



exhibition

Our temporary traces

16 January 2009

Mark Pimlott has created a luminous set of photographs of urban landscapes, says Biq's Hans van der Heijden

Mark Pimlott: All things pass

Stroom Den Haag, The Hague

Until February 1, 2009

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There are architects who like to collect art, and ones who like to integrate art in their buildings. There are also artists who fulfil such architects' desires, and there are those who criticise and comment on architecture. Of the latter, names that come to mind vary from Pieter Saenredam and Johannes Vermeer to Ben Johnson, Donald Judd and Dan Graham. Mark Pimlott is part of that gang.

Pimlott does not just observe and comment on architecture from the outside. His position is ambiguous. He is an active producer of architecture as an interior and landscape designer, as well as an educator and writer. As a commentator, he likes to widen his scope and it is not for nothing that he wishes to call his object of study and fascination not "architecture" but "the world".

The photographs on display in Stroom at the Hague show cities, interiors and structures, but people and other signs of life do not manifest themselves strongly. Rarely, human figures appear, but just like in architects' visuals they do not provide much more than a sense of scale. This show is not social photography, this is about architectural artefacts, about things that are made by man.

I say artefacts, because Pimlott's pictures are not strictly about buildings or objects, and it might be more accurate to say that they are about the space between architectural artefacts. Or, to use Pimlott's vocabulary again, this work is about "places".

Upstairs is a puzzling urban scene in Paris. The Eiffel Tower is on the horizon, yet the urban icon is not the centre of the picture. Additionally, we note an obelisk, a fountain, two columns, a range of lampposts and bollards. The visual rhyme of verticals is continued in the stone railings in the foreground. The author is distanced from what he is recording. It is not even clear what he is recording: a street, a square, a park? It is some sort of cityscape, a product of our traffic machinery. Cars and people are in the distance, far enough away not to look into the lens. Compositionally, the human figures add to the vertical composition of the tableau. It is not easy to tell how old this picture is. However shapeless, this urban space possesses strangely strong imagery generated by normality and things we all know and take for granted.

Downstairs in the gallery is a picture apparently of the rear of a stage set. It shows an improvised timber structure that looks just strong enough to carry a canvas that must have some invisible theatrical illusion. This photo of a wood structure reflects Pimlott's architectural interest and knowledge, but it is most definitely not a study in tectonic culture. Again, there is more than a hint of demystification and ordinariness.

For Pimlott, photography is second nature. From childhood, he has always taken pictures. The Stroom exhibition includes pictures taken between 1988 and the present. All the pictures are black and white, and are presented in A0 format. The images upstairs are mostly urban pictures, while the ones downstairs are more tangible, close-ups.

Unexpected angles

The show is about peripheral urban landscapes and other human constructs recorded without comment or message — or indeed without any didactic inclination. Although taken from unexpected angles, they appear very casual. In each picture it obvious that there must be a bigger reality: the city of Paris as a whole, the theatre, the stage and its spectators and, in the case of the urban periphery, one knows there must be some sort of city centre as well. The photos are like antique postcards, postcards sent from the back of the world, conveying a traveller's surprise about things that are not unique but still always different.

I anxiously await Pimlott's book containing 120 new photographs, which is to appear later this year, and is also called All Things Pass.

Postscript :

Hans van der Heijden is a director of Biq in Rotterdam.

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