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REVIEWS PARIS

William Anastasi Finds Beauty in What Isn't There

The late Conceptualist's site-specific works turn absence and removal into a perceptual labyrinth.

Galerie Jocelyn Wolff

By Barry Schwabsky



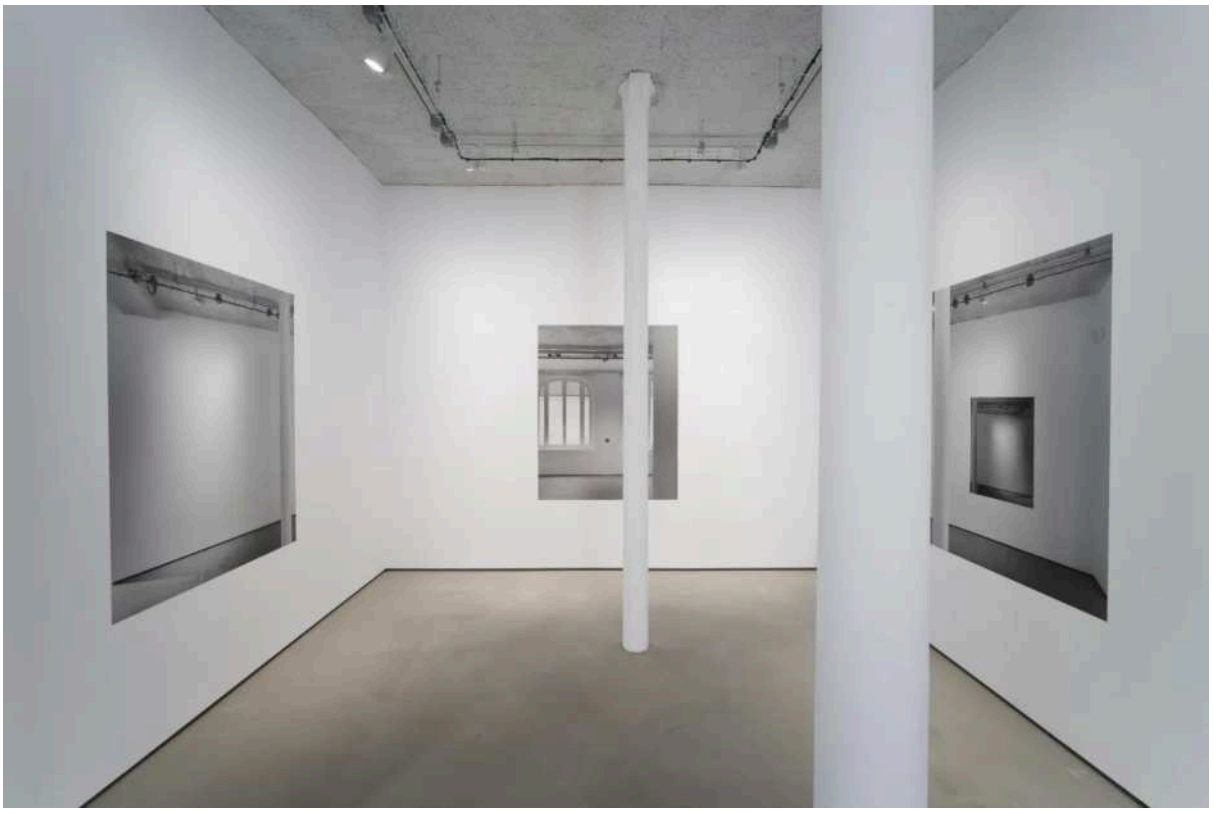
William Anastasi, *You're Through*, 1964–1965/2026, wall, shelf, dimensions variable. Photo: François Doury.

Through August 14, 2026—Among the best-known works by first-generation American Conceptualist William Anastasi are his "Wall Removals," from 1965 to 1967. *Issue*, 1966, is made by removing a floor-to-ceiling strip of the wall's plaster surface, with the debris left piled at its foot. The work is distinctly sculptural and employs both the traditional modes: on the wall, *per via di levare*, as Michelangelo had it (the subtractive mode, carving) and

via di porre (the additive mode, or modeling) on the floor. But the piece has a painterly dimension, too: The marks left by carving out the vertical band correspond to brushstrokes, and the verticality of the form inevitably echoes Barnett Newman's "zips."

Eleven mostly early works by Anastasi, who died in 2023 at the age of ninety, make up "exhaling, then inhaling." Curated by Anastasi's widow and fellow artist Dove Bradshaw, this tight selection focuses on works whose manifestation is physically or visually inseparable from the exhibition space—works that in principle cannot be moved but only remade. For another wall removal, *You're Through*, 1965, what's called for is not the scraping away of a single layer, but rather the total elimination of a large, roughly elliptical area of wall to reveal the underlying studs and wood lath; the resulting shards of rubble sit on a wooden shelf that has been built across the width of the gaping hole. Seen together, the works suggest the range of possibilities Anastasi found within this simple subtractive paradigm. And they also remind us that, in fact, the method is not truly subtractive: Nothing goes to waste, because the remains of the action of removal become part of the work rather than being discarded.

The realization of works such as Anastasi's might be compared to performances of a musical score: No particular performance of, say, the "Moonlight Sonata" is equivalent to the work in itself—though what wouldn't one give to know how Beethoven himself played it. Today, after the deaths of artists such as Anastasi, Mel Bochner, and Lawrence Weiner, some of their works have to be scrupulously reinterpreted in order to be shown again. In Anastasi's case, Bradshaw is for now the person in the best position to do this, and "exhaling, then inhaling" makes a convincing case for these works, which can seem simple and austere but possess great resonance. Anticipating what would later be dubbed institutional critique, they are, however, less concerned with uncovering ideological givens than with finding overlooked sources of beauty.



William Anastasi, ***Continuum***, **1968/2026**, variable quantity of gelatin silver prints mounted on aluminum, 60″ × 48″ each. Installation view. Photo: François Doury.

Consider the photographically based work *Continuum*, 1968, for instance. The piece calls for photographs to be displayed in the room where they have been taken, each showing what a mirror would have shown if it were installed in that spot. The result amounts to a kind of perceptual labyrinth where one is always on the inside looking out—and always absent from the place where one's reflection ought to be. In any case, the photographs seen in *Continuum* are not the artwork; the artwork is a certain relationship between a space and the images we make of it, and any time this piece is reinstalled, new photographs have to be made. The point is always to perceive any place differently.

It's possible, even in the artist's absence, to show some works for the first time. This show includes an installation that was conceived in 1968 but only shown in a fragmentary manner at that time; circumspectly, it is given a description rather than a title on the gallery checklist, and no date is specified, as if to acknowledge its ambiguous status as a work. Anastasi called for eight video monitors to display live views of the corners of the room in which they are placed. Here, just four corners are shown, so the artist's plan is still not fully realized. Even so, and as is often the case with Anastasi's work, the effect is surprisingly disconcerting. Here you are, the

piece seems to say, and yet what it keeps showing you is: Here you are *not*. Likewise, one could say of this show: Here is Anastasi, yet here he is not.



William Anastasi, *Video tablets with live cameras trained on the corners of any given room* (detail), 1968/2026, monitors, live video feed, cameras, dimensions variable. Photo: François Doury.

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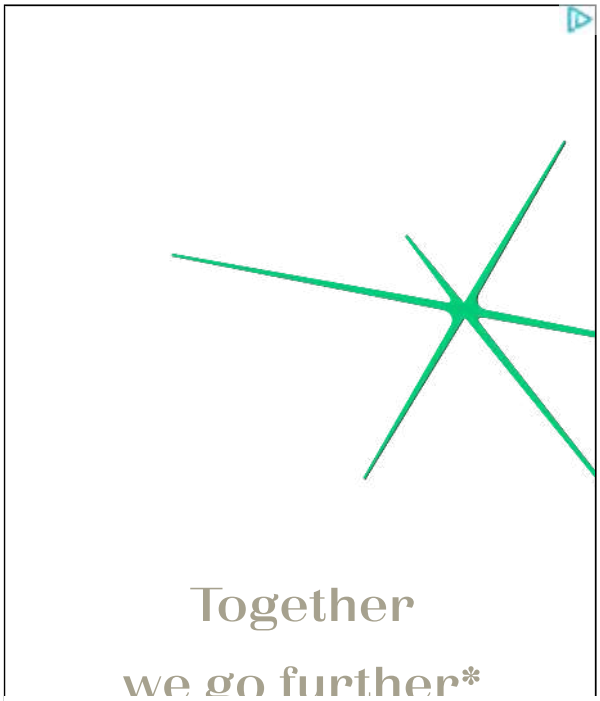
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