

ARTFORUM

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Doug Hall, *Wild Blue Yokohama*, 2000  
C-print, 50 x 63 1/4 inches

DOUG HALL  
FEIGEN CONTEMPORARY

Modernism was great for slogans, from Mies's "less is more" and Sullivan's "form follows function" to Rauschenberg's quip about acting in the gap between art and life. Warhol knew it the best, perhaps: Modern artists were often great copywriters. Ironically, art in the information age is less slogan-driven; about all we have is the unattributed, shopworn phrase "photography is the new painting," which didn't really catch on until a few years ago—around the time MoMA acquired the complete set of Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Stills" for a cool million. But it's as loaded as any modernist motto, particularly it treats painting as a painting as a singular well as something that's as a singular practice as well as something that's *over*.

The phrase gains some real currency when you look at the work of American photographer Doug Hall. Hall shares many affinities with the students of Bernd and Hilla Becher—Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, and Thomas Struth. All are known for their large-scale, color-saturated, conceptual photography; all are concerned with how space is organized and how power is asserted in it (following Michel Foucault's inquiry into the "order of things"). But there is something much less insidious about the aesthetic of Hall's works. While Gursky celebrates the sublime beauty of parliaments, exchange floors, and stores, and Höfer and Struth plead the Fifth,

"documenting" with efficient objectivity, Hall focuses on mundane, unglamorous public spaces, marked by telling details: crumbling books in libraries, cracks and fading lines on highways, people who stray into the foreground of the photograph, into the viewer's space.

This show included eleven photographs of Asian exteriors-landscapes, cityscapes, and an example of Hall's "leisurescapes," which tend to focus on public fountains, aquariums, and swimming complexes. (He also takes pictures of architectural interiors, but none were on view here.) *Hong Kong from Robinson Road* (all works 2000) captures an anonymous slice of urban sprawl; its title raises issues of both colonialism and viewpoint (since the road itself isn't visible). *Shinjuku South, Early Evening* shows a dingy square in Tokyo with a young woman's face looming over it on a giant video screen, while *Cua O Quan Chuong (Old East Gate), Hanoi* is a streetscape with less high-tech trappings. The most captivating images in the show were a pair of aerial scenes of riverboats in Vietnam. *Red River, Hanoi (Looking South)* captures the muddy, earth-toned river (the second largest in the country, and historically and spiritually the most significant) and the houseboats along it in a manner not unlike a Canaletto *veduta* or a sixteenth-century Dutch harbor view.

Documenting the relationships among river, boat dwellers, and nearby urbanity, Hall offers at the same time a still, classically balanced landscape.

Hall accepts the advantage of photography and its potentially crystalline realism. But his subjects are by and large removed from the locus of global power. His public space is the every person's space, a less rarefied, dramatized, and privileged (or privatized) site than those of Gursky et al. Like the landscapes of Constable or the Impressionists or the interiors of Velázquez or Goya, these photographs undertake the exploration of nature, contemporary people, and the sometimes surreal intersection of the two.

—Martha Schwenderner