

## Press Release

### *LIGHTS OFF, AFTER HOURS, IN THE DARK*

**Louise Lawler**

September 17–October 30, 2021

Sprüth Magers, Berlin

**Sprüth Magers**

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to present an exhibition of new work by Louise Lawler in Berlin. *LIGHTS OFF, AFTER HOURS, IN THE DARK* continues Sprüth Magers's more than three-decade collaboration with the artist.

Photographs of artwork created by other artists have been the subject matter of Lawler's oeuvre since the late 1970s. The artist's practice involves complex photographic investigations of often overlooked or tacitly aesthetic forms of art experiences in museums, collections, auction houses, or storage depots. Lawler's work analyzes the conditions of exhibiting and the fate of objects, the "life" of the photographed artworks. It shows how their meaning changes with respective environments and forms of presentation, and documents the market's growing influence on developments in the art system. In contrast to classical institutional critique, the artist withholds judgment in her work, leaving it open to ambiguity.

Lawler's latest body of work focuses on Donald Judd's sculptures as they appear in the 2020/21 exhibition *Judd* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York – one of the largest-ever retrospectives of the late American minimalist artist's work. These photographs were taken over the course of two nights: after visiting hours, as the exhibition's title suggests, without artificial light, in the dark. They mark a logical, consequential new development in Lawler's work, but also open it to a new level of interpretation. This is the first time that Lawler has shown the "life" of art objects in the dark, that is, when their reception is not only institutionally prohibited but also limited, almost precluded by the pure physical conditions of the space. Judd's iconic work is restaged in an aesthetic of shadow that imbues with a particular, almost meditative calm.

Only viewers very familiar with Judd's work could make out the immaculate shapes of his familiar "boxes," "stacks," "progressions," "bullnoses," or "channel pieces" at first glance. Many photographs show only their surfaces in various degrees of darkness. In some instances – *Untitled (Brass and Blue)*, for example – it is the faint reddish light of an "EXIT" sign that allows a glimpse of the photographed sculptures. Other images, such as *Untitled*

*(Reflection)* and *Untitled (Sfumato)*, show ambient light reflected on the works' anodized aluminum surfaces, creating the impression of a sunset. But it can also happen that a viewer finds themselves confronted only with a disorienting range of dark, abstract-seeming shades, as in *Untitled (First Night)*, for example. The longer one looks at Lawler's exceptionally large-scale works, the stronger the spell they cast. The experience of them is immersive, triggering eye reactions similar to those we know from dark nights and unlit rooms: the pupil, retina, optic nerve and brain re-adjust to the image's new lighting conditions to allow us to see better and more, make out smaller and finer details, perceive the works with growing clarity. In a sense, these photographs – created in the museum's nocturnal hours – prompt a kind of night vision, an adaptation of the eye to the dark. They succeed in nothing less than transforming the viewer's visual perception.

Even beyond their visual quality, Lawler's images are characterized by a striking aesthetic density. The aluminium plates on which they are printed give the photographs themselves a sculptural quality. Their materiality mirrors Judd's works in that regard. Viewers stand confronted with a sober, yet almost entrancing beauty, one that draws focus to the smallest details and subtlest shifts in perception. The captured shades and hues of night have an abstract poetry all their own – broad, almost painterly graduations of dim and shadow. It is a poetry that not only makes palpable the emptiness of the exhibition spaces at night, it also lends Donald Judd's depicted sculptures a striking new aura. We literally see them in a new light. Lawler strikes an astonishing balance here: she simultaneously lifts the veil on the nocturnal museum and keeps its mystery intact.

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Louise Lawler (\*1947, Bronxville, New York) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Selected solo exhibitions include *Andy in Chicago*, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago (2019), *She's Here*, Sammlung Verbund, Vienna (2018), *WHY PICTURES NOW*, MoMA, New York (2017), *Adjusted*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2013), *(Selected)*. *Louise Lawler*, Albertinum, Dresden (2012), *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures (looking back)*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2006), *In and Out of Place: Louise Lawler and Andy Warhol*, Dia:Beacon, New York (2005), and *Louise Lawler and Others*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel (2004). Selected group exhibitions include Fondazione Prada, Venice (2021), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2020), Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2020, 2017, 2016), Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2019, 2016, 2012, 2009, 2003), Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2006, 2004, 1991, 1988), MoMA, New York (2019, 2010, 1999), MoMA PS1, New York (2019, 2015) MUMOK, Vienna (2015, 2011), Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2014, 2003) and the Whitney Museum, New York (2013, 2002, 2001, 2000), which additionally featured the artist in its 1991, 2000, and 2008 biennials.

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