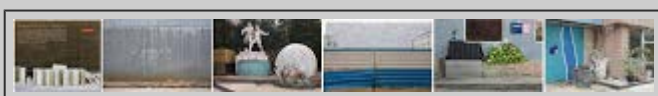




5B4 | Photography and Books

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

## Simple Present by Bert Danckaert



The wear and tear on any city -- the effect of living -- is apparent to everyone who lives in urban environments. The ability to see what tourist bureaus airbrush out of brochures -- to momentarily stay repulsion -- and examine these physical flaws with a mind towards aesthetic value takes a bit more effort. Clutter that collects in the corners of a building's outer walls or various pieces of detritus still holding the promising of being useful are left leaning against walls and forgotten -- all become a part of our sight-line in the urban landscape. Left on their own and perhaps unintentionally arranged by human hands these chance sculptures -- unwanted installations -- can be arresting sights to stumble upon. Bert Danckaert's book *Simple Present* published by Veenman is a celebration of these sights found in Beijing.

*Simple Present* is full of spaces that are more familiar than foreign. They transcend strict attachment to place. This may be Beijing but it could easily be Eastern Europe, Latin America or parts of the United States. The larger information -- wall construction, types of cars, architecture -- is more or less universal while a few smaller details -- signs with native characters, monuments -- key the viewer into the 'foreignness' of place. Regardless of the influence of the smaller details, the main tenor is one of the recognizable urbanized world -- or on a grander scale, the globalized image being created of modern urbanized world.

Danckaert's work explores this notion of what is 'typical' and 'authentic' about a particular place -- the thought that the basic structure of modern urban environments is essentially very similar and it is the major landmarks that create the sense of individual identity. When one thinks of China, images of the Great Wall or the Forbidden City create this sense of dynamic difference but for the locals, those places are anything but typical. The authentic is found near their workplace or their apartment building.

Danckaert's photography describes these places with rigid formality.

### ARCHIVE

- ▶ 2013 (1)
- ▶ 2011 (16)
- ▶ 2010 (53)
- ▶ 2009 (112)
- ▼ 2008 (144)
  - ▶ December (14)
  - ▶ November (12)
  - ▶ October (11)
  - ▼ September (15)

The Three Penny Review #96:  
Robert Frank

Errata Editions On-Press: Day  
Five

Errata Editions On-Press: Day  
Four

Errata Editions On-Press: Day  
Three

Art For Obama Auction

Errata Editions On-Press: Day  
Two

Errata Editions On-Press: Day  
One

13 Million Tons of Pig Iron by  
Bruce Haley

Errata Editions Books on Books  
Series

Simple Present by Bert  
Danckaert

David Deutsch:  
Photographs/Paintings

5B4 Donation Print Offer

Throughout this book of fifty images, roughly half of which frame their subject squarely facing a wall. The other half describe their subjects at a 45 degree angle. This rigidity, which seems intentional, could work in his favor conceptually but I wish over the course of the book that there was more variation of frame and relationship to subject. Each points out worthy content that are often complex visual gifts but a larger sense of scale couldn't hurt. In my opinion, this present is formally wrapped a bit too tight.

The book itself appeals to most all of my weaknesses. It employs a very clean design, very fine printing, great use of materials and it has a wonderful dustjacket with a slight stippled texture that feels great in the hand. Jan Blommaert contributes an fine, thought provoking essay that avoids a heavy-handed examination of the work.

It is interesting that Beijing just hosted the Olympics after spending 40 billion dollars creating an image the world would concentrate on for a few weeks. That image seems 180 degrees from anything that would normally spring to mind with the suggestion of 'Chinese-ness.' The scale of the architecture and the insanely orchestrated opening and closing ceremonies might have held to the notion of what greatness the masses can create, but the look and feel of those environs felt like a bridge to the West and the larger world that is becoming so familiar.

POSTED BY MR. WHISKETS AT 11:57 PM

---

## NO COMMENTS:

[Post a Comment](#)

[Newer Post](#)

[Home](#)

[Older Post](#)

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

[Baghdad Calling by Geert van Kesteren](#)

[The Complete Films of Robert Frank: Volume 2](#)

[RFK Funeral Train by Paul Fusco](#)

▶ [August \(8\)](#)

▶ [July \(8\)](#)

▶ [June \(10\)](#)

▶ [May \(11\)](#)

▶ [April \(14\)](#)

▶ [March \(14\)](#)

▶ [February \(14\)](#)

▶ [January \(13\)](#)

▶ [2007 \(149\)](#)

---

---

5B4 PHOTOBOOK EXCHANGE



---

---

PAUL GRAHAM: BEYOND CARING