



THE WORK

TOP ROW

Paula Cooper, 2006
Archival pigmented ink print

Sikkema Jenkins, 2006
Archival pigmented ink print

Yossi Milo, 2006
Archival pigmented ink print

BOTTOM ROW

Luhring Augustine, 2006
Archival pigmented ink print

Pace-Wildenstein, 2006
Archival pigmented ink print

Mitchell Innes & Nash, 2006
Archival pigmented ink print

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WHEN I FIRST STARTED GOING to art galleries in New York, there seemed to be two kinds. Uptown, on the East Side, there were rooms carved out of brownstone residences, with spindly-legged chairs, lots of dark wood, and attendants wearing pearls and unplaceable European accents. They never spoke to me; I always felt ignorant and underdressed. The other kind was downtown, in Soho, freshly carved out of illegal residences that had, in turn, been carved out of sweatshops. They had huge windows, pressed tin ceilings and entrances through fire doors after endless flights of stairs. Their attendants wore black clothes and creatively coloured hair. They never spoke to me either. I felt unsophisticated and provincial.

Today the spotlight has moved on. The art galleries of Chelsea are similarly recycled, built in the footprints of warehouses left over from the days when the Hudson River piers handled cargo rather than ice skating rinks, lap pools, cafés and day care centres. They differ from their predecessors in other parts of the city in several ways. They were never residences. The traces of their former use are almost invisible. They were all established at almost the same time — the delirious period in the mid-Nineties when Soho surrendered to the forces of *Armani*, *Prada* and *Chanel*, and the galleries decamped to the west of the city for even larger spaces. Most significantly, they were established with real capital. It cost a lot to rehab a warehouse into a temple of high end esoteric commerce. It required architects, designers and an evolved and specific style that both permitted and encouraged the oversized artwork that characterized those extravagant years.

Andy Freeberg's photographic series *Sentry* is a document of this particular place and time. He has chosen to record the entrance areas of a number of Chelsea art galleries, and secondarily, and intentionally almost

out of sight, the presence of the so-called *gallerinas* who populate them. The spaces are stunning in their similarities: they are white, spare, elegant and perfect (a description equally appropriate for the young women behind the desks). Like the women, the tops of whose heads can barely be seen over a wall or computer monitor, the spaces seem intentionally cold and unfriendly. Despite the ubiquitous potted orchids (exquisite and overpriced parasites themselves) that decorate a number of the poreless, colourless and massive barriers that serve as desks, there are few signs of life or, in Freeberg's words, *of the simple eye to eye contact that affirms our humanity*.

Like most photographs, Freeberg's images will be of even greater interest one hundred years from now. I imagine historians, anthropologists and visitors from other planets studying them with intensity and delight for the information they contain. Freeberg's document feels true to me. It reflects what I see and feel when I run around Chelsea. After all these years of consuming art on walls, I am now comforted by the familiar consensual ritual of mutual invisibility and the certain knowledge that some day the people who never speak to me will be doing it in Williamsburg, Long Island City or Shanghai.

THE WRITER

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