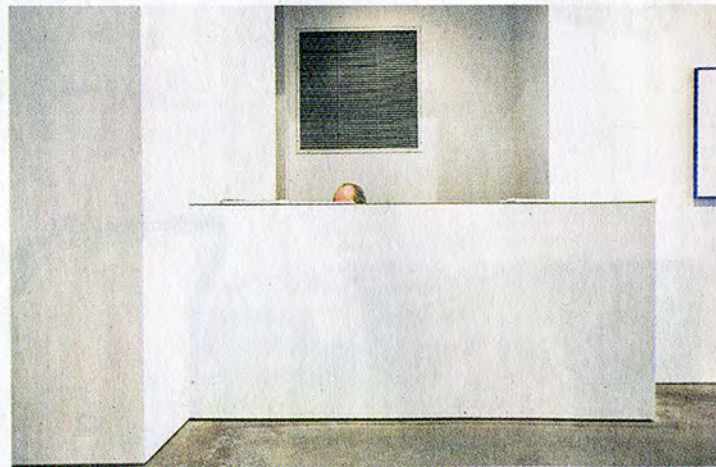


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CURRENTS



STEFAN KIRKEBY

ABOVE, TOP LEFT AND TOP RIGHT, ANDY FREEBERG

PHOTOGRAPHS

What Has the Power of Great Art? Try Asking at the Front Desk

New photographs by Andy Freeberg take aim at the “architecture of intimidation” practiced in the galleries of Chelsea in Manhattan, as one gallery owner, James Danziger, put it. These luminous, comical and slyly trenchant studies of the front desks of big names (and desks) in the art world — including (clockwise from top left) Andrea Rosen, Metro Pictures, Sonnabend and, behind Mr. Freeberg, Cheim & Read — are on view in a show called “Sentry” at Mr. Danziger’s own Chelsea gallery. The first photo was unstaged, Mr. Freeberg

said recently. “I was in Pace Wildenstein, this massive space with this massive desk,” he said, “and all you could see was the top of the head of the person sitting behind it. It seemed like the desks had gotten bigger since my last visit. I took the picture without them ever knowing I’d done it.”

Early this summer, Mr. Freeberg presented his work to a few gallery owners (but to only one of his subjects, a gallery specializing in photographs), using a secure Web site; a day later, the images appeared on a photography blog known as Conscien-

tious (jmcolberg.com). “By the next day, there were 350 hits from 30 countries,” he said. That, presumably, is how one gallery worker whose desk was the subject of a photograph saw the work. “He sent me an e-mail,” Mr. Freeberg said. “He was really upset. He said he thought the work showed a lack of engagement with the subject.”

PENELOPE GREEN