

STEPHEN PRINA*“GALERIE MAX HETZLER, 1991 (TEN YEARS AFTER)”*

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Galerie Max Hetzler, 1991, is, as its title indicates, a work that was made and first exhibited in 1991 at Galerie Max Hetzler, in Köln, Germany. The work is comprised of 163 contact-printed, sepia-toned prints with ivory-colored mats and walnut-stained mahogany frames, accompanied by screenprint-on-acrylic labels; nine architectural models made of ivory-colored mat board, encased in acrylic; and wall-painted supergraphics.

Looking back on this work ten years after it was first exhibited, and keeping in mind that an artwork cannot be reduced to the ideas that generate it, I have some thoughts to share.

Galerie Max Hetzler, 1991, comes out of a consideration of that which is made by galleries as well as that which is presented by them. On one level, galleries are photographic factories. Exhibited works are documented—as isolated objects and as installed for public view—in photographic form, and then added to the archives. The stuff of the Hetzler archives became the raw material for me to form into an artwork.

By the time I had completed this project, Galerie Max Hetzler had been in operation for seventeen years. At its inception, it had been a typical, incipient gallery, providing the impression that to assemble and install an exhibition was more than enough of a challenge let alone to assume the responsibility of documenting it for posterity. Documentation was spotty, either nonexistent or inconsistent in quality. As the years passed, a more professional attitude was gradually attained until a resolutely consistent quality and aesthetic of photography had been attained.

This acquired degree of sophistication was represented in my project by an over-stated aesthetic I had developed: all forms of photographic documentation—35mm, 4x5”, 8x10” color transparencies; gelatin silver prints; photocopies; etc. were rephotographed in 4x5” black and white, contact printed, sepia toned and framed in walnut-stained mahogany with ivory-colored mats. I acknowledge that to use sepia toning is to, at the very least, flirt with the nostalgic impulse, but I maintain that this impulse is neither confirmed nor maintained in that, at least on one level, albeit naively isolated, sepia toning can also be considered a technical treatment that is available to all practitioners within the discipline of photography. On another level, what becomes of the nostalgic impulse when applied in an equivalent manner to an image that was seventeen-years-old and to one that was produced only a month before but now itself is ten-years-old?

My research led me to focus on the installation views in the archive in that, in this form, the artworks are shown both in relation to architecture and in the state in which they met a public. Several exhibitions were left out of this selection process because, even in the later years, it was common that if, for instance, an exhibition of painting had been mounted, it was likely that the works had been photographed in the studio before they were installed. Whenever this occurred, I substituted a photograph of a photographers gray card, the tool that is used to determine the appropriate exposure since it represents the average of the tonal range of the average photograph.

Architectural models were made of the nine locations the gallery had occupied during its history. As was the case with the photographs, there were instances when accurate records had been kept, and others when they had not. For the first gallery location, there were no floor plans that were extant, in point of fact, the building itself had been razed. The resulting model, which was in effect a non-model, was a placeholder with no inflection as to spatial form.

When installed in Köln, the work fit perhaps a little too well into the given galleries. In a move conceived as a then current address of the state of working in a site-specific mode, the first appearance of *Galerie Max Hetzler, 1991*, was tightly fitted into the place from where all the materials of its making issued. The slogan, "WE REPRESENT OURSELVES TO THE WORLD," was presented as a supergraphic, painted on the wall, wrapping around the ground floor gallery, up the stairway, into the first floor gallery, and finishing in the upper stairway area. There was no one vantage point from where this organizing narrative device was available to a viewer. The photographs were then installed atop the wall painting and the architectural models were positioned in close proximity to their entrance in the chronology. It was anticipated that, on subsequent presentations of this work, the arrangement of elements would strictly adhere to the design derived for the Hetzler location, whether it seemed as though that arrangement was appropriate for its next venue or not. The dislocation became a way of putting into check the positive affirmation assured in its first appearance.

Is *Galerie Max Hetzler, 1991*, then, a critique or an homage? It was carefully constructed to be reducible to neither. As for its insights, as is usually the case with art, they are perceivable in the details.

Galerie Max Hetzler, 1991 (Ten Years Later) is on view at Friedrich Petzel Gallery from February 23 through March 31, 2001. For further information, please contact the gallery at 212. 680.9467.

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