



UNLIT CHAMBERS

ABELARDO MORELL BRINGS US INSIDE
THE CAMERA OBSCURA

“The postmodernists were all announcing the death of photography, and I wanted to give it a rebirth,” Abelardo Morell says. “In some small way, I want to feel like I’m reinventing it.” The 58-year-old Cuban-born photographer isn’t fooling around—he uses a camera obscura, which predates photography altogether.

Invented in the eleventh century as an optical experiment, and later used as a drawing aid for painters and artists, the camera obscura is a relatively simple device: a box with a hole cut into it, which allows light to strike the back wall of the camera and form an inverted reproduction of the scenery outside. When photosensitive printing materials were invented, the design evolved into the modern camera, though the archaic technology still has a wealth of unexplored potential.

Morell begins by seeking out rooms with windows facing a spectacular view, from the Empire State Building to the gardens outside a Venetian palazzo, creating a camera obscura inside the rooms by sealing light out and then cutting a hole in front of one of the windows. With the outside world projected, inverted, on the room’s walls, Morell sets a long exposure on a large-format camera and photographs the interior of the room. While the process is relatively simple, the artist’s location search is painstaking. The Camera Obscura series ends up as an inadvertent travel diary of the places he’s stayed and worked (Havana, London, Paris, among others).

“It’s the quality of truth,” Morell explains. “The phenomena of a small hole rendering such a vivid image feel sensational, like a gift. It’s not something one invents.” Regardless of its form, his work will always be retracing and building upon the past. “Words have been written before, but put [them] in a new pattern or sequence and you have a new poem,” he says. “Conventional photography still has a lot of things that are undiscovered.” LORI FREDRICKSON

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OHNE TITEL

HELMUT LANG AND KARL LAGERFELD ALUMS FORGE
THEIR OWN MODERN ELEGANCE



Ohne Titel (“without a title” in German) is one of those rare labels that seems destined for success. All twenty-eight pieces in their fall 2007 collection are familiar enough for integration with any wardrobe, but also possess a level of innovation sure to set each design apart. A streamlined palette of black, gray and electric purple ensures continuity, while a number of specially developed fabrics, like bonded silk, neoprene, nylon and silicone, add a higher level of functionality.

Post-Parsons, Ohne Titel’s Alexa Adams and Flora Gill scored positions with two highly revered fashion designers: Adams as Helmut Lang’s womenswear designer, Gill at Vivienne Tam doing “crazy knitwear things.” When Helmut Lang was shuttered in 2005, the two transitioned to Karl Lagerfeld’s womenswear collection. “We learned more at our first jobs than we ever could have at school,” Adams says. “Working with [them] was a true education. Helmut and Karl are both very different kinds of people, but they just taught [us] the right way to do everything.”

What they learned is reflected in detailing that is applied to body-conscious pieces, such as a miniskirt inspired by the shape of a backpack or a dress embellished with looped plastic thread that mimics feathers. Elements of activewear pepper the collection, sometimes in overt references such as bungee-cord lacing and plastic-clip closures. It’s a thoroughly modern elegance that defines the line. “For a new designer, it’s important that you have a real feeling of what your collection is, not referencing other collections at all,” says Gill. “[The] most important thing is an opinion and an actual thought about what you want to do.”

Pleased by a positive response for fall 2007 from buyers and press, the duo has enthusiastic plans for the future. Adams and Gill revealed that the upcoming September collection would be “really tribal, including some oversized jewelry pieces.” With scores of industry supporters anxious to see their sophomore efforts, Ohne Titel’s excitement and optimism is well deserved. NINA STOTLER

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