

SEAN KELLY

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The Vast Halls of Imperial Russia through the Lens of Candida Höfer



Candida Höfer
Catherine Palace Pushkin St. Petersburg III 2014, 2014
Ben Brown Fine Arts

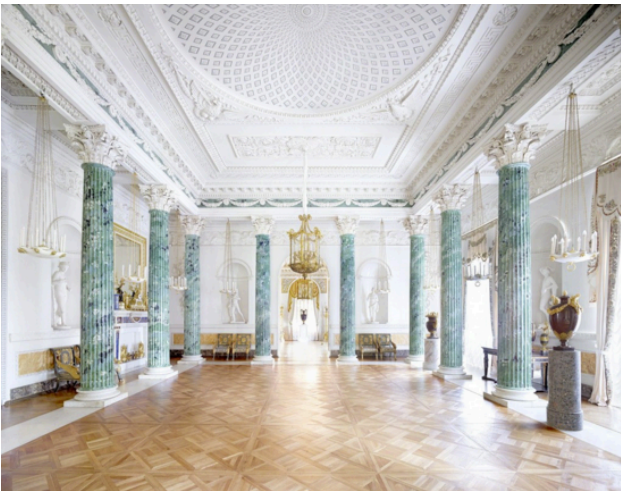
Those who didn't make it to the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, this past summer to see Candida Höfer's acclaimed series of photographs can now catch a selection of them at Ben Brown Fine Arts in London. The 10 large-scale C-prints of her "Memory" (2014) series show the splendid imperial halls of St. Petersburg with the hyper-precise detail that we've come to expect from Höfer's architectural images.

As usual, Höfer portrays the spaces she visits without any figures. In this case, the emptiness draws attention to the ostentatious monumentality of these grand rooms. Frozen in a moment of aristocratic history, these sites, with their extreme ornamentation and magnificence, seem even more overwhelming and oppressive. Time has passed though, which is revealed through carefully concealed hints of modern-day technology (lights, plugs) that appear behind historic decoration. The "memory" of Höfer's title has multiple meanings: the history of past cultures, traditions, and institutions, as well as her own understanding of how that history has been remembered.

Five of the images on view here present different rooms of the stately Hermitage Museum. Höfer is famously skilled at capturing the structure of the spaces she photographs, as well as the color. The blood-red carpet leading downstairs in Hermitage St. Petersburg XVI 2014 creates incredible depth, while similarly red carpets in Catherine Palace Pushkin St. Petersburg II 2014 emphasize the extreme whiteness of the ornate architecture, surely as its creators intended. The images are flooded with beautiful light, an especially noteworthy feat, considering that Höfer is known to work only with natural light and refrains from digitally manipulating her photographs.



Candida Höfer
Hermitage St. Petersburg VIII 2014, 2014
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Candida Höfer
Pavlovsk Palace Pavlovsk III 2014, 2014
Ben Brown Fine Arts