

FRONT MEMBERS' ROOM

possibility in destruction.

b.princen

Fulcrum: One of the things that strikes me most about your work is the dichotomy between architectural object and people, it's almost as if there are two contexts.

Bas Princen: If there are people, there are not many. Lately, if there are people, they are workers. In earlier series there are people at leisure in the landscape; this evolved when I thought, "that's not the interesting preoccupation, what's interesting is when people are actually building or destroying something", so in-between activity.

F: In the history of architectural photography, there's a debate about whether or not to include people in images, especially exterior shots. Often you have a completely empty context, are you responding to this?

BP: It has to do with the disappearance of the middle view. In contemporary architecture it's either about the object, as a kind of solo object, or it's about the super grand scheme, the urban, and how things are organized. If it's a huge scheme, people are too small to recognize; it's always about the object, not the relation between object and people. This middle scale, which was there quite a bit in the 30s, 40s, even 50s, has somehow disappeared. The street view is not there anymore. Also in photography it's disappearing.

F: Do you think this is indicative of a general shift in architectural thinking about objects?

BP: Yes. Architecture is either about the really big scale or about objects. Few work anymore on this middle scale, there is no attention for it. It's not really cool to work there. Maybe you don't agree...

F: What do you try to show when you work at the periphery, in periods of construction/destruction?

BP: Both are acts of a certain forward thinking; you destruct things because you want to build. If you have no intention of creating, you

just leave them to become ruins. So to me those two things are closely connected.

DESTRUCTION AND CONSTRUCTION ARE PART OF SOME NEW ENERGY. THERE'S A KIND OF A POSSIBILITY IN DESTRUCTION.

F: Geographically, you seem to be increasingly working in emerging countries...

BP: Especially for the Reservoir. It has a strange relation to the American frontier, its history... or China, which is the new frontier somehow. And the most interesting one is North Africa, one no one seems to understand yet as a new frontier. We look at the photographs of the frontier now as pure documents, but if you really examine them, they were quite specific about their subject.

It seems they wanted to tell a certain story to people not involved in this frontier, which was maybe not completely the reality. I like to think they were creating a certain view – what we now think of as the reality. In both subject and technique they were really forward thinking... not dissimilar from 16 and 17th century Dutch paintings, where you have windmills. We look at them today and it's completely nostalgic, but if you imagine that at that time this was the most hi-tech object you could find in the landscape. Thinking about historic images in this way can make them feel very strange. I like that, but I also like photographing things that are now, that are shaping our world.

F: There's a lot of nostalgia today, especially technological nostalgia, like Instagram for the iPhone. Is this counter productive?

BP: It's a way to make the image less real, and therefore easier to connect to. There are so many real pictures, if you want to do something special the easiest way is to give it this certain look. It's an extra story on top of reality, that's the reason people like it.

Bas Princen is a photographer of cities, landscapes and our times. His exhibit at the AA is open until May 26th.

NEW YORK

depicting place.

i.baan

Fulcrum: How do you capture the relationship between a building and its context?

Iwan Baan: I am quite specific about the type of work I'm interested in, I'm always looking for projects where I can tell a story about a context, the relationship of a building and its true position, how it really fits into an area. It's a very intuitive way of working, you spend some time around the project, see what happens, what people do there on the site.

F: There's a very particular way that people are included in your images.

IB: My background is more documentary photography... I kind of fell unexpectedly into this whole field of architecture. My older work was always about people and space, never really architecture. Then I started working with Rem, a bit by accident really.

Architecture is made for people, we see this in renders, in drawings, in models; there are always lots of people. Then you see the final commissioned pictures and there is no life anymore. For me it's always been very important to include people, as way to give buildings a certain purpose. I can suggest why a building is there, in this specific place. I just let people do their thing and a kind of story evolves in that sense.

F: Is that how you think about the purpose of your photography? To communicate the reason for a building?

IB: Often, yes. It varies, sometimes I think of it as architecture, sometimes more like a documentary, where you are trying to record the story of a site.

F: Does this approach change based on the nature of the client?

IB: Not so much the client, more the type of project. With a public or urban project you can show a more of a story than, say, with a family home where one or two people are living in the space.

F: Your photos are extremely widely publicised, and employed by different people with diverse agendas: for magazines, for developers, for clients, to promote architects. When you make your images are you sensitive to their political or economic use?

IB: As an architectural photographer you're basically providing a service.

I STILL WORK INDEPENDENTLY; I RARELY TAKE BRIEFS FROM ARCHITECTS ABOUT WHAT THEY WANT IN THE PICTURES. THOSE I WORK WITH NORMALLY KNOW MY INTERESTS, AND LET ME DO MY THING.

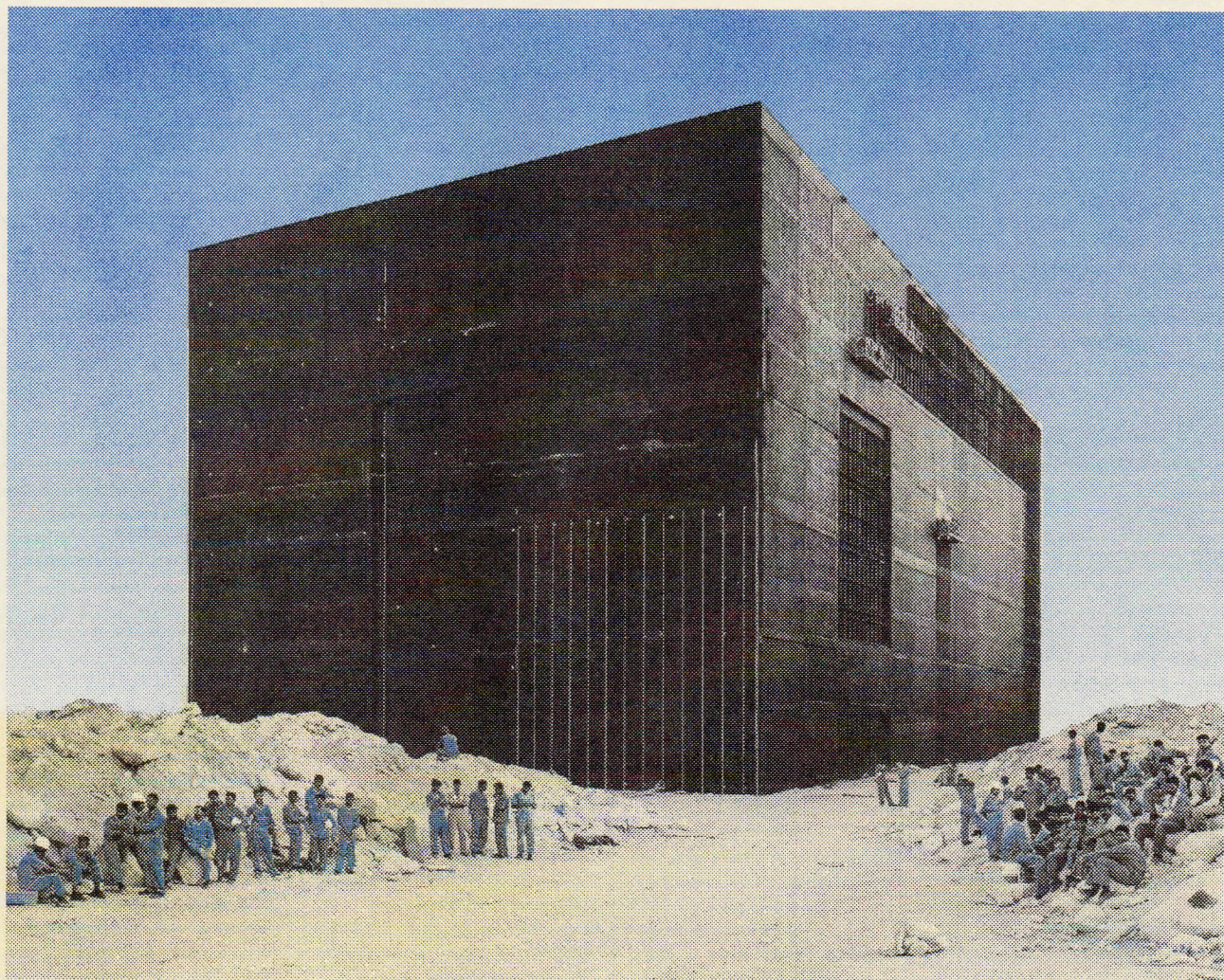
Of course after you've photographed something these images often live a life of their own, in publications or in the story of an architect.

F: A building lasts for a very long time; often you arrive shortly after its finished. How do you factor time into your photography?

IB: It's always a bit of a struggle with architects, but as a photographer you're often rushed in either late or early, just when it's finished or around an opening. I normally like to shoot the project a little later in its life, when it's in use and overtaken by people. But that sort of depends on for whom you're shooting it – if it's for the architect, they want to publicise it straight away. If it's for a magazine or book you might even come back a number of times. So there is a gradation in differences.

I'm always interested with my pictures to tell a story of a site and a place. I live now from a suitcase, every two or three days I'm in an aeroplane travelling all over the world. Sometimes when I wake up I struggle to think of where I am. Photography is a good way to clarify where this building is, and what are the specifics of the place. That's why I normally refuse the sort of generic office building that could be anywhere.

Iwan Baan is perhaps the most widely-published architectural photographer. His clients include OMA, Zaha, and H+DeM.



Cooling Plant, by Bas Princen
(Dubai 2009)

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