

ARTFORUM

Nancy Holt

TUFTS UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY
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The first survey of Nancy Holt's work is now on view at the art gallery of her alma mater, where she majored in biology in the late 1950s. It is a kind of homecoming for an artist whose engagement with the postwar American landscape has taken her far afield and expanded the horizon of sculpture in turn. The show is accompanied by a lavish monograph—the first on the artist thus far—which was published last year, when the survey debuted at Columbia University's Wallach Gallery.

The pieces on view were made between 1966 and 1980, and include photographs and videos of well-known Earthworks such as *Sun Tunnels*, 1976, as well as little-known artist's books. Surprisingly, the 1960s works reveal a completely new early Holt. *Crossword Work*, 1966, for instance, is a crossword puzzle on a sheet of graph paper with self-reflexive clues such as WHAT A NAUMAN WORK SOMETIMES APPEARS TO BE (ALSO A MATERIAL IN HESSE'S WORK). In dialogue with the remnants of the modernist grid and concrete poetry, these pieces testify to Holt's early preoccupation with abstraction. Here, that abstraction is language; shortly after she made these pieces, it would move off the page and out of the gallery, rediscovering the map, the star constellation, and the surveyor's tools.

Even as Holt expands sculpture's possibilities, she returns us to the origins of photography. The circle, which structures so much of her work, evokes photography's first frame, before the rectangular box disciplined the oculus of the camera obscura. The photographic trope produces a spatially disorientating experience, as if the viewer could be either surveying through a telescope or peering into a keyhole. Newly evident, as well, is how Holt's work consistently sets us on the ground, only to have us look up at the sky, as in the site-specific *Hydra's Head*, 1974, whose arrangement of concrete cylinders in a riverbank corresponds to the eponymous constellation above.

— Jordan Troeller



Nancy Holt, *Hydra's Head*, 1974, concrete, water, dimensions variable. Installation view, Artpark, Lewiston, New York.

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