



JULIAN FAULHABER WASHINGTON

Like a German compound word, *Lowdensitypolyethylene*, the title of Julian Faulhaber's exhibition, evokes banal utilitarianism [Adamson Gallery; April 14—May 26, 2007]. Its decipherment compels the American tongue to systematically sound out the syllables to discover the name of a type of plastic primarily used in the manufacture of food storage containers. In these ten recent large-scale color-saturated photographs of architectural features and furnishings, the idea of plastics is never far away. It hums in the background, surfacing here and there by conveying the pliability, translucency, and industrial versatility of the material or, as in the image of a ceiling, by its direct reference to Tupperware colors. *Lowdensitypolyethylene* presents an environment that borders on the otherworldly, despite the work's general focus on mundane settings and their utilitarian adjuncts.

With many Washington galleries and museums concurrently preoccupied with the achievements and legacy of the city's color field heroes, this exhibition makes a striking first impression. More than the artist's technique and subject matter, it is Faulhaber's hue deployment that makes it stand apart. The glowing intensity of his tones bears no relationship to the Washington color field tradition of plastic marvels—ranging from yards and yards of Magna and acrylic-drenched canvases to Portia Munson's *Pink Project: Contained*, 2007, the latest version of heavily synthetic color investigation. What's more, another kind of plastic operates as a subtle but important dimension of his prints. He glazes his images with matte Plexiglas, enhancing the inherent diaphaneity of *Silk II*, 2005, lending immateriality to solid materials, while also muting reflections disruptive to the viewing experience.

These images owe their unique character to long exposures and carefully chosen perspectives. *Aufgang*, 2005, for example, presents a side view of a smoldering

general, the caller's age, race or social status eludes the available audiovisual data. Their feelings, however, resound clearly. Many express frustration, sometimes repeatedly. While some make the effort to identify themselves, one says nothing and slams down the receiver. Grasping the absurdity of the situation, another merely whistles a pleasant tune.

BUILDING proves fascinating for the way in which it reveals the social, political, and technological impact of a structure that, ultimately, cannot be identified. Casting the viewer as an amateur archeologist, the exhibition opens up a cultural field requiring interpretation and analysis. In doing so, it challenges our assumptions about the recent past. While we can easily relate to the callers' predicament during the power failure, the outdated equipment suggests the facility hails from a more distant past. Given the current state of urban renewal in Washington, D.C., *BUILDING* gives us pause to consider what we may learn from the rediscovery of forgotten structures in our midst.

—John Gayer

such as the rise in vacancy and dramatic decreases in birthrates imply the period of instability. Oliver Jeffers' rearrangement of found objects takes an entirely different tack. Lured by the secrecy surrounding the building's function, Jeffers explores the notion of imperceptibility by painting replicas of some of the archaic dials in unexpected places. Surprise comes into play when viewers find them tucked away in boxes made to hold keys or first aid supplies. This gesture reminds us of the many utility stations intentionally designed to become invisible by harmonizing with surrounding architecture.

Personal comments drive the exhibition's two strongest works. Rory Jeffers' painting *Connection*, 2004-2005, depicts the signal station as a nerve center by juxtaposing map-like circuitry to a quote from transcriptions of employee interviews. Suggesting rust or dry blood, the reddish-brown diagram and words "nothing happened in Belfast that we didn't know about" lead us to ponder what occurred, where, and when. The painting's earth tones, together with its support of discolored fiberboard panels, present a visual opposite of the control room's institutional green walls, the so-called hard facts delineated in Heaney's *Untitled #1*, 2004-2005.

Finally, Duke Riley's moving-image installation *Building*, 2004-2005, breaks from the site's interior and the exhibition's predilection for circuitry, figures, and dials. The work ventures to the receiving end of the station's function, focusing on individuals who have literally found themselves in the dark. The installation combines messages left on an answering machine during a 1985 power outage with low-resolution video footage of the callers' locations. As voices reverberate in the gallery's resonant space, images pass before our eyes, taking us to a Chinese restaurant, a gas station, brick dwellings, and a vacant lot. Any desire to associate a caller's voice with his or her address proves futile. In

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Julian Faulhaber, *Hinterausgang*, 2007, pigment print, 110 x 150 cm, edition of 7 + 1 AP [courtesy of the artist and Adamson Gallery, Washington]; Julian Faulhaber, *Supermarkt*, 2006, pigment print, 120 x 150 cm, edition of 7 + 1 AP [courtesy of the artist and Adamson Gallery, Washington]

orange stairway floating against rich yellow walls. These vivid, contrasting colors flatten the space, making the image read as a bold, hyper-realistic graphic design. As you look a little longer, details such as a white box on the wall and a snippet of a metal railing undermine this two-dimensionality, taking you back to reality. *Hinterausgang*, 2007, and *Andachtsraum*, 2005, similarly taunt us. *Hinterausgang* features a nighttime view of a rear exit photographed from a high angle that distorts relationships of color, texture, and scale. Is this an image of an actual building or a synthetic model? *Andachtsraum* also challenges our perceptive ability. Very carefully framed, this view of a chapel with ambiguously sized window shades initially transforms modernist religious accoutrements into knickknacks on a windowsill.

Faulhaber's photographs are devoid of both people and cultural indicators, which instills the images with a subtle tension. They convey anonymity and a kind of general hypoxia, a nonspecific calamity that engenders a morbid fascination. Deserted views of a loading dock, a supermarket, and a gym emphasize these sites' inherent characteristics. Abandoned, they are familiar yet foreign. In these images, materials as varied as tarmac and corrugated metal panels are made to imply polymeric verisimilitude and to invoke chemical imbalance.

Faulhaber's images show a definite preference for structures and materials evoking a high-tech aesthetic. *Stühle*, 2006, a diagonal view of stacked red chairs, comes dangerously close to product photography. This makes you wonder what he will do next. Faulhaber's lens mediates banal objects and places that don't usually receive more than a passing glance, making them the subjects of detailed visual study. *Lowdensitypolyethylene's* greatest impact lies in the images' ability to alter understanding and restructure time.

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