

Keith Cottingham: Constructed Photographs
by Donald Goddard © 2004
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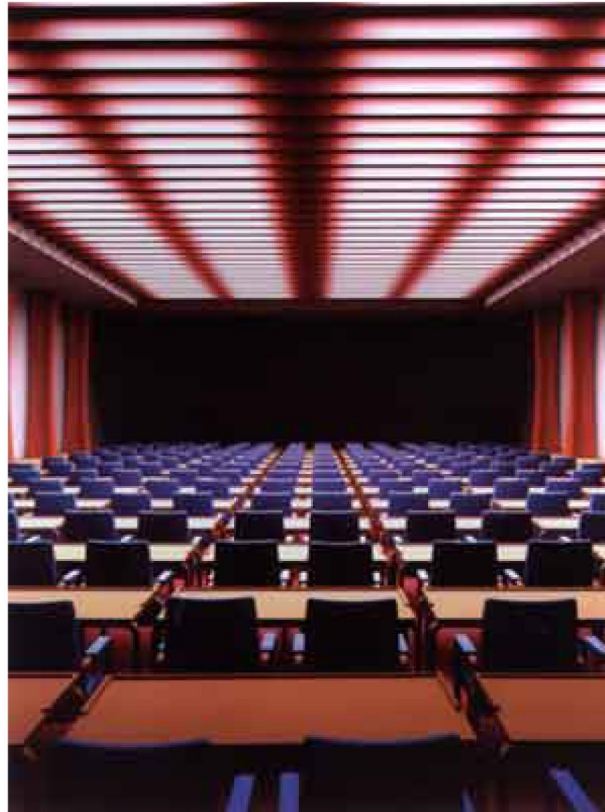
Untitled, 2004.

Description: two figures. Constructed Photograph,
digital chromogenic print,
66 3/4" x 48" (framed). Ed. of 5.

Two women in one photograph, and one in another, look distressed, or in wonder. The first two hold each other anxiously, one seated with her left hand raised slightly above her lap, the other standing. The third woman, also seated, leans forward, expectantly, toward the left. They are all looking at something, not us, but something in the darkness that surrounds them. Light strikes them from the direction of what they appear to see.

But, of course, they do not see (they are specifically without pupils) and they are not women, nor can they therefore be anxious. Neither are they sculptures of women that have been photographed, though their modeled surfaces and heightened awareness suggest a connection with the classical tradition in sculpture. So why do we (or rather, I) identify with them so immediately, emotionally and intellectually? After all, though they were constructed and

contextualized on a computer, a means that has only recently been available, they are no more fictitious than any other figures in works of art. The Greeks and Romans devised ideal proportions for human and other bodies, and Leonardo da Vinci was even more calculating. However affected we are by these and, for instance, the more emotionally wrought figures of Bernini in the 17th century, we can also embalm them, and dismiss them, as the products of defunct mythologies in other times.



Untitled, 2004.

Description: interior columns.
Constructed Photograph,
digital chromogenic print,
62 1/4" x 48" (framed). Ed. of 5.

The figures are not witnesses of Agamemnon's murder, nor of the Nativity, nor of Nora's defection in *A Doll's House*--but they are in that manner. In a way, Cottingham's other pictures are diversions, of an extremely powerful kind. Each one is a resounding architectural space, the space into which the gaze of the figures might be directed, the obverse of the inverse. From our own experience, three of the four most closely resemble a church, an auditorium, and a conference room. The fourth space is puzzling, in that it seems to have no particular association, with its two windows at floor level and its domelike interior of ascending, bellowing forms. Each of the spaces has a focal point, an altar or a door, a screen, a stage, or the two windows cited above. We are in places like others we have been in many times in our lives, where we are expected to have something revealed to us that will direct us and define what we should be, or perhaps would like to be, doing, thinking, feeling, seeing.



Untitled, 2004.
Description: front view.
Constructed Photograph,
digital chromogenic print,
66 3/4" x 48" (framed). Ed. of 5.

What Cottingham encounters is the elegant inevitability of human, and more particularly, artistic presumption. Works of art are made to achieve some higher sense of reality, whether in religious, philosophical, or aesthetic terms, just as roads and bridges are made for the purpose of going somewhere else. The auditorium or the church may be confining, impossible to move about it, but ultimately to be there is somehow thrilling, just to wait for everything to be explained.

Nothing does appear on the screen, at the altar, on the stage. The perspective of seats, desks, columns, and overhead louvers in the red, yellow, and blue auditorium space ends in a perfectly black rectangle. The elliptically arched church space ends in a tiny square altar in one work and a tiny square door in another. In each picture, light is modulated with extraordinary "naturalism" to articulate the structure defining the space. Light comes in through windows, in some cases, and from other more hidden places, but that is all we can surmise about what might be outside the structure that has been made, seemingly, to reveal what is outside. We don't really know what might be outside, any more than we would know, despite elaborate systems of ideological and pictorial clues, sitting in Chartres Cathedral or watching a play by Ibsen.

The exhibition remains through April 17, 2004, at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, 31 Mercer Street, New York, NY 10013. Tel. 212 226 3232. Fax 212 941 1536. www.feldmangallery.com.

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