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LOS ANGELES

Featured in the exhibition *Spring Through Winter* (MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House; January 7—February 20, 2005), Los Angeles based photographer **Amir Zaki's** newest body of photographs is a strangely disorienting investigation into architectural entropy and the surrounding California landscape. These large and monumental ultrachrome prints obliquely reveal that the impossible might very well become the norm, that it is in itself a necessary component of freedom and the creative imagination.

Zaki's own passionate interest in California's hybridized buildings is more than evident. It is reflected not only in scale, but in their presentation as weirdly unconventional structures symbolizing the possibility of some new fangled utopia. Zaki's suite of images includes cantilevered exterior architecture, swimming pools seen from the air, and interior fireplaces. Resurfaced, refaced and restructured following earthquakes, renovation projects or simple redecoration, these buildings stand in for paradise by relying on makeshift strategies which Zaki's images expose. These buildings are also at once mythically old and new. Much the way a faded Los Angeles star restructures her face and body to conceal her true age, these "new" buildings hide their support structures, except when the artist discovers them. If the exhibition's title invokes aging, cyclical time and time's passage, the photographed subjects embody them through space, as the artist takes us on a journey from the outside, represented by the nearly impossible blue of the swimming pool (itself, an iconic Los Angeles mainstay), toward the interior and the fireplace, as the winter months progress.

Disorienting images abound. In *Press Pool*, 2004, a bizarrely disembodied ball falls through the air, descending toward the protective netting that covers the expanse of the pool. The image is oddly threatening. The netting is designed to prevent children from falling into the water and drowning, and yet the presence of the falling red ball connotes a

metaphoric loss of innocence. The image is also spatially destabilizing, as the ball seems simultaneously very close and very far away. A structure hangs precariously over the edge of a mountain, in another untitled image, revealing its support structure.

The cantilevered structures appear vulnerable, and resonate as unstable psychologically-charged landmarks. They are receptacles of longing, or victims of some manic designer's dangerously utopic vision. Their images inflect time with impendence. The buildings exist on the brink of falling. At any moment, they might snap from their flimsy moorings and kill us, even as we stand at



Amir Zaki, *Untitled (OH_03X)*, 2004, lightjet digital type c photograph, framed dimensions: 88.5 x 69.5 inches (courtesy of the artist)

such a great distance, looking in. The most subtle and compelling work in the show are Zaki's series of fireplaces, most of which are not functional and stand denuded, or walled up, waiting perhaps for excavation. These interiors are claustrophobic even in the midst of the excessive wealth and expansiveness around them. Edgar Allan Poe would definitely have been interested in these images dominated by stillness and an implied doom. Time stands still. Any perceived distance here is simply the result of faulty perception. Do people really live in these houses? If they do, perhaps it is only a matter of time before the cold rooms they live in fall over the cutting edge they live by.

Time and distance are also given literal form in a series of works exhibited simultaneously in

the project room at the prestigious Roberts & Tilton Gallery, a few miles from the MAK Center. Entitled *south...west...cold...water...south...west...studio...city*, this series charts the course of a plane through the sky above one of Zaki's precarious and quintessentially LA houses. The sky is blue, the house formidable. As luck would have it, the small orange plane high above in the sky is flying in the direction of the Schindler House. The plane looks as though it might be on a downward descent and, once again, we are reminded of Zaki's interest in temporality and the gap between literal space and the imagination. The two may eventually conjoin, though the results may well be dangerous.

—Eve Wood

RIVERSIDE, CA

To a large extent, a city's topography reveals something of its culture, reflecting the dialectic between the built environment and the collective psyche. Curated by Jan Tumlir, *The Lateral Slip* (Sweeney Art Gallery, University of California at Riverside, January 8—February 26, 2005) presents a thoughtful selection of drawings, photographs, videos, sculptures and installations that, created by twenty-two artists, reference 1970s New Topographics photography as they take Los Angeles as their subject.

Represented here by **Ed Ruscha's** *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966, and **Bas Jan Ader's** *In Search of the Miraculous*, 1973, New Topographics documented the social landscape. Maintaining an emotional distance, these artists approached their subjects anthropologically. The contemporary works showcased in *The Lateral Slip*, however,

shun neither subjectivity nor irony and reveal a slight discontent. Exploring the relationship between humankind's alienation from the environment and the industrializing topography, they invoke a spiritual weariness.

Showing a preference for scenes of banal, everyday life, many works focus on the damaged landscape's visual potentials. Playing with this theme which is quite antithetical to LA's pretense, **John Divola's** large panoramic color photographs, *1500 Block of PCH* and *10900 Block of Wilmington Ave.*, 1999, use oversaturated hues and a remarkable crispness to call attention to an ordinary, even drab scene with an adult book store on one block, and a liquor store on the other.

In a similar vein, **Mark Flores' City Walker**, 2002-2003, chronicles a pedestrian's visual apprehensions. Displayed as a slideshow on a small PowerBook, these digital images turns the mundane and even ugly scenes often ignored by the more aesthetically-wanton eye—garbage cans, overflowing grocery carts, sidewalk cracks stuffed with cigarette butts, dried up palms—into repositories of stories.

If no prominent human figure anchors many of the works, the artist's presence thoroughly permeates them. The artists are very successful in putting us in their place, and in so doing, implicating us in their voyeurism. After all, there is no hiding from the camera in LA's so-called society of spectacle. In **Kevin Hanley's** series of oddly-timed color photographs, human figures are almost, but not quite central. In *Rear View*, 1996, an over-the-shoulder angle from the back of a car into the driver's rearview mirror keeps the subject obscured just enough to arouse curiosity. Similarly, in *Irregular*



John Divola, *10900 Block of Wilmington Ave, Los Angeles, CA*, 1999, lightjet color photographs, 16.5 x 50.5 inches (courtesy of the artist)