

## GALLERIES



VIVID: Barbara Probst's "Exposure #49: N.Y.C., 555 8th Avenue, 05.21.07, 4:02 p.m." (2007) shows 12 views of a model surrounded by cameras in the expanse of a white-walled studio.

G FINE ART

# Stimulating serendipity

BY MARK JENKINS

It's impossible to be in two places at once, at least by the rules of classic physics. But filmmakers can simulate multiple points of view by cutting quickly between different camera angles. Barbara Probst, whose large-format multiphoto pieces are on display at G Fine Art, does something similar. She sets up two or more cameras around her subject and releases their shutters simultaneously with a remote control, thus capturing several facets of the same instant. The technique is a bit like the one Akira Kurosawa used for such action epics as "Seven Samurai."

Control is a crucial idea in Probst's work. The German-born photographer, who divides her time between New York and Munich, leaves little to chance. She selects the locations, camera placements, backdrops, models and even the models' clothing. And yet she rejects the latest digital tools for manipulating images, such as Photoshop. At a certain point in the process, Probst cedes power over the picture to serendipity. "There is no privileged point of view," she says — not even hers.

The crux of Probst's ongoing "Exposures" series is simultaneity. While one or more of the images in an individual piece may appear to have been photographed at a different time, she guarantees that they're all in sync. Identified by a number, location, date and time, each is a shadow of a single moment (albeit printed in editions of five).

There are only three pieces in this show, but they use 16 camera angles. The trickiest work comes first: "Exposure #80, Munich studio, 09.09.10, 12:58 p.m." Probst has often employed backdrops to baffle the eye: One view will show, for example, a

rustic scene, while another will reveal that the bucolic vista is an illusion and the actual context is urban. The two-panel "Exposure #80" uses an oversize photograph of everyday items — a brush, a bottle, some tape — behind the same items, sandwiching a model in between. The twinned images seem to defy perspective and are oddly disorienting.

Perhaps because many of them were shot on location in New York, Probst's earlier pieces sometimes evoke crime-scene photos or stills from surveillance video. But these three works were made in a studio and feature vivid colors that make them more sensuous than menacing.

The largest, "Exposure #49, N.Y.C., 555 8th Avenue, 05.21.07, 4:02 p.m.," shows 12 views of a model surrounded by cameras in the seemingly infinite expanse of a white-walled studio. Half the images are black and white, and most of them are close-ups.

Probst hasn't broken any of her self-imposed rules here, but the emphasis is different. There's nothing jarring about "Exposure #49," and the notion that all 12 pictures were shot at once is not perplexing. The piece's most striking aspects are its tidy composition and near-abstract imagery. Some of the frames (all horizontally oriented) are mostly empty, with parts of the model's body outlining a white field in a way that suggests an abstract expressionist canvas. (One of Morris Louis's "Unfurleds," perhaps.) The softer focus of a few segments further adds to the sense that the work is concerned more with color and shape than time.

"Exposure #49" retains much of the agenda of the other pieces in the series, including Probst's ultimate surrender of control: It's the model,



COURTESY ADAM GOLFER

PLACES: Adam Golfer's photographs of sites, such as "Wannsee (Tree in Path)" (2008), are chilly and powerful. Golfer calls his "Kin" series a "personal documentary."

not the artist, who decides when the shutters will be released. But the photographer cropped some of the images — a taboo in her earlier work — and determined which of the frames would be converted to black and white from the original color. The result tips away from conceptualism and toward sheer beauty. "I want to make them seductive," Probst says. "The more rigorous they are, the more seductive I want to make them."

Where Probst's "Exposures" freeze a moment for contemplation, Adam Golfer's photographs seek nothing less than to convey the burden of history. The pictures in his "Kin" are divided between shots of

Germany — contemporaries of the artist, the grandson of Holocaust survivors — and views of seemingly placid sites with infamous connotations. These include Dachau, Nuremberg's Nazi Party rally grounds and the site of the Munich Olympics, where 11 Jewish athletes were murdered by Palestinian militants in 1972.

Golfer calls this photographic series a "personal documentary" and suggests that his German subjects have "uncertain and conflicted feelings about their families' potential Nazi involvement" akin to "the weight I bear from my family's Holocaust history." So what does it mean that most of these Germans look away from the camera, sometimes even turning their backs to it?

That they can't face the gaze of history? Or that Golfer can't quite face them?

The answer may not be either psychological or philosophical, but merely aesthetic. The photographer's images of young Germans (some of them far too young to know such words as "Nazi" and "Holocaust") have a carefully composed indifference. Taken out of the context of the Goethe-Institut show, the individual portraits would evoke only one thread of history: the move of art photography from socially engaged to stylishly detached.

The photos of sites are also chilly but more powerful than the images of people. These locations are witnesses to history, sometimes with many stories to tell: The Munich Olympic Park, for example, contains a "trummerberg," a hill made from rubble left after the Allied bombings during World War II. Unlike in the United States, built on the search for virgin land, Europe constructs and reconstructs itself atop millennia.

Golfer shoots from a distance — as in the Munich photo — or focuses on such tiny details as the outline of a vanished staircase. Viewers can fill in the rest.

style@washpost.com

Jenkins is a freelance writer.

## BARBARA PROBST

on view through June 25 at G Fine Art, 1350 Florida Ave. NE. 202-462-1601. [www.gfineartdc.com](http://www.gfineartdc.com).

## KIN\*: PHOTOGRAPHS BY ADAM GOLFER

on view through June 3 at the Goethe Institut, 812 Seventh St. NW. 202-289-1200.

[www.goethe.de/ins/us/was/en/index.htm](http://www.goethe.de/ins/us/was/en/index.htm).