

CRITICS' PICKS

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New York

Barney Kulok

NICOLE KLAGSBRUN GALLERY

532 West 24th Street

September 13–October 27

The austere geometry and muscular presence of architect Louis Kahn's late designs infuses the photographs Barney Kulok has taken of the Four Freedoms Park. In this exhibition, however, one won't find conventional documentation of the park's allée of linden trees, its open granite "room" at Roosevelt Island's southern tip, or its bust of Franklin D. Roosevelt created by Jo Davidson. Kulok, who was granted access last year to the construction site, has instead brought back chiaroscuro fragments—moody gelatin silver prints that demonstrate remarkable tonal range and control but explain little about the late master's final design. As often as not, Kulok seems simply to be photographing whatever was resting at his feet. The results, however, are quietly thrilling.

In addition to distilling something of Kahn's design principles, these twenty-three images also demonstrate that Kulok has deeply internalized the legacy of Minimalist and post-Minimalist sculpture. One can walk through the gallery's two rooms assigning to individual photographs entries from Richard Serra's 1967–68 *Verb List*. "To scatter": *Untitled (Cobble Constellation)* (all works cited, 2011) depicts a chance array of loose granite paving blocks resting atop those already laid in neat rows. "To suspend": *Untitled (Improvised Plumb Line)*, an image of a dangling brick, isolated against a dark, pockmarked wall. "To heap": *Untitled (Joint Filler)*, a pile of the eponymous material that exhibits such sharp contrasts between light and dark as to seem unreal, like a Photoshop tweak or a darkroom mistake. Others, with their bent wires and bits of stone and wood and earth, call to mind Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson, or Carl Andre. The photographs' charcoal-rubbed wooden frames give them a solidity, an objectness, that further aligns them with this sculptural precedent—and with Kahn's resolutely tactile architecture. Visitors' experiences of the park will undoubtedly range widely. For viewers of these images, Kulok has expanded that range still further, and tapped into something elemental that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.



Barney Kulok, *Untitled (Joint Filler)*, 2011, gelatin silver print, 29 x 40".

— Brian Sholis