

ART PICKS OF THE WEEK



Cernicky's *Film Love*, 2000

ANTHONY HERNANDEZ, JIRI CERNICKY

Anthony Hernandez looks at the underside of things, the normal or subnormal conditions of human existence, wherever he goes. It could be out onto the boulevards of Los Angeles, as in his famous '70s sequence of people-in-the-streets (which wasn't actually limited to L.A.); it could be under those boulevards, as in his more recent documentations of homeless nest-sites; or it could be in and into active and abandoned construction sites, the kind we pay no mind to — not at home, anyway. When those sites are somewhere else, somewhere exotic, they take on a new frisson, precisely because they remain so homely, so ordinary. Imagine: Hernandez gets a Prix de Rome, awarded a year's stay in the Eternal City, and comes back with photos not of the Colosseum or the Vatican or the Appian Way, but of the interiors and corners of new buildings in mid-building, their dusty ambiances and twisted rebars and random pieces of paper as anonymous and touching as they would be in Reseda or Irvine. But, then, we expect them in Reseda and Irvine; in Rome they seem almost an affront to history, a tawdry outermost layer to an exquisitely layered urban locus. But, again, Hernandez has photographed these elevator shafts and concrete pillars with great care, finding the most lucid, elegant points of view, and composing pictures as classically poised as anything in antiquity. Rome remains Eternal — and universal as well.

And what happens when the roles reverse, when a denizen of a history-laden city reflects on a nearly history-free one? You get the loopily sinister objects of Prague's Jiri Cernicky. We get a taste of Cernicky's previous potently peculiar transformations with photos and videos of his porcelain mask — a Munchian scream turned into a bathroom fixture — multiplied like an army and, singularly, tooling around Prague's streets with ferocious abandon on a motorbike. Looking at Los Angeles, Cernicky concocts emotionally and sexually loaded car figurines — hood ornaments, rear-view mirror mascots — men's and women's shoes, both silver, merging into one another; a baseball glove dripping with beads; and a Medusa-esque headdress bristling with immense syringes. Cernicky has picked up on L.A.'s obsessive, appetite-ridden creepiness — and has burrowed into it as only a Kafka countryman can.

Anthony Hernandez at Grant Selwyn Fine Art, 341 N. Cañon Dr., Beverly Hills; thru Dec. 2. (310) 777-2400. Jiri Cernicky at Post, 1904 E. Seventh S. Pl., dwn.twn.; thru Nov. 11. (213) 622-8580. Cernicky also at CzechFront, 10990 Wilshire Blvd., No. 1100, Wstwd.; thru Dec. 31. (310) 473-0889.

—Peter Frank