Lewis Baltz, Installation view of *Ronde de Nuit, (Night Watch)*, 1991 – 92

Review: Lewis Baltz surveys surveillance

By Leah Ollman
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On the occasion of the Getty's acquisition of Lewis Baltz's archive, Luisotti has mounted an installation of the photographer's 36-foot-long mural, "Ronde de Nuit" (1991-92). Titled after Rembrandt's "The Night Watch," it, too, is a meditation on civic guardianship, but of a distinctly contemporary, insidious order, the sort of protection that delivers an equal dose of vulnerability.

Baltz gleaned many of the 12 color photographs in this filmic montage from police surveillance footage made in a suburb of Lille, France: figures ascending an escalator; a man standing in what might be a line in what might be a bank; the distant facade of a high-rise. Much is indeterminate, out of context, captured in the bluish low-res blur of a security camera, from the perspective of an anonymous, authoritative eye. Sharper-focused images depict tresses of data cables and a daunting, room-sized server.

"Ronde de Nuit" progresses like a dark fugue, the images repeating and varying, building a sinister mood. From his earliest work in the '70s, Baltz has scrutinized the architectures of dehumanization, estrangement, detachment. Whether modest black-and-white prints or a large, glossy color spread, as here, his seemingly dispassionate views smolder with criticality. This isn't his most incisive statement on the invisible exercise of power, but its persistent relevance triggers a useful frisson of unease.

Gallery Luisotti, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310)453-0043, through Nov. 2. Closed Sunday and Monday. www. galleryluisotti.com