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ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

CRITICS' PICKS

Claude Collins-Stracensky, *Vine*, 2006.**"JSA"****RENTAL GALLERY**

936 Mei Ling Way

January 07–February 11

"JSA" stands for Jim Shaw's Armies—and Shaw deserves to have an infantry. His epic Horror a Vacui (made in collaboration with Benjamin Weisman in 1991) was the standout of the now-classic 1992 MoCA exhibition "Helter Skelter" and one of the most earthshaking experiences I've had in a gallery. So if it seems a little cute to put Shaw's works together with those made by his former assistants and students, at least it couldn't happen to a more talented guy. Alas, the artist has more Beetle Baileys than George Pattons in his ranks—with two stunning exceptions. Julian Hober's *Grotesque/Abstract*, 2006, a drawing of four severed heads made with a Géricault-like impassivity, except for a slight tweak of the dials—each head is progressively more pummeled—that makes the overall effect both more sadistically exhilarating and more queasy. Claude Collins-Stracensky hits the real home run, however. His photograph *Vine*, 2006, has the sinister monumentality of Gregory Crewdson yet retains an even more everyday veneer. The mammoth office building of a FedEx-style Major Shipper is attacked by mammoth strands of the seemingly self-supporting titular object: It's a hunk of exurban office-park architecture devoured by repressed nature. As in much of today's theatrically staged photography, the tiniest details (the legible street sign, for instance) take on a macabre importance. This work features nothing like a human figure, but even without one, Collins-Stracensky's composition makes us feel that the real action (exploding elsewhere) is being covered up, the real players are detained offstage, and the real meaning is sitting somewhere tied to a chair, gag firmly planted in mouth.

—Matthew Wilder

Wilder, Matthew. JSA. Artforum.com, Los Angeles Critics Picks