>)

16 East 71st Street

New York, NY 10021

OTHER LINKS

Karl Martin Holzhäuser artist site (<http://www.kmholzhaeuser.com/>)

