

# JAN KESNER GALLERY

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**Frank van der Salm: Abstract Realities**  
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**Jan Kesner Gallery, Los Angeles, CA**

"Expo," "Capital," "Intersection," "Flux," "Façade," "Setting," and "Complex," are some of the titles of Dutch photographer Frank van der Salm's new color photographs on view at Jan Kesner Gallery in Los Angeles, CA. The images at first glance appear as deadpan as their titles suggest. They depict generic, peopleless places. The colors are muted. Something seems off. We pose the question: "are these even real places?" Van de Salm is interested in creating ambiguous images that catch the viewer off guard, making the viewer question reality and the trustworthiness of the photographed image. His work takes its point of departure not only from the work of the new topographers--photographers like Lewis Baltz, Stephen Shore, and Frank Gohlke who were interested in recording industrial landscapes, but also from the digital composite images of Jeff Wall (an interesting comparison is Jeff Wall's merging of numerous shots to create a single image with van der Salm's selective framing within a single shot), and the constructed model photography of Oliver Boberg, Bernard Voita, Thomas Demand and Gregory Crewdson-- Van der Salm's images feel more constructed than observed.

Van der Salm asserts that his images are "real," that the only 'manipulation' involved is in the focus. His images have a technical sophistication that is hard to believe. They seem to require a viewer to ask, "how did he do that?" For example in "Expo [Lisbon, Portugal]," 2001 the foreground of the image is in sharp focus. One's eyes are drawn to the cars, sidewalk and street signage. Behind are larger buildings, typical post-war modern architectural structures, that become more and more out of focus as they rise toward the sky. Similarly in "Capital [Paris, France]," 2000 the entire image depicting lights along a wide boulevard is out of focus giving the image a surreal glow and an otherworldliness.

Van der Salm is as interested in creating an abstract form of elegantly contrasting colors as he is in faithfully recording his subject. Seen together the images depict the urban environment, but do not describe any individual city. Van der Salm focuses on details. In this new body of work he is interested in windows and entryways. These images are barriers. They reflect the outside blocking our view of the interior spaces. The images collapse space and distort perspective, As abstract surfaces they become disorienting. Its difficult to locate the ground or photographer's vantage point in the images. One is left to indulge in the surfaces depicted: to marvel at the play of light or the perfect geometry of the building. "Two-Sixty-Four" [Lisbon, Portugal], 2001 is an image of a flat façade. A grid of windows makes up its surface. Each of the tiny windows reflects a different part of the sky or low down, the landscape. The image becomes a composite of more than 200 small pictures, each depicting a different window reflection. The photograph is a fragment of a much larger whole yet at the same time becomes a microcosm of urban existence.

There are numerous dualities in Van der Salm's work: Real vs artificial, sharp vs blurred, inside vs outside. Although each image is the result of a carefully observed and framed reality, the ambiguities that are created add to the content of the work. Each image is the result of hours of looking, walking, waiting and seeing. They are not spontaneous. Rather than document the 21st century as a bustling and lively metropolis, van der Salm depicts an urban landscape devoid of people, with very little signage, suggesting that this is how the world would appear if the human elements were to disappear. Van der Salm's world is precise, orderly and beautiful. He states, "Reality for me is only a means to be used as flat, two-dimensional paint." In his works he transforms 'reality' into an abstraction that while still identifiable is totally alienating.

--Jody Zellen