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Candida Höfer, *Trinity College Library Dublin I* 2004, C-print, 180 x 215 cm. (70 7/8 x 84 5/8 in.)

Candida Höfer: The Order of Beauty Celebrating 20 Years of Candida Höfer at Ben Brown Fine Arts

28th November – 1st February 2024

PRIVATE VIEW: Monday 27th November 2024

Ben Brown Fine Arts is delighted to present *Candida Höfer: The Order of Beauty*, an exhibition showcasing a selection of works by the esteemed German photographer Candida Höfer at the London gallery. This exhibition marks twenty years since Höfer's debut with the gallery, celebrating a longstanding and fruitful collaboration that began with the seminal 2004 show, *Libraries*. As one of the first artists to join Ben Brown Fine Arts, Höfer returns for her thirteenth solo exhibition at the gallery, affirming her enduring significance in contemporary photography and the evolving depth of her artistic practice.

The exhibition features an extraordinary assemblage of photographs depicting iconic libraries, theatres, museums, and palaces – treasured symbols of universal culture and human achievement – offering a journey through cultural landmarks across Italy, Great Britain, France, Spain, and Russia. Her large-format works capture the beauty and historical gravitas of these institutions, which, even in their emptiness,

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pulse with the echoes of countless stories, memories, and silent dialogues between the past and the present. As we traverse these images, we are invited to engage with the history, form, and function of these enduring structures, to feel the weight of centuries pressing against our gaze. Each photograph becomes a poignant reminder of the cultural memory that lives within these walls, challenging us to consider the role these magnificent sites play not merely as backdrops to human activity, but as active participants in shaping our shared consciousness.

Höfer's distinctive artistic approach is often situated within the context of the Düsseldorf School of Photography, alongside luminaries such as Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth, Thomas Ruff, and Axel Hütte. In 1976, she began her studies at the Düsseldorf Art Academy under the guidance of the influential photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher. However, her work stands apart in its disciplined focus and sobriety, dedicated to capturing the formal qualities of architecture. She directs our gaze towards silence, symmetry, and the nuances of light and colour, embracing the profound stillness created by the absence of people. Through her meticulous command of perspective, depth, and balance, Höfer draws viewers into these spaces as though they are encountering them for the first time, allowing each image to serve as a portal for exploring not only the architecture itself but also our place within it. Her works reveal how public spaces shape and are shaped by human presence, urging a deeper contemplation of our interaction with these environments.

Among the highlights of the exhibition is *Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen III 2021*, a photograph that captures the grandeur of one of the world's oldest monastic libraries, the Abbey Library of St. Gallen, Switzerland. In this work, Höfer's signature precision reveals the opulent Baroque architecture, with rows of meticulously arranged books and intricately patterned wooden floors. The strong horizontal lines convey an ordered calm, while the curving alcoves and serpentine balconies add a dynamic rhythm to the composition. The frescoed ceiling soars above, drawing the viewer into the depths of the library, while Rococo cornicing and decorative metal balustrades underscore the architectural complexity and splendour of the space.

Another notable work is *Musée du Louvre Paris VII 2005*, in which Höfer captures the dramatic expanse of the Louvre's Grand Galerie. Photographed during the museum's closure on a Tuesday, the image showcases a series of galleries suffused with an ethereal interplay of light and space. The quasi-pictorial composition, with its central vanishing point, invites the viewer to follow infinite perspectives, merging documentary precision with a poetic evocation of symmetry. The viewer is enveloped by a sense of calm and order, yet the echoes of footsteps and faint whispers seem to reverberate through the emptiness, reminding us of the transient nature of human presence within these historic halls.

Höfer's work reminds us that while these spaces can exist without us, they also hold echoes of our presence. As we gaze down the empty walkways of the Louvre or across the vast halls of a library, we sense the flicker of movement, the murmur of distant voices, and the passage of time that resonates through these structures. The artist compels us to reflect on how such spaces not only preserve history but also mirror society, acting as repositories of memory and cultural identity.

Candida Höfer: The Order of Beauty is a celebration of an artist who has spent decades capturing the essence of the world's most significant cultural institutions. This exhibition invites viewers to enter moments of profound tranquillity and reimagine how we occupy these magnificent spaces, revealing an enduring dialogue between architecture and human experience. In doing so, it illuminates *the order of beauty* that lies within these sacred monuments – where history, culture, and aesthetic harmony converge to shape our shared understanding of civilisation.

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About Candida Höfer

Candida Höfer, born in Eberswalde, Germany, in 1944, is renowned for her large-scale photographs of uninhabited architectural interiors. Her work primarily focuses on cultural, institutional, public, and civic spaces, including libraries, museums, theatres, opera houses, universities, palaces, and zoos. The striking absence of human figures in her photographs imparts an eerie sense of grandeur, inviting contemplation of the architectural forms and the significance of the absent inhabitants in relation to public and private spaces. Rather than imposing a particular interpretation, Höfer presents these vacant public interiors with an objective, democratic, and almost encyclopaedic lens, capturing the pure essence and character of each room and its furnishings. Höfer's meticulously composed photographs are unpretentious, precise, and serene, engaging with the pictorial poetics of absence and the psychological effect of architecture.

Höfer began studying at the Düsseldorf Art Academy under the influential photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher in 1976. In 2003, Höfer represented Germany at the 50th Venice Biennale, and in 2002 she participated at Documenta 11. In 2018, Höfer received the Outstanding Contribution to Photography Award as part of the Sony World Photography Awards, and this year, she was honored with the prestigious Käthe Kollwitz Prize. Her work has been shown at the Kunsthalle Basel, Basel; Kunsthalle Bern, Bern; Musée du Louvre, Paris; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; and The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Her photographs are part of major museum collections across the globe, including the Tate Modern, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Museum Folkwang, Essen; Kunsthalle Hamburg, Hamburg; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; and The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

About Ben Brown Fine Arts

In 2004, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened its first location in the heart of Mayfair, London. The gallery quickly established itself on the international art scene with exhibitions of long-term gallery artists Candida Höfer, Tony Bevan, Claude & François-Xavier Lalanne, and Heinz Mack, amongst others, as well as momentous exhibitions of 20th century masters including Lucio Fontana, Alighiero Boetti and Gerhard Richter. In 2009, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened an exhibition space in Hong Kong, becoming the first international gallery to move to the city that would soon become a major international art hub. In Hong Kong, the gallery introduced notable exhibitions of Pablo Picasso, Sean Scully, Frank Auerbach, and Miquel Barceló, as well as survey exhibitions of Chinese contemporary photography, the Düsseldorf School of Photography, 20th century Italian art, and the ZERO movement. In 2021, Ben Brown Fine Arts opened a third location in Palm Beach, Florida, with an inaugural exhibition celebrating the legacy of American and European 20th century artists who developed radical approaches to making art, among them Alexander Calder, Georg Baselitz, and Andy Warhol. The galleries regularly exhibit and develop programming for our renowned stable of international, multi-disciplinarian contemporary artists, including the aforementioned as well as Yoan Capote, Awol Erizku, Nabil Nahas, José Parlá, Enoc Perez, Ena Swansea, and Gavin Turk. With multi-lingual staff based in London, Hong Kong, New York, and Palm Beach, the gallery has strong relationships with private collectors, advisors, and public institutions, sourcing and placing important primary and secondary artworks for them. Ben Brown Fine Arts participates in major art fairs worldwide, including Art Basel, Art Basel Hong Kong, Art Basel Miami Beach, The Armory Show, Frieze Masters, TEFAF Maastricht, and TEFAF New York.

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