

Frank Mädler

Corkin Gallery // January 28–March 13

THERE IS A SMALL but important accident in Mädler's quiet and doleful 2009–11 series "Wiesen." A photo of a church, located in what had once been a German village in the Czech Republic where Mädler's father was born and eventually forced to leave, was shot on film using a box camera. When Mädler hung the image to dry, the clips he used to hold it to the line seared two rings in the photograph, pocking the church steeple. The accident feels appropriate for this collection of haunting, soft-focus photographs; nothing here leaves comment more than trace, or a subject more than shadow. Its true felicity lies in its final comment on memory: the fallibility of the medium at its service, and the things we think we remember, despite forgetting and omission.

Mädler, born in the German Democratic Republic and confined to the Eastern Bloc until his mid-20s, makes photographs that limn beauty through constraint. Of the four series presented here, the large-scale "Gold," 2011, shows this best. The photographer, positioned at a high vantage point over Prague (one of the few foreign cities GDR civilians were permitted to visit), renders the city through a fine—but nearly obfuscating—lattice of trees. The suggested barrier echoes Mädler's own psychological remove, with only brick-red rooftops and glancing light filtering through the scrim.

Mädler works in analog photography, which demonstrates his embrace of historic subjectivity. And while he plays with scale, abstraction, and light in "Basic Motion," 2010, and "Shine," 2011—depicting the dancelike play of airborne insects and the alien glow of LED-lit electronics, respectively—he achieves his most profound use of the medium in "Wiesen." The six photographs comprising this series veer toward the painterly, their edges bending and clouding focus, and their subjects—barren factories, snow-piled stone houses, a church—are suffused in light. Mädler's return to this unchanged village allegorizes what we all know to be true and yet resist: We can never go home again. But marked by an accident, the image of the church in the winter landscape anchors Mädler's efforts in a second truth—that memory holds its place, even as home grows distant. —**Sky Goodden**



Frank Mädler
Gold, Gold 5,
 2011. Color
 print, diasec,
 56 x 37 in.