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SABINE HORNIG

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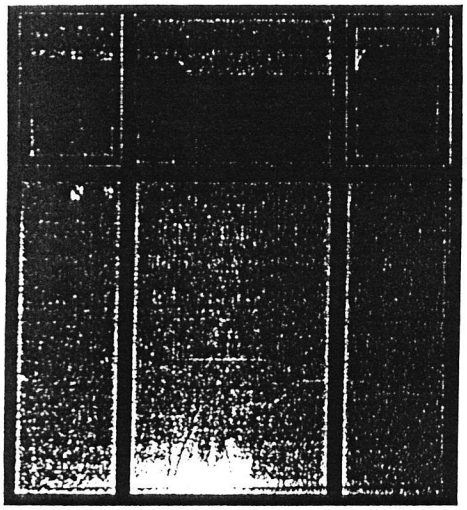

Sabine Hornig, *Window with Door*, 2002, color photograph and Perspex, 66⅛ x 58¼".

In Germany modernism arguably found its fullest expression in architecture. In a land without a Picasso or a Matisse, a Malevich or a Rodchenko, it was figures like Mies and Gropius who supplied the Teutonic part in the great avant-garde fugue of the twentieth century. This may be one reason that contemporary German artists have consistently trained their cameras (postmodernism's favored tool) on the built environment. Architectural photography has been coming out of Germany steadily for decades now, first from Bernd and Hilla Becher, then from the procession of star graduates from their master class at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. More recently a lesser-known generation of Germans—including Candida Höfer, Oliver Boberg, and Heidi Specker—has used photography to subvert the social claims of modernist architecture in new ways. In her second New York solo exhibition, Berlin-based artist Sabine Hornig built on these critiques while setting off in a different direction: mixing straight photography with architectural sculpture to create a suite of works with complex phenomenological import.

Hornig presented four new pieces here: one large photograph and three sculptures. Like her other recent photographic offerings, Hornig's *Window with Door* (all works 2002) is a life-size image of a window whose frame is congruent with the edge of the Perspex-mounted print itself. Literalizing the Albertian idea of the picture-as-window, Hornig's photograph looks strikingly like an aperture in the wall. On closer inspection, the highly detailed image yields more nuanced readings. It is full of deliberately disorienting reflections: Are we inside a building looking out or outside looking in? The unexpected absence of the photographer's silhouette among the murky forms adds to the confusion. This collapse of interior and exterior, so central to classic modernist architecture—think of Mies's Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, probably Hornig's closest reference—raises questions about the role of built space in the formation of identity. Here Hornig's presence is reflected in a document of absence that speaks to the failure of modernist utopian promises of universal inclusiveness.

Modernism's shortcomings are also brought to bear in Hornig's sculptures. Each re-creates a banal architectural form that provides its generic title. *Bus Stop*, *Storefront*, and *Entrance* are pared-down, meticulously stuccoed wooden constructions painted in washed-out pastel hues (*Storefront* is a hybrid of Hornig's mediums, incorporating a photographic-transparency "window"). Short on ornament and detail, these modernist-derived objects are long on eerieness. Their charge stems from Hornig's sensitive manipulation of scale: They have been reduced from the size of their source buildings so that the roofs come exactly to the artist's eye level. This is, of course, the point at which the architecture becomes functionless—at which the bus stop becomes a model and Hornig's constructions become art. Made uninhabitable, if only just barely, and stripped of the function that supposedly dictated their form, the buildings are transformed into objects of contemplation, and their latent strangeness emerges: We are left with hollow, impersonal, even brutal shells that conjure feelings of alienation and imprisonment. By subtly tweaking our most basic sensory perceptions, Hornig's smart, resonant work challenges both the supposed transparency of modernist architecture and, more compelling, its attendant claims to an unmediated universality.

—*Jordan Kantor*