

ARTIST MICHAEL WESELY USES UNIQUE METHOD TO PHOTOGRAPH THE CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION OF THE NEW MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Three-Year Exposures are Among Wesely's Longest to Date

Michael Wesely: Open Shutter at The Museum of Modern Art

The René d'Harnoncourt Exhibition Galleries, sixth floor
November 20–December 19, 2004

The Louise Reinhardt Smith Gallery, third floor
December 20, 2004–Mid-2005

NEW YORK, November 15, 2004—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Michael Wesely: Open Shutter at The Museum of Modern Art***, an installation of four large-scale photographs that capture the transformation of MoMA during the most ambitious building project in its 75-year history. Over the past decade, German artist Michael Wesely (b. 1963) has invented and refined unique methods for making photographs with unusually long exposure times—some as long as three years. In the summer of 2001, at the invitation of the Museum, Wesely installed cameras overlooking The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden and the surrounding buildings. The resulting photographs—some completed as late as June 2004—present an unfamiliar and absorbing description of the extensive transformation of the site. The passage of time is rendered in delicate, translucent layers, as existing structures were demolished and new ones rose in their place. The photographs—three in black and white, one in color—will be on view in The René d'Harnoncourt Exhibition Galleries on the sixth floor from November 20 through December 19, 2004, and subsequently in The Louise Reinhardt Smith Gallery on the third floor. *Michael Wesely: Open Shutter at The Museum of Modern Art* is organized by Sarah Hermanson Meister, Associate Curator, Research and Collections, Department of Photography.

"Instead of a momentary glimpse presented as fact and just as quickly consumed, Michael Wesely's photographs for MoMA offer an experience in which past and present are intertwined elements of an evolving proposition," writes Ms. Hermanson Meister in her essay for the book the Museum has published to accompany the exhibition.

The photographs were made from three vantage points along 54th Street between Fifth Avenue and Avenue of the Americas: from the University Club at the east end of the block, looking southwest; from 1330 Avenue of the Americas at the west end of the block, looking southeast; and from the former City Athletic Club on the south side of the street, looking northeast. Wesely mounted two cameras—one for black and white, one for color—at each site. The color exposures were an experiment, and only the one from the University Club succeeded.

The progress of construction obliged Wesely to remove his cameras from the City Athletic Club in May 2003. The black-and-white plate yielded a view in which the rising layers of steel decking describe the emerging structure against the backdrop of midtown Manhattan. The path of

the sun across the sky is traced in graceful white arcs, in contrast to the cacophony of spots and marks along 54th Street—the record of taillights from a constant stream of traffic, and from the reflected light off the chrome window trim of parked cars.

The exposures at either end of 54th Street were completed at the conclusion of major construction in June 2004. The view from the west end of the block (the only vertical among the four photographs) is dominated by The David and Peggy Rockefeller Building, its bulk rendered translucent because its black granite and dark glass received relatively little light. At the top of this structure is an office tower enclosed in white fritted-glass, whose north facade is rendered as a brilliant white triangle of reflected light. The west facade presents a very different pattern of shimmering reflections, and, at its southwest edge, a glimpse of its internal structure.

The black-and-white and color images made from The University Club at the east end of the block encompass the same view but render it very differently. For example, the black-and-white image clearly describes Rachel Whiteread's *Water Tower* (1998), which was installed on the roof of the former Garden Wing for the first ten months of the exposure; but the sculpture is largely obscured in the companion color view. On the other hand, the curtain wall of The Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Education Building, which replaced the Garden Wing, looms palpably in the color picture but barely registered in the other. The sun follows the same path in both photographs, but only in color are the shifting shades of the setting sun captured in hues of red and orange.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Munich in 1963, Michael Wesely studied at the Bavarian State Institute for Photography and the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. *Open Shutter* continues Wesely's ongoing investigation of the structure and fabric of urban change through long-term exposures. He began inventing and refining techniques for making photographs with unusually long exposures in the early 1990s and eventually was drawn to photographing architectural projects, which he records from start to finish. In 1999, he completed five pictures of the massive transformation of Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, including two photographs made over a period of 26 months. Among Wesely's awards and honors, is the prestigious DAAD grant from the Netherlands, which he won in 1995. He has had numerous solo exhibitions in Europe; and the Goethe Institute has invited him to exhibit and to photograph at its locations in Caracas, Rome, and most recently Rio de Janeiro. His work was featured in the São Paulo Biennial in 2001.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Sarah Hermanson Meister, Associate Curator, Research and Collections, Department of Photography, joined the Museum in 1994. She previously organized *The Observer: Henri Cartier-Bresson after the War* as part of **MoMA2000**, *A Walk through Astoria and Other Places in Queens: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt* (2002), and *Projects 78: Sabine Hornig* (2003).

PUBLICATION

Michael Wesely: Open Shutter by Sarah Hermanson Meister accompanies the exhibition and reproduces all of the MoMA pictures as well as a generous suite of images from earlier long exposure projects. Hardcover, 10 x 13 in./80 pages/40 duotones and 14 color illustrations ISBN: 0870706829, publication date: November 2004, \$29.95.

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