

SEANKELLY

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Wallpaper*

Candida Hofer at Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong



Candida Hofer work in situ at Ben Brown Fine Arts in Hong Kong

Ben Brown Fine Arts' new Hong Kong outpost is the first gallery dedicated to Western contemporary art in the city. Opened at the end of 2009, it has introduced residents to big names like Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha and Lucio Fontana, and dabbled in the concept of design art with a Ron Arad pop-up show. Now photography is having its moment in focus, with an exhibition of new works by Candida Höfer.

The German photographer's latest series, taken in Naples and Florence, includes her characteristically powerful portraits of vast, empty interiors. Like Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth and Axel Hütte, Höfer is part of the Düsseldorf School of photography - a group of students who trained under Bernd and Hiller Becher, known for their neutral analyses of public buildings. But there is nothing dry about her architectural studies. The sense of human presence in her work is all the more tangible in its absence.

Ben Brown Fine Arts also exhibited some of Höfer's works alongside pieces by the likes of Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne at last month's art fair, ArtHK 2010. Here the gallery was joined by an extensive flock of international names - lured by China's growing breed of collectors - including Hauser & Wirth, Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin and Gagosian Gallery, which is also about to open a permanent space in Hong Kong.

Here we caught up with Ben Brown himself, to find out his thoughts on the Hong Kong arts scene.

Why did you decide to open a gallery in Hong Kong?

After two highly successful shows in Hong Kong it was only natural to open a gallery there. Personally, my family has lived there for over 50 years.

How is the arts scene evolving there?

It's more vibrant than everyone gives it credit for. The collectors are avid for knowledge. What is missing in the cultural equation is high minded institutions showing great art and a serious debate with critics. Hong Kong's arts scene has already come a long way from the days when it was about pure investment and speculation, and it is now about genuine interest.

What kind of impact do you think the West Kowloon Cultural District will have?

Huge - if it happens. The people of Hong Kong will finally be able to see excellent art, assuming it is properly curated on a regular basis.

Please describe the new space in the Pedder Building?

It's a bespoke gallery space designed by John Parson-trained architect Andre Fu. It's located in the iconic Pedder building, built in 1924. With its 12 ft high ceilings, and light wooden floors, it's a practically unheard of space for central Hong Kong.

What is your intention with the Hong Kong gallery?

To show world class international art on a level which Hong Kong has not been used to but will enjoy more and more. I am especially proud to show one man exhibitions so that Hong Kong's collectors can really get to know the work of artists in depth, rather than just perusing auction catalogues. High on my agenda is bringing the artists and critics out to Hong Kong so that they can speak and discuss their work with collectors.

What attracts you to the work of Candida Höfer?

She presents extraordinary interiors that are usually bustling with people, devoid of human activity, leaving a lot to our imagination.

What did you show at ArtHK?

A varied selection of works by internationally acclaimed artists, including Not Vital, Claude and François-Xavier Lalanne, Vik Muniz, Lee Ufan, Tseng Kwong Chi, Henri Matisse, Candida Höfer, Caio Fonseca, Tony Bevan, Lucian Freud, Yan Pei-Ming, Marc Quinn, Gerhard Richter, and a three metre long photograph by Andreas Gursky entitled 'Hong Kong Börse II' amongst others.



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'Palazzo Medici-Riccardi Firenze I 2008' by Candida Hofer



'Biblioteca Marucelliana Firenze I 2008' by Candida Hofer



'Reggia di Portici Portici I 2009' by Candida Hofer



Hofer's work on show at the Ben Brown Fine Arts stand at ArtHK 2010