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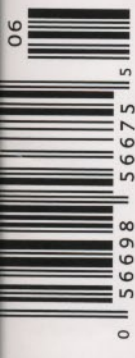
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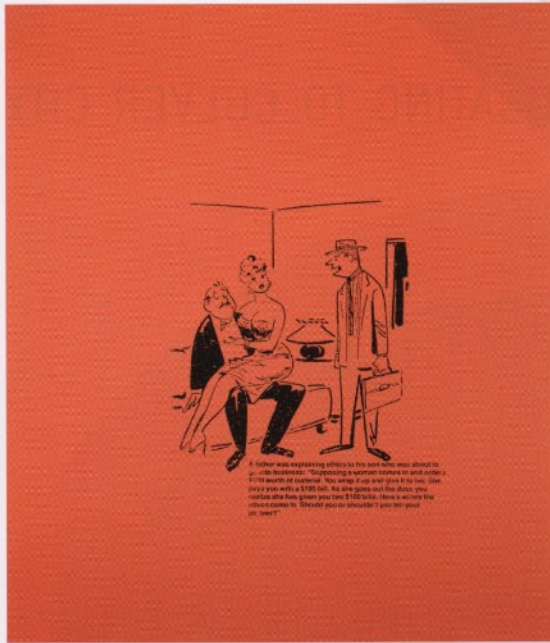
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Page 31: Amir Zaki, *Untitled_62-63*, 2007, ultrachrome archival photograph, 44.75 x 56.75 in. Courtesy the artist & Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York.



Page 4: Kang Can, *Drowning in Fruit*, 2007, oil on canvas, 31.5 x 31.5 in. Courtesy ArtSpace/Virginia Miller Galleries, Coral Gables FL.



Page 47: Richard Prince, *Untitled*, 1988, acrylic & silkscreen on canvas, 56 x 48 in. © Richard Prince. Courtesy Solon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Page 55: Bertein van Manen, *Rostov-on-Don (Maxim and Tanja Resting)*, 1993. Courtesy Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York.



Cover: Zhang Xianyong, *Practice Series: Dive*, 2007, digital print, 35.5 x 53 in. Courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco & Arena 1 Gallery, Santa Monica.

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Publisher: Paul Foss Editors: Nancy Barton, David Carrier, Juli Carson, Gean Moreno, Laurence A. Rickels, Mike Rogers

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artUS is published by The Foundation for International Art Criticism, a nonprofit corporation.

Printed by Tara TPS, Korea.

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Distribution inquiries should be addressed to the artUS office. tel 213 625 2010 artUS@artext.org

AMIR ZAKI by Jody Zellen

Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York NY October 19 - November 21, 2007

artUS 22 SPRING 2008

At first glance, Amir Zaki's new series of photographs and sculptures, rather mysteriously titled "•••," concerns nothing so much as bland mall architecture conjugated in the singular—isolated gas stations, churches, taco stands, convenience stores. A keen observer, Zaki photographs these architectural eyesores very precisely against their immediate backgrounds, including palm trees, empty streets, and mountains receding in the distance. What instantly strikes the viewer, however, is that each building exhibits an enigmatic sign, in the form of applied posters, metal hoardings, and flickering neon lights. On the face of it these signs seem deliberate, being located where commercial symbols normally go and having a similar eye-catching effect. But it soon becomes evident that these signs are sheer poetic license, added to the images after the fact.

Untitled_62-63 (all work 2007), for instance, is an abandoned gas station seemingly in the middle of nowhere. An eclectic mix of mock-stone pillars, diverse cladding, and a large, already crumbling driveway overhang supported by two, impossibly thin columns, the earth-toned construction is only identifiable by a single, relatively inconspicuous piece of signage. Comprised of a red graphic circle with three central dots and two intersecting diagonal double lines, the symbol reads as a cross between a skull-and-crossbones and a Smiley face. Elsewhere, Zaki places on the roof of an A-frame mall eatery an electric sign in the shape of a large purple "L" with a circle in each of its clock-like hands. Yet as the incongruous signage is placed at the back of the building, out of sight of entering customers, one wonders what purpose it might possibly serve. It even looks like a religious symbol, with its glistening white Christmas lights. But as it's not turned on, one would never know. What precisely sheds light on this mysterious, faceless edifice is the nearby flash of a McDonald's outlet, whose own unsigned proximity speaks volumes about where we are and what we might expect to find.

A patent exercise in differential semiology and the absence of what is usually thus affirmed, Zaki still allows his signs a certain universal presence because of their continuing significance *in absentia*. A good example of this presence-in-absence is the church-like building in *Untitled_127*, with its sheer triangular roof and patterned facade of circles and X's. Surrounding it are well-manicured lawns temptuously being watered by underground sprinklers. The building's severely sloping sides expose bare low walls, to which Zaki has added a duo of iconic intersecting lines in keeping with the facade's game of religious Tic-Tac-Toe, stamping it as authoritative yet profoundly empty. A patch of reflective water lying in a gutter across the street says it all.



What is truly baffling about Zaki's show is why he also included his *Symbol Combo* series of laser-cut polyurethane sculptural abstractions. Clearly related to the symbols insinuated into his pictures, these enamel-colored additions seem heavy-handed and opaque by comparison, otherwise jarring the subtle transitions between the photographs. But perhaps this is the point. If Zaki is pointing out that what signs assert is often an illusion, then it is just as certain that art or architecture falls into the same category—the present sum of all absences.



(OPPOSITE TOP TO BOTTOM) RACKSTRAW DOWNES, PRESIDIO HORSE RACING ASSOCIATION TRACK, 1. LOOKING NORTH, EAST AND SOUTHEAST; FROM THE ENTRANCE ON RTE. 170 TO THE BEGINNING OF THE TRACK, 2007, OIL ON CANVAS, 15 X 144.4 IN. THE PULASKI SKYWAY CROSSING THE HACKENSACK RIVER, 2007, OIL ON CANVAS, 24 X 66.5 IN. (ABOVE TOP TO BOTTOM) AMIR ZAKI, UNTITLED 119, 2007, VIVERRA PIGMENT ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPH, 44.75 X 56.75 IN. UNTITLED 127, 2007, VIVERRA PIGMENT ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPH, 44.75 X 56.75 IN. COURTESY PERRY RUBENSTEIN GALLERY, NEW YORK. COURTESY THE ARTIST & PERRY RUBENSTEIN GALLERY, NEW YORK.