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JORG SASSE
LEHMANN MAUPIN
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Jörg Sasse has refined the role of artist as technician. He scans photographs of architectural forms and prosaic landscapes taken by himself and others—friends and strangers—into his computer and manipulates them by reducing and enlarging scale, shifting focus, and playing with tones and hues. In the process, the found photograph is drained of all sentimental, souvenir, in some cases even deictic value, and the final product, a glossy print bluntly titled with a random four-digit number followed by the year of completion, yields only a trace of its ancestor. Yet some formerly muted or hidden aspect of the original—a singularity, a mood—is revealed. Sasse thus opens a space between photography and painting—more specifically, between the stolid portraiture of Bernd and Hilla Becher's photographs and the fuzzy faux-photography of Gerhard Richter's paintings.

The standout in this show, *8246, 2000*, is a classical composition: field in the foreground, low-lying building in the center, pale blue sky above. But the nondescript white, blue, and red structure, which looks like an industrial depot or storage facility, is cropped in such a way that it seems to extend indefinitely to either side. Incongruously, against the sky behind the building, a spinning fireball of light emanates from a Tilt-a-Whirl, the kind in a traveling carnival that plunks down on the outskirts of town, as in James Joyce's epiphanic story "Araby." But the image is devoid of people, and the straight-on perspective emphasizes not exoticism or fantasy but the stationary building in all its banal and "useful" anonymity. Herein lies the connection to the Bechers (under whom Sasse, a Düsseldorf native, studied): The architecture is made to testify to a loneliness, to unveil a concealment, yet the scene itself still holds on to something inexplicable and can offer no epiphany.

Many of Sasse's buildings have a distinctly East German feel. *1063, 2001*, pictures a small hotel sitting inexplicably in the middle of a grassy field that rises diagonally in the foreground. Six square windows stare blankly at the viewer. In *5924, 2000*, Sasse focuses on the lurid drabness of a commercial nursery. In many of these photographs, nature is ultra-rationalized, leaving only the residue of a now nonexistent sublimity.

One significant departure for Sasse in this show was the inclusion of more abstract, or rather nonfigural works (since they are all technically abstractions). While he has always favored the occasional blur that softens the edges of still-recognizable spaces, some images here approached the indefinable: rain on a windowpane? a highway by a field? zigzagging lights above a lake? In their almost expressive confusion, these photographs contrapuntally enhanced the deadpan "objective" works (after all, Sasse is still a proponent of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*), but as images in their own right they were less convincing.

Sasse's project succeeds in raising fundamental, nigh-Heideggerian questions about the relation between technology and art. For Heidegger, technology (*der Technik*) is not the means to an end we may think it is but rather, "essentially," akin to artmaking (itself akin to poetry)— a bringing forth or expressing of something that was already there. In this (not unproblematic, not unromantic) view, the artist is a kind of medium for art, not the other way around. Though for Heidegger "modern" art ends with van Gogh (and always fixates on the handwrought), Sasse's state-of-the-art technique reveals a rather traditional, even classical aesthetic: one based on the notion that art is not a creation *ex nihilo* but always already a kind of prosthesis.