

## Tim Eitel

### Essl Museum

#### Vienna

Tim Eitel's paintings of museum scenes and abandoned urban spaces have been compared to the works of Edward Hopper for their spare, vaguely dreamlike quality. But unlike Hopper, whose compositions suggest myriad narratives, Eitel makes environments that seem to exist outside particular times and places. Titled "Visitor" and curated by Günther Oberhollenzer, this retrospective featured 36 works by the New Leipzig School painter.

Eitel begins his process by taking photographs during long strolls through major cities including New York, Paris, and Berlin. Then he simplifies and transforms the figures captured in the photographs into anonymous, nearly abstract entities, and finally transplants them into fictitious surroundings and architectures on canvas. His compositions' people, objects, and settings are curiously mute and nonrepresentational, and they come in unspectacular colors—mostly tones of gray. Figures are often depicted from behind, standing in empty spaces and erased of identifying details. This effect has particular significance for the viewer, who attempts to see what the painted characters see from their perspectives, rather than focusing on the figures themselves.

Without the cues of facial expressions or gestures, viewers are unable to decipher the figures' relationships to one another—and Eitel's locations, whether the insides of buildings or city-street exteriors, are also rendered anonymous.



Tim Eitel, *Legs*, 2013, oil on canvas, 11 1/2" x 11 1/2". Essl Museum.

The sensation of being lost is echoed by the paintings' sterile esthetic; with surfaces so smooth they resemble plastic, no single brushstroke is left visible.

In a sense, Eitel's compositions seem familiar, recalling scenes we have seen before such as pigeons hovering around a trash can or a homeless man sleeping on the street. But each of his stripped-down interpretations of quotidian experiences ultimately seems created to evoke a single emotion, such as desire, fear, or loneliness.

—Helen Young Chang

## John H. White

### Daniel Blau

#### London

This year, the *Chicago Sun-Times* laid off all its staff photographers and said it would rely henceforth on wire services and news pictures snapped by its reporters. Added to the downsizing of photo departments throughout the media, the announcement was taken by some as a fresh sign that news photography is being bled to death by the ubiquitous cell-phone camera.

This intriguing exhibition of photographs by John H. White—one of those dismissed *Sun-Times* photographers—proved that news photography still has a fighting chance as an art form, whatever its fate as a business. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, White chronicled life in Chicago housing projects and neighborhoods with an unflinching, compassionate eye. He gave us plenty of abandoned buildings and decay, but these images don't evoke a city in ruin. Instead, they show its more human side: boys doing acrobatic flips, women helping children across the street, and, in *Human Blockade at the Eviction House Door* (March 19, 1970), a spirited protest crowd gathering on a front porch. His photographs have a complicity and lyrical humor that harks back to Helen Levitt and Roy DeCarava, but with a newsier, more documentary feel—and a bit less mystery—than the tradition of street photography.



John H. White, *Chicago Housing Projects*, 1981, silver gelatin print on PE paper, 7 1/2" x 10 1/4". Daniel Blau.

White's appreciation for children is evident everywhere, as in *Chicago Housing Projects* (1981), which shows joyful, self-confident kids running across the grim backdrop of a high-rise. The image seems to have been snapped at the kids' level, making the picture about them, not the building. Another eviction photo shows a man with a resigned, strangely wistful face as a crowd of reporters, policemen, and onlookers watch his forcible removal from a house. It's an ambiguous, emotionally complex, almost painterly image. The presence of TV cameras and giant microphones reminds us that the subject is as much eviction as it is journalism itself—and the scene, like this show, suggests the enduring power of the news image.

—Roger Atwood

## Damián Ortega

### Freud Museum

#### London

In 2011, Mexican artist Damián Ortega journeyed to Nigeria to spend a few days at a chimpanzee reserve with a group of primatologists. Ortega had long been interested in tools and everyday objects—manipulating knives, hammers, and other things into enigmatic, graceful sculptures—and the chimpanzees inhabiting this reserve also made items, fashioning sticks for hunting ants and extracting honey from beehives. Titled "Apestraction" and curated by Luiza Teixeira de Freitas with biologist Gonçalo Jesus and professor Volker Sommer, this provocative show documented a collaboration of sorts between the artist and these apes, including works that Ortega made from the primates' tools, and other works that were