

CANDIDA HÖFER'S DÜSSELDORF MEMORIES

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“Love architecture for its silence,” Gio Ponti once wrote, “its secret and powerful song.” One of the German photographer Candida Höfer’s greatest talents is her ability to amplify the whisper-quiet melodies of great buildings, especially grand European spaces both past and present. In a new exhibition at Sean Kelly, entitled “From Düsseldorf,” Höfer trains her experienced eye on some of the most iconic buildings of the city where she received her first photographic training.

Höfer studied under one of modern photography’s great power duos, Bernd and Hilla Becher, whose restrained series of industrial building typologies like grain silos and water towers created a rarified and compelling alphabet. Likewise, Höfer’s work displays a great respect for the order and rationality implicit in good architecture, but her work is also often imbued with sinister undertones about the nature of power, intimidation, and the social order. Sometimes Höfer employs extreme angles to dizzy and disorient, but often her compositions are straightforward studies in single-point perspective, in which the overwhelming scale and supernaturally intricate detail of her subjects is enough to make the point.

The photos in “From Düsseldorf” were captured in castles, baroque cathedrals, and halls, and even a opera house. Eerily devoid of occupants, the interiors of these grand spaces become subjects themselves, abstract, mute, seductive, and majestic, conduits for our most deeply entrenched social rituals. Like her countrymen Thomas Struth and Andreas Gursky, there is a certain detachment to Höfer’s work that somehow makes it all the more affective. “From Düsseldorf” takes a cinematically wide angle view of architecture, exposing its mechanisms and tools for ordering the rhythms of life and imbuing gatherings of all types with rich arrays of meaning.

“From Düsseldorf” is on view through Saturday at Sean Kelly, 475 Tenth Avenue, New York. All images © Candida Höfer, Köln / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York.