

Artist Statement

I am often asked what my photographs are pictures of. This question is addressed easily with technical explanation: I make straight analog photos of mixed-media constructions of materials (Ink, colored acetate and various debris) which I work with on drafting film over a light box and photograph with my 8x10 camera in backlight.

Hopefully this clarification of process doesn't close the question, but rather holds open the very notion of what a photograph can be of. I make pictures of increasingly complex visual scenarios, both as a means of mirroring our general sense of contemporary complexities, and as an attempt to hold the viewer: to ask/offer a sustained looking in a time of accumulative scanning. The desire to hold a viewer in an act of questioning comes from a sincere commitment to the heroic potentials of engagement with this medium.

Recently I have been researching ideas that give claim to their own sense of heroic achievement and coopting these forms for my own attempts. Early modernist abstraction ("If Only"), Utopian visions ("untitled (geodesic dome)"), and big-data visualization ("If we had a plan") have all made sweeping, often male-driven claims of universal solutions for mass human harmony. My photographs are pictures of my one-woman crafted, increasingly obsessive, attempts to find photographs that grapple with genuine exaltation of these heroic forms (through beauty, scale, and light), while holding a sense of the inherent biases and failures of our triumphant aspirations (through noise/debris, handmade imperfections and the utilization of an everyday all-over medium).

COLLECTOR DAILY

Amy Finkelstein, If Only @Elizabeth Houston

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / January 7, 2019

Comments/Context: Amy Finkelstein's brand of photographic abstraction falls into the "constructed" subspecies of the genre, even though she isn't building three-dimensional

settings to be photographed or exploring the optical oddness of light cast into a controlled space.

Her works are resolutely two dimensional and fully analog, her compositions built on transparent drafting film that is then photographed and enlarged, without the aid of additional post-production tweaking. The resulting images use strips of tape to generate the hard edges of geometric structure and washes of India ink to generate more organic forms that feel loose and painterly, like petri dish experiments left to run wild. The combined aesthetic oscillates back and forth, never quite allowing the viewer to settle into a sense of visual resolution.

Several of the works use insistent verticals as their dominant motif. Single tape strips in red and yellow recall Barnett Newman's bold zips, as does the spatial balance exercises that take place between a lone thick strip and thinner verticals situated farther away. These primary colored lines are set against a backdrop of watery monochrome black, creating a rich contrast of textures. The darkness ranges from cloudy indeterminate murkiness to more splashing gestural washes, and in one work, the ink seems to have begun to coalesce, with feathery forms like tree branches or creeping decay evoked by the splotchy ink.

Finkelstein then takes these aesthetic ideas and encourages them to go further. The tape verticals are expanded into a parade of stripes in varying widths (some of them now partially transparent), the array turned into a plaid by a weave of horizontals. One work experiments with incremental reductions in size from left to right (the strips getting thinner and more tightly spaced as they march across the surface), while another allows the interlocking latticework to become more gridlike, creating an echo of the jazzy primary-colored energy of Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. The ink washes behind the geometries have also become more complex, with puddles encroaching on the surface of the lines and perhaps dirt or other small natural debris added to the mix to create more variations of blotted form.

Where Finkelstein diverges from the crowd of rigid abstractionists is in her willingness to embrace uncertainty and messiness. Her lines and grids search for systematized rigor and order, but are balanced by the gloppy improvisation of nature, which never allows those strict impulses to win out. Austere geometric precision is undermined by earthy expression, revealing it to be a set of rules imperfectly imposed on a roiling and often uncooperative undercarriage. It is this compositional tension that gives Finkelstein's works their spark – her photographic abstractions revel in the details of their layered processes, but consciously force those competing aesthetics and approaches into an unending battle.

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

Jan 23 Art Out: Amy Finkelstein "If Only"

ART OUT

By [Sarah Sunday](#)

For just a few more days, until the near-approaching 26th of January, Amy Finkelstein's *If Only* is being displayed by the Elizabeth Houston Gallery on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Housed within the interior of the gallery, five of Finkelstein's experimental photographs have been framed in black and hung upon white walls, awaiting observance.

Artfully reveling in the abstract form, Amy Finkelstein creates complex and earthly grids of color and texture; a structured and deliberate process of mess-making. Blacks, reds, and yellows stand out in bold contrasts, while soft eggshell blues and whites appear more quietly in unassuming lines and backgrounds. Nature runs rampant within the textures of the photographs, and while the specifics of the photographs are up for interpretation, perhaps one can glean the images to be of frozen leaves amidst outdoor icy residue, or even a microscopic view of bacteria against the glass and light of a petri dish.

Finkelstein does not engage in post-production or software editing but rather completes her work in the darkroom. Her chromogenic prints are created using drafting film, a matte-translucent material, as the canvas. Tape is placed across the film to create the geometric grids, upon which Finkelstein applies her India ink for color. The canvas is backlit from behind and the process is perfected; a photograph is taken of the artwork and it is then finalized.

There is an enveloping facet of entropy and forceful energy present in the gridwork of her pieces; an energy that gives light to organized chaos. As good artwork tends to do, Finkelstein's pieces delve into the sphere of the paradoxical. There is the deliberate intention and there is uncontrollable chaos. There are deep and rich contrasts as well as softly feathered and crawling dribbles. It is, all at once, the natural weaved against the unnatural, and each individual image carries its own connotations and impressions, ranging in tones of light and darkness.

To truly look and see Finkelstein's art is to experience a celebration of the unpredictability of nature and life; there is a natural order that begins with creation and ends in destruction, but in between this opening and closing lies the middle ground that is life, in which Finkelstein so adeptly recounts through her images.