

DEREK ELLER GALLERY



Fiesta Fence, 1979, toned gelatin silver print, 16 x 20 inches

North Room: Thomas Barrow

From the Series Cancellations

February 20 – March 21, 2026

**Opening Reception: Friday, February 20,
6–8 pm**

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present a historic exhibition of photographs by Thomas Barrow (1938-2024). Beginning in the 1960's, Barrow pioneered new photographic methods and challenged the limited physicality of photography by pushing the medium into unprecedented forms. His series *Cancellations* (1973-1981), a selection of which will be on view, is a quintessential example of this innovation.

In *Cancellations*, Barrow responded to the disparate photographic trends of the mid-70's: the survey-like, documentary approach to the American landscape as practiced by New Topographics photographers like Bernd and Hilla Becher, and the desire to utilize photography in a more manipulative, experimental fashion. To that end, he shot banal landscapes and interiors and then aggressively tore through the emulsion on the negatives with an ice pick, marking them with an X. In other instances, Barrow abraded the negative with sandpaper or punched it with holes. In many, there is a considered effort to use the disturbance as a subtle comment on the composition. A sandpaper rubbing echoes the erosion of land in *Field Abrasion*, an X slices across the telephone wires in *Cut*.

Barrow's chosen terrain was mainly the Southwest, with forays into California. His images of the gritty and sometimes lunar-like New Mexican desert are particularly notable, given his commitment to Albuquerque where he lived and worked for much of his life. The otherworldly *Fiesta Fence* pictures the annual autumn hot air balloon festival, where balloons descend on the city of Albuquerque like alien spaceships. Barrow composed the scene from behind a fence, with his jagged cancellation X snagging on the barbed wire.

From his early days as a student of Aaron Siskind and throughout a career of over fifty years, Barrow staked a firm place for himself within the history of fine art photography. An iconoclast and intellectual, he is a forerunner for the generation of contemporary artists concerned with pushing the limits of photography.

Thomas Barrow has been featured in recent group exhibitions such as *The '70s Lens: Reimagining Documentary Photography* at National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C; *Sightlines: Photographs from the Collection* at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; and *Site Reading* at The Morgan Library, New York, NY. His work is in numerous public

collections including the Hammer Museum, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art, and The Museum of Modern Art. Barrow had a mid-career retrospective at LACMA and SFMoMA in 1986. This will be his fifth solo exhibition at the Gallery.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 38 Walker Street between Broadway and Church Street. Hours are Tuesday – Saturday, 10am to 6pm, and by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com.