Candida Höfer

Showcase at Impromptu Storefront

11.03 ◆ 30.06.2022

The Renaissance Room in Candida Höfer's Casa da Musica I Porto 2006 stands conspicuously empty. The artist is well known for photographing empty public spaces. In many of her other images, elaborately framed paintings or endless shelves of books reveal to us a museum or library. In this image, the only indication of how this room might be used is the illuminated doorway on the left. The effect is to invite we viewers to occupy the temporarily empty spaces of her images and allow us to be absorbed by the wealth of detail, as if we were potential visitors. This effect is magnified by the sheer dimension of the print (2.21m x 1.75m), now showcased at Impromptu Storefront. In a small print, or on an electronic screen, details smaller than a human can be difficult to perceive. But as the image grows, the space also grows and fills with infinite details, like a mathematical fractal that expands and replicates the closer we observe it. Eventually, we enter the space ourselves, free to analyze it for its own sake for as long as we like. We soon begin to fill the void of people with our own memories, true or fabricated, of visiting similar spaces. Like the building-sized panoramas and dioramas of the 19th century–the grandparents of the enormous screens in today's cinemas–Höfer's images hold us enrapt as the drama unfolds in our mind's eye on the stages of her photographs.

Without a title, the iridescent tiles and bright white floor framing a heavy fabric curtain in this image would be completely unmoored from time and space. The titles Höfer elects are in fact an inalienable part of her artwork. They function as a classification system, indicating to the viewer the place (i.e. Casa da Música), the number in the series (i.e. I), the location (i.e. Porto), and the year (i.e. 2006). This breathless concatenation of data illuminates a path to a specific time and place in the world, much as a call number will lead us to a specific shelf and book in a library. As a body of work, these intentional image-title pairings form an archive amassed over four decades of phoatographing around the globe and to Höfer as their archivist. Far from being an objective and neutral collector, Derrida found the archivist to be an active shaper of the past and the future and the archiving process itself an act of social creation.[1] As its mediator and interpreter, what sort of archive has Höfer shaped for us? Her lens focuses exclusively on publicly accessible spaces in baroque, modern, and contemporary structures. Together, these depictions form an archive of post-enlightenment western cultural expression. By inviting us to view and inhabit these spaces, even if at a distance, Höfer attests to their importance not as symbols of historic power and wealth, but as contemporary vessels for the empowerment of their inhabitants. We are not made to gaze in awe at the magnificence of the structures seen from the outside. Rather, we are invited to meet with our neighbors inside, where we may, as Höfer describes, communicate, learn, relax, and refresh ourselves.[2]

Choosing a single image to hang in this storefront to represent Höfer's oeuvre is like choosing a single book to represent the Library of Congress or Bibliothéque Nationale de France¬–it is not possible. Far from being a super image, Casa da Musica I Porto 2006 is an inviting image. The bold geometry of Rem Koolhaas' design is magnified by Höfer's wide field of view and use of converging lines. The resulting image is very graphic, working at a distance to draw viewers nearer, beckoning them to enter through the illuminated doorway within it. The tiles of the Renaissance Room and the pavement outside the storefront blend in the reflection of the window. Passersby stand in the viewing gallery of this open-air panorama, and see themselves reflected in the dark, heavy curtain at the center of the photograph. The lines in the tilework no longer vanish on an imagined point of the Porto skyline, but instead point to Macau and its citizens who are free to inhabit that space day or night. In the tradition of storefronts from New York's SoHo to Paris' Galeries Lafayette, Impromptu Storefront brings artwork from the bare walls of the gallery to the most fundamental public space: the street. In so doing, the border between public and private spaces is blurred, amplifying the content of the storefront, and impelling it towards the public space. As such, Casa da Musica I Porto 2006 becomes part of the public space more than 13,000km away. We are all invited to dwell within those walls and pass through that illuminated door, a gateway to Höfer's grand archive for all.

Valley Center,
California, 26 February 2022

Hugo Teixeira
Board of Directors
Ephemera Public Space Cooperative

1. Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." Diacritics 25, nº. 2 (995): 17.

2. Gronert, Stefan. "Photographic Emancipation." In The Dusseldorf School of Photography, 26. New York: Aperture, 2010.



Casa da Música I Porto 2006

Collector's Corner

An authorized limited edition of this particular work will be available for interested collectors and connoisseurs who appreciate an international artist whose work is collected by the major museums such as MoMA, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Kunsthaus Bregenz, just to name a few. Part of the sales will be reverted to Ephemera Public Space Cooperative, strategizing a long-term sustainability plan for independent curatorial projects.

Candida Höfer

Born in Eberswalde, Germany in 1944, Candida Höfer attended the Kunstacademie Düsseldorf from 1973 to 1982. Whilst there she studied film with the Danish filmmaker Ole John and photography under the influential photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher, who also taught noted Düsseldorf School photographers Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Axel Hütte and Thomas Ruff. From 1997 to 2000, she taught as professor at the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe. In 2002, Candida Höfer participated in documenta 11. In 2003 she represented Germany at the Biennial in Venice (together with the late Martin Kippenberger). In 2018 she was recipient of the Outstanding Contribution to Photography award, as part of the Sony World Photography awards. She is based in Cologne.

Known for her meticulously composed, large-scale, color images of architectural interiors, Höfer's oeuvre explores the structure, presentation, and influence of space. Interested in the psychological impact of design and the contrast between a room's intended and actual use, Höfer has focused her lens on cultural and institutional buildings such as libraries, hotels, museums, concert halls, and palaces. Whilst devoid of people, the images allow us to consider the role of their missing inhabitants. The large-scale nature of the work invites the viewer to linger over the architectural details and contemplate the subtle shifts in light that make up the character of the space.

Institutional Support

This event has a project grant from Goethe-Institut Hongkong. Promotional information was cordially extended by the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany for Hong Kong and Macau SARs.

Date and time

Opening will take place on Friday, 11 March at 6.30pm in Macau, at Impromptu Storefront and be officiated by representatives of the supporting institutions. The exceptional showcase will be on display until 30 June 2022.

Address

Travessa Inácio Baptista, 14–A, r/c, Macau

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