

For 25 years Lynne Cohen has photographed interiors that are unpeopled but replete with human presence, visible in the form of mannequins and other generic representations and, more broadly, in the social relations conveyed by the organization of space. Moving away from the surreally furnished meeting halls, waiting rooms and offices of her earliest photographs, Cohen has increasingly pictured more chilling institutional interiors — laboratories, firing ranges, classrooms, spas. While the absence of living beings in her photographs of meeting places seemed partly a matter of formal convenience, contrived to allow an unencumbered view of a social landscape, the uninhabited state of the clinical sites might seem 'natural.' The desertedness of the reception areas and offices was an unnatural condition, spaces *as* they were not meant to be seen, whereas the emptiness of the spas and laboratories is the intended condition of these places for solitary endeavor, spaces *that* were not meant to be seen.

Nonetheless, these spaces for individual but regimented activity display a consciously public face. If the bizarre vernacular of the meeting areas revealed, through conventions of domestic arrangement, a desire to personalize working space, what is embedded in the architecture of these stark rooms and unworldly instruments is a will to sameness, expressed — or concealed — in a mythic neutrality of modernist design. These institutional installations operate in terms of artifice, not only in the modification of behavior or physique and through simulation, but also in the adoption of modernist regularity to signal normality (though not so seamlessly that we believe it).

Cohen's work sits at a curious juncture between sculpture, photography, installation, and even performance. When viewing the photographs as evidence, it might seem to be essentially a question of uncovering

sealed environments that, like ready-mades, bear (bare?) their own histories. The images might seem to direct attention to the imagined functions of these places, or to how their designs are adapted or domesticated by the occasional eruption of the human — the addition of a plastic footstool below a forbidding bed, for example. Hinging the impact of Cohen's works on the incredible-but-true reality of pre-existing environments as subject, these views implicitly maintain that there is a difference between *there* and *here*.

At some point, though, we must suspect not only that the photographer acts upon the depicted places (not least in that we can never view institutional spaces the same way again), but also that her photographs act upon their own surroundings. It is certainly the attention of the photographer that causes the coordinates of art and not-art to shift around, with spa fixtures beginning to recall Brancusi, a circular chamber harkening to the Bechers, and a target-lined room suggesting Kenneth Noland. There are also indications — the formica frames, the carefully bañal captions, the regularity of the views — that the thoroughgoing artificiality is not limited to the places depicted, but is duplicated in their representations, confirming that there and here are actually one and the same. And when we find ourselves in an everyday situation wondering if we are experiencing a Cohen work, we understand that the Bauhaus ideal of the interpenetration of art and life is realized every day, and that the one thing we can be certain about is the unreality of our own environments.

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