

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

ALLEN FRAME GITTERMAN

For some photographers, the down time that attends travel of any distance generates their most memorable portraits. Few are more alert, when marooned between activities, than Allen Frame, who over the past several decades has amassed a body of work that, like some hidden gem of cinema, awaits rediscovery. Frame's exhibition of 11 color photographs made between 2006 and 2008 (each 22 by 27 ½ inches) marks a departure for the artist, in which he leaves behind the grainy drift of 35mm black-and-white for the precision and openness of the 4 by 7 format. The shift feels so natural that you wonder why he waited. The images are simultaneously assertive and romantic, offering relief (down time again) from the crowded, portentous field of post-chemical photography. Frame's art has never been simple to categorize. Thick with Eros, his work operates, to paraphrase photographer Lewis Baltz, in that narrow area between the novel and the film.

Hilary and Josh, Punta del Este, Uruguay finds Frame in Hockneyland. A veritable "how to" guide for composing a picture, it overlays triangular areas of light, contemporary architecture and youth in repose. A young man at a table works on a laptop while a young woman stands contemplating a swimming pool. Throughout this show, laptops and other communication devices emerge as thematic, underpinning Frame's essential classicism with a focus on the self-absorption of youth, abetted by its ever-present devices. Another swimming pool is the subject of a photo taken in Campinas, Brazil; Frame gives it a thoughtful glance—there is nobody around—and one can almost hear (as the song says) the hissings of summer lawns.

But Frame's greatest strength lies in being a tourist of the indoors; the interiors and hotel rooms where he visits with friends and colleagues are hermetically sealed, a wall away from the teeming cityscapes associated with many of these locales. Nearly lost in darkness, the subjects of *Paola, Mexico City*; *Victor, Brooklyn* and *Josh, São Paulo* pause or work in rooms a skilled art director would be well compensated to create. In *Veronesa, Mexico City*, a woman sits reading on a folding metal chair with a water dish and a jar of cat food nearby. She has chosen a corner of grand beauty, in a squash court whose mossy green walls suggest the finest installation of Clyfford Still paintings imaginable—or a gargantuan attempt to duplicate such a display by a Latinophile Julian Schnabel.

The pleasures here are indicative of a growing return to the art photograph as the product of a highly mobile individual deeply engaged within a personal order of looking. Frame's images appear stripped down and radical in both their suspension of narrative drive and absence of overtly biographical impulses, yet they are deeply personal. *Alfredo, Mexico City* is another lesson in how a picture gets made. A man of color shown in a dimly lit interior, Alfredo nearly disappears into a textured wall, but his silver chain necklace and studded belt signal to the photographer that picture has assembled itself and awaits taking; the translation of this communication is what Frame shares with us.

--Tim Maul