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David Maisel, *Ohlivia 1372-53n* 2004. C-print. Courtesy of JGS, Inc.

A View from Above
SBMA Frames a View of Ohlivia with Photography by David Maisel
On View January 26 – April 27, 2008

“This is not the first time you’ve seen an overhead shot of L.A.’s looping freeway interchanges, but Maisel abstracts them and everything else here until the city appears depopulated, absolutely postapocalyptic.”

— ***Vince Aletti***, The New Yorker

November 28, 2007 - Aerial photography occupies a special place among the many segments of photography. Not only because of a history dating back to the earliest periods of photographic discovery, but also for the images aerial photographers have captured – images that would have been unattainable from any other viewpoint. Images that have had a profound impact both on how we view ourselves and how we view the world around us.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art illustrates such an intense view of the world, or at least that which is defined by the urban area of Los Angeles, in an exhibition entitled ***Ohlivia David Maisel*** on view January 26 – April 27, 2008. These large scale images by San Francisco-based photographer David Maisel are printed as negatives rather than positives, providing views of a city that is nearly the size of Ireland with more than 15 million inhabitants, as startlingly quiet, intimate, and eerily beautiful. In essence, these photographs provide x-rays of a city’s anatomy – topographies of frenzy and alienation – making them all the more frightening as claustrophobic expanses.

From earliest times humankind has held a fascination with the view from above, especially those of urban landscapes. Not long after the discovery of photography, pioneers in the field began to turn their attention to the aerial view. The first to successfully accomplish this feat was Gaspar Felix Tournachon or "Nadar" in 1858 when he photographed the houses of the French village of Petit-Becetre from a balloon tethered at a height of 80 meters. That first image has unfortunately been lost, but Nadar went on with his experiments becoming the first to photograph Paris from a balloon in 1868. In 1860, not long after Nadar's first attempts, James Wallace Black was successful in photographing Boston from a balloon. This is the oldest aerial photograph known to still exist.

So, why does David Maisel cast a critical bird's eye view upon the megalopolis that is Southern California? In the words of the artist:

"Los Angeles is emblematic of an idea of modern space that is linked to an increasing sense of collective societal anxiety....These aerial images describe a potentially desecrated urban fabric, even as they transcribe the commonplace. In the post-9/11 age we now occupy, chaos and catastrophe seem implicit in the urban aerial view. To surveil and record the city from the air seems nearly to approach an act of civil disobedience. The images cannot help but serve as portent or prophesy of some future conflagration."

Whether viewed as a forecast of doom or an expansive study of urbanization, Maisel's images are truly breathtaking and thought-provoking, following in the tradition of those photographic pioneers who provide us a unique look at the world in which we exist.

About the photographer:

David Maisel was born in New York City in 1961. He received his BA from Princeton University, and his MFA from California College of the Arts, in addition to study at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. He has been the recipient of an Individual Artist's Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and is a Visiting Scholar at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.

Maisel's photographs, multi-media projects, and public installations have been exhibited internationally, and are included in many permanent collections, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Brooklyn Museum of Art; the Santa Barbara Museum of Art; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, among others. His work has been the subject of three monographs: ***The Lake Project*** (Nazraeli Press, 2004), ***Oblivion*** (Nazraeli Press, 2006), and ***Lilray of Dust*** which will be published by Chronicle Books in Fall 2008.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA. Open Tuesday – Sunday 11 am to 5 pm. Closed Monday. Free every Sunday. 805.963.4364 www.sbmanet