



Jan Kempenaers, *Spomenik #4*, 2007, color photograph on aluminum, 40 x 50".

Jochen Weber. The photographs were hung on a set of four light and loosely positioned walls in the slightly curved space of the exquisite Braem pavilion of the Middelheim. Consisting of an open structure of wooden planks, the delicate exhibition architecture not only afforded an overview of the whole space but also served as a critical backdrop for the material and symbolical weight of the depicted objects.

With "*Spomenik*," Kempenaers manages to avoid a wholehearted celebration of the sometimes peculiar and retrograde character of the monuments, on the one hand, and a cynical exposure of them as gloomy relics of a past political ideology on the other. Still, one missed learning something of the geographical and historical specifics of the monuments—all the photographs are titled merely *Spomenik*, followed by their number in the series. Given the problematic social and historical background of these monuments, there's something unsatisfying about Kempenaers's treatment of them as nothing more than aesthetically appealing objects.

—Wouter Davidts

BERLIN

Viktoria Binschtok

KLEMM'S

It looked as if the gallery had closed up shop. Had the end come for one of the pioneers of Brunnenstrasse, home to Berlin's youngest galleries? All the other white cubes were brightly lit, but Klemm's had blacked-out windows. The space looked abandoned. But the door was not locked. Inside, Viktoria Binschtok showed mostly light-gray photographic images that gleamed under spotlights strong enough to blind anyone emerging from the dismal Berlin winter: One can recognize only outlines in these pictures, which look abstract, like Minimalist paintings—gray striations on gray backgrounds. Only gradually do details appear: a hand waving, the silhouette of a limousine, a head, a broad back. Binschtok, who was born in Moscow in 1972 and moved with her family to West Germany in 1980, used a news video from the Internet as the source for these enlarged frames in which so little can be seen; paparazzi flashbulbs have drowned out everything else. But soon a scenario becomes clear: A couple walks down the stairs, past bodyguards, through an open door into a car, waving and driving off. The images combine to show a slice of celebrity life.

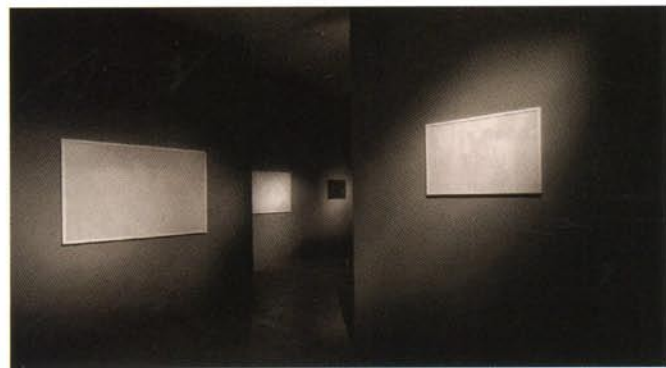
Binschtok's works are an antidote to our daily information overload. They produce a sort of empathy in the viewer, who is put in the place of the stars, blinded by the bright lights just like the figures standing on the red carpet. (Now we understand why they wear sunglasses at

matters in the "*Spomenik*" series. The environs—some surrounding trees, bushes, or rocks—merely serve to indicate scale. The artist does not blow up the images to the spectacular dimensions so common in art photography nowadays; the pictures are small, and placed in delicate white frames.

Kempenaers's distinctive approach further benefited from the specially devised exhibition design, by Antwerp architect Kris Kimpe in collaboration with German artist

night.) The title of the show, "Spectacle," evokes Guy Debord, and now, on the fortieth anniversary of May '68, his claim that society consists exclusively of PR, advertising, and propaganda seems more valid than ever. For Debord, the star was living vicariously for the masses, who could follow along by means of images. He writes of the link between money, power, and pictures: "The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images." Especially in the art world, one might add.

Binschtok has been tracking the circuits of global capital for a while. In her photographs of Louis Vuitton logos on the streets of New York ("LVNY," 2005), for instance, fakes and originals become indistinguishable. The question remains whether the pictures in her "Flash" series (all works 2008) are showing us the climax of the spectacle or its end—after all, the concentrated attention of the camera is destroying the images' actual content. But the celebrity-obsessed viewer will be able to just barely make out the back of Tom Cruise's head, Katie Holmes's silhouette, and the logo of the restaurant next to their favorite Italian place in Mitte. Binschtok's pictures are by-products



View of "Viktoria Binschtok," 2008.

of the tabloid reports on the filming of *Valkyrie* in Berlin, a movie about the would-be assassin of Hitler, Count von Stauffenberg (played by Cruise). A final point of escape from spectacle appears in a triptych, *The Big Media Interest*, three properly lit photographs showing us the crowd of photographers at the Berlin Film Festival. The paparazzi themselves, seen from behind and blocking our view of the subjects of their interest, remain anonymous.

—Daniel Boese

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.

COLOGNE

Janis Avotins

GALERIE JOHNEN + SCHÖTTE

What does the show's title, "I write to you at 20:02 as you wrote to me at 18:08," have to do with Janis Avotins's pictures? At first glance, not much. Perhaps it makes us think of the e-mails that mercilessly follow us everywhere at all times—but as for the pictures themselves, their strength lies in their ability to transcend chronological and locational specificity. Gigantic, for the most part more than ten feet high and sixteen feet across, they seem to resist analysis, and their titles aren't of any more help than that of the show, either. In *Nothing from Nothing*, 2008, a black cloud spreads from the upper right corner of the canvas—or is it a splotch of color run amok? It spreads toward the center in picturesquely overlapping circles, floating upon a light background. At the upper left edge, the background brightens—or is it a cloudy sky allowing a bit of blue to shine through?—while at the