

landscape. The pictures never feature people, but most depict places where people have left traces, in the form of manicured gardens, collapsing fence posts, or pathways that have been partly erased by natural forces. Even in the photos featuring twinkling skyscrapers at night or factory smokestacks at dawn, there is a pervasive sense of absence.

Unfortunately, when so many of these small and technically perfect photos are placed so close together, they begin to appear redundant, even monotonous. Kenna's vision of the outside world is narrow; in large quantities, his work can be too pretty. His brand of romanticism ignores the specificity of individual landscapes, their unique flavors, and can render magical places anonymous. Yet when taken in small doses, the collection is undeniably masterful—poetic and, at times, otherworldly.

—Laurie Hurwitz

'The Promise of Loss'

Brot Kunsthalle
Vienna

This crowded and challenging group show, subtitled "A Contemporary Index of Iran," surveyed recent work from Iranians living at home and abroad. Curated by Shaheen Merali, the show featured 18 artists, whose approaches were often explosive and seldom nuanced.

Many of the works juxtaposed images



Abbas Kowsari, *Women Police Academy #12*, 2008, C-print on Kodak Endura Metallic paper, 41 1/2" x 27 1/2". Brot Kunsthalle.

of war and protest with traditional Shia patterning, Islamic symbols, and quotidian objects. Shadi Ghadirian's photo series here showed grenades nestled next to silky underwear, and an army-issue water canteen standing between the OJ and cola in the fridge. Parastou Forouhar transformed silhouettes of figures in torture positions into an intricate, retro gray and pink design that might adorn a dress. In Sara Rahbar's textile works, in which American and Iranian flags serve as both shelters and shrouds, symbols of pride and patriotism became threatening and foreboding. Mandana Moghaddam's installation *Sara's Paradise* (2009) featured a public fountain, bubbling with bloodred water, surrounded by empty plastic canisters. Collectively, these suggestions of the intrusion of conflict into everyday life conveyed a sense of despair.

The show's most moving works, which seemed less consciously conceived for a Western audience, intermingled the real with the absurd in intimate and seemingly inconsequential ways. Neda Razavipour's series of drawings extracted from her diary depicted superheroes next to illustrations of news events. Jinoos Taghizadeh commemorated small, overlooked tragedies under the current regime in a series of stamps. Abbas Kowsari's photos at first appeared to be staged, but the almost whimsical pictures of women in chadors rappelling down a building actually documented female police-academy graduates. Like the best work here, it was unexpected and compelling.

—Helen Chang

Joachim Brohm and Heribert Ottersbach

Beck & Eggeling
Düsseldorf

This collaborative exhibition brought together the unlikely duo of photographer Joachim Brohm and painter Heribert Ottersbach. The former has honed a precise idiom of urban realism that succinctly documents the commonplace while endowing it with an unexpected, low-key

lyricism. Ottersbach has developed his own brand of bare-bones realism in which the painterly gesture is so reduced that it often seems on the verge of dissolution. Such a minimalist approach is a far cry from the gestural virtuosity of Neo Rauch, whose professorial mantle Ottersbach has now assumed at the Leipzig Academy.

The show presented two complex proj-



Heribert Ottersbach, *Transformation*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 67" x 94 1/2". Beck & Eggeling.

ects, each of which began as an independent series by one of the artists and was turned into a collaboration by the other. From 2005 to 2006, Ottersbach's focus was the thinly populated Portuguese island of Culatra, whose fragile infrastructure is beginning to yield to tourism and development. Fascinated by the paintings Ottersbach created there, Brohm subsequently visited the island himself and produced a cycle of 21 photographs. Shown in juxtaposition here, the works probed the very essence of the artists' respective mediums.

At the same time that Brohm was exploring Culatra, Ottersbach was examining and painting from a series, titled "Areal" (1992–2002), consisting of 300 photographs Brohm had taken of an industrial complex near Munich. Ottersbach often extrapolated details that even an attentive viewer might have overlooked.

In the end, this unconventional doubles act bypassed any consideration of the strengths and limitations of the "rival" mediums and offered instead a kind of reciprocal homage. The cross-fertilization apparent here said a great deal about the depth of a particular artistic friendship, but also about the potential of the respective mediums to reformulate and vivify even the most banal visual evidence.

—David Galloway