

# **POST BROTHERS**

**P O S T**

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**INVITED**

**BY**

**ROSA**

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# **A SIDEWAY VIEW OF FLAT FACADES**

Blurring the lines between abstraction and documentation, Annette Kisling's *Museo 4* defamiliarizes architectural space and lays bare the role of framing in perceptual and symbolic encounters. An obviously meticulous shutterbug and image-maker, Kisling deploys the vernacular of black and white documentary photography to build complex compositions that undermines expectations and confronts normative modes of representation. Asserting the photographic apparatus as a contingent and variable form of composition making, Kisling uses photography as a way to create abstractions that function in a documentary sense, as very literal records of a specific set of physical conditions. With a keen eye for the correlation of content and form, she isolates and recomposes elements through her framing, deconstructing aesthetic perception and perceptual and stylistic expectations. In doing this, the artist reminds the viewer that all photographs are simultaneously representational and abstract, constructions that have gone through a series of translations, manipulations, and framings.

Stretching photographic representation to its lineaments, Kisling's ambiguous image masquerades as a number of ubiquitous forms of picture making but adheres to a tradition thoroughly rooted in the history of photography. Following the evolution of image production technologies, the artist substitutes the classical silver gelatin print with the piezo pigment process of printing, a quadtone form outputted from digital media that allows her to render tones and values with stunning precision and creates a unique surface quality that can easily be mistaken for intricate linework. The image features a series of mostly vertical forms that break up a flat plane of gray. Detached from context and source through her framing, the structures and objects depicted are perplexing, at once familiar and entirely alien. One can recognize at the center of the image a thin lateral view of what looks to be a classical Hellenistic structure or a museum entryway. A figure without ground, the façade appears to float on the page, isolated from any human subjects or terrains to place it in space and time. Directly behind the frontage of architecture

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to the left is a similarly sized strip of what looks like a canvas stretcher that has a dense series of black tacks running down the edge. The architecture and the (potential) stretcher are connected to a long plank of grainy wood that bisects the image. Protruding from the center of the wooden strip is a metal structural connector or fastener that then connects to a smaller piece of timber that runs to the bottom of the image parallel to the central beam. Confusing one's perception of scale and space even further, the right edge of the image features lightly pleated and undulating strips of material that are likely curtains.

What kind of space could this image possibly be? Kisling collapses logics of proportion, rendering the architectural façade minute in relationship to the other elements of the composition. Given the screws and metal fittings of the wood, the tacks on the side of the stretcher, and the folds of the curtains, one can surmise a consistent space in which these components reside. But what of the architectural façade? Is this just an indication of the trickery of perspective, where the building recedes compared to the objects in the foreground? This is hardly likely, the distortions of scale being too extreme to follow the principles of spatial representation in Euclidian geometry. Is there a simultaneity of multiple views in the image? Perhaps the artist has engaged in photographic manipulation, cutting the elements from separate images and compiling them into a single form? This, as well, is probably not the case, as the objects commingle too naturally to be the result of even the most adept photographic collagist faker. One can even imagine that the artist has masked out the background and other elements in order to further confuse the viewer. But close analysis renders this hypothesis false; the soft and creamy gray has too much subtle variation to have been deliberately produced. If the artist has been completely faithful to the objects she is representing, what, then, is this space where such contradictions can be reconciled? Where in the universe do scales collapse, interiors and exteriors are inverted, and different materials and temporalities integrate? The title of the work gives a vital hint: *Museo*.

Rather than emphasize the artworks and artifacts of the museum, the artist looks to its materialist base, its supports. Deploying a scrupulous documentary method, Kisling simultaneously demystifies and re-mystifies the exhibition apparatus, deconstructing the museum's constitutive logics by rendering visible inconspicuous incongruities. A form of subtle institutional critique, the artist discloses the physical support structures of the museum, connecting such arrangements to their ideological underpinnings and ramifications. A site of displacement, decontextualization and distortion, Kisling points

to the museum as an instrument that only incorporates the façades of culture, detaching objects from their time and place so as to present the surface as part of a deliberate ideological narrative. With this, Kisling creates a nuanced constellation between her own use of photographic framing, the “frame” of the modeled vestibule, the framing and decontextualization of the museum, and the material framings that support the display apparatus.

Accustomed to the manipulation of scale in any standard photographic print, the architectural edifice appears to be a true part of a building, but is only a model of a façade affixed to a support. The building is therefore a façade of a façade, a petite model with no interior in which it relates. The exterior front is detached from its interior, serving as sign and recalling the ubiquitous practice of Façadism, a compromise between preservation and demolition where a building’s façade is left intact for the purposes of building new structures in or around it. What resides within this building, this surface indicating a history with no clear interior? Why does the artist abandon a frontal view of the architecture, emphasizing its protrusion from flatness rather than its entry into depth? Is it not odd that in order to destabilize the flatness of a surface one need only shift perspective?

The independence of the façade correlates with the mythopoetic autonomy of the interior. Without an inside for which the outside corresponds, one may believe that Kisling’s image asserts pure surface, a vital divide between outside and inside. But consider again that there are multiple interiors and exteriors within the image itself. The object is isolated from the gallery wall by the inclusion of a black frame. Within that interior is another frame, a zone of untouched paper bordering the image. The image is produced by registering the movement of light from outside to inside the camera. The picture produced is an interior shot that captures the objects and allows them to exist externally from their time and place. And within the image itself resides a model of an exterior brought inside, the evidence of a series of borders and frames contextualizing and supporting the object, and a curtain which functions to demarcate and mediate between outside and in. At various and overlapping points, thresholds are maintained and undermined. Such folding and unfolding of interior and exterior within the image could be found *ad infinitum*, demonstrating the inextricable interrelation of outside and inside, a shifting and schizophrenic tension where each is at once independent and regulated by a strange, pre-established correspondence in such a way that each one sets off the other. Individual spatial elements are subdued because the architectural possibility comes not from the autonomy of individual elements, but from the disparity and in-betweenness

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in which the elements exist. Kisling defamiliarizes space, contrasting the flatness of the image itself with the open and closed spaces it implies. The artist presents multiple planes in a single field, collapsing dimensions. This lens-based negotiation of the museum in turn creates a new territory, a new space and mode of interaction. Kisling encounters the museum obliquely, laterally engaging with its structures and deconstructing its depths so as to not succumb to the trickery of frontal views and artificial façades. Neither overtly critical to the content nor purely formalist, her pivoted point of view of the museological apparatus is not an attempt to sidestep discussions but rather presents an unfamiliar view of a familiar context, accessing foundational truths by turning hidden or unacknowledged structures into abstract forms.

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SATURDAY

POST BROTHERS is writing about Annette Kisling's  
"Museo 4"

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