

COLLECTOR DAILY

Markus Brunetti, FACADES – Grand Tour @Yossi Milo

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / February 20, 2018

JTF (just the facts): A total of 15 large scale color photographs, framed in white and unmatted, and hung against white walls in the East and West gallery spaces and the smaller viewing room. All of the works are archival pigment prints, made between 2008 and 2018. Most of the images are sized roughly 66×54 inches (or reverse), with a few somewhat taller, at 84×54 and 113×54 inches. All of the prints are available in editions of 9+3AP.



Comments/Context: In the distant past, when trying to capture an accurate likeness of a grand cathedral, we would have likely started with hand-drawn architectural plans, or perhaps some detailed etchings of frontal views and elevations made soon after the completion of the initial construction process.

Much later, after the invention of photography, as our ability to document such structures with crisp realism increased, we began to see the creation of photographs whose sole purpose was to make records of important architecture, like Édouard Baldus' 19th century images of Paris landmarks.

This visual approach was then extended in the 20th century by conceptual artists like Bernd and Hilla Becher, who pointed their cameras at industrial buildings of much less noble heritage, documenting the functional details found there with an even more exacting sense of intentional rigor. And at each step along the way, the precision of the resulting imagery increased, allowing us to see the minute details of our built structures (as well as their subtle relationships to the land around them) with more and more clarity.

Markus Brunetti's intricate photographs of European churches extend this idea of highly deliberate architectural documentation in ways that go beyond a true sense of visual reality. Instead of making a single exposure of a given structure (as both Baldus and the Bechers did), Brunetti makes literally thousands, exhaustively working from top to bottom of the facade, in an almost inch-by-inch manner. These tiny fragments are then painstakingly stitched together later, leveraging the power of digital software to harmonize all the infinitesimally small details.

When I first encountered Brunetti's works a few years ago, I have to admit that my initial reaction was mild skepticism. They seemed like big art fair art, merging the deadpan of the Bechers with the ornate grandeur of Candida Höfer, and perfectly sized for a massive condo wall. Their reliance on digital stitching also seemed, at that time, to be a bit too much of the moment, as if Brunetti was trying too hard to be part of a cutting edge trend. But with the benefit of hindsight and a more deliberate dose of looking at his new images from the ongoing series, I am happy to admit that I underestimated (or misunderstood) Brunetti's motivations.

If we think about these buildings for even a quick minute, it becomes obvious that any one church will not be at its visual best on one single day. There might be clumps of tourists in front, or rain that afternoon, or ongoing construction that obscures the front with scaffolding, netting, or the bustle of craftsmen working. So Brunetti, and his partner Betty Schoener, have settled in for the long haul, outfitting a van with all their gear and traveling around Europe in patient cycles, returning to their various subjects many times over the span of several years. This is why the dates for the images are spans (like 2009-2016) – it has taken them many years to generate all the image fragments needed to execute the final picture.

With some more thinking, we also begin to see these buildings that may have taken centuries to construct, were not ever “finished” in some end point manner, but were constantly evolving, being built, extended, and rebuilt over time. So the photographs made at any one point in time are a snapshot in a continuum of that process of constant change, rather than a definitive document.

Where Brunetti’s images enter this dialogue is that they are in a sense nearly “perfect” composites. They strip away all the distractions and optical distortions, piecing together the facades with astonishing clarity. In fact, they are so hyper-real that they go beyond what our eyes can actually see – it would be impossible to ever “see” these churches as Brunetti has captured them. While weathering, moss, and soot stains are left in place, there are no shadows, no anchoring cables, and no hanging ropes – every inch of these huge buildings is seen in its best possible presentation, and harmonized across a decently wide span of time. Given this superlative clarity, it brings his images all the way back to the elegant linear symmetry of the original architectural drawings, albeit they capture all the tiny decisions made by the builders over the centuries that deviate from the plans.

Standing in front of a Brunetti photograph of one of these massive facades is an exercise in getting hopelessly lost in the minutiae (see the detail shots above to get a feeling for this). One can see variations of stone textures, sculpted statues that have been cleaned (or not), windows that were made the same or different, and spires that don’t quite match. Each image represents a master class architectural lecture on the forms of flying buttresses, gilded mosaics, swirling Gothic arches and decorations, onion domes, bell towers, and countless other textbook details given life. A wander through the galleries encourages the typological comparison so loved by the Bechers, where the elemental wood form of a Norwegian stave church can be matched with an elaborate Roman Catholic church in Siena or a colorful Baroque example from Portugal.

What ends up being most impressive about these works is how hard Brunetti has worked to remove his artistic hand from his process. These images of churches are not his “impressions” of them or his stylized conceptual reinterpretations of what he found there. They are sober and reverential homages to the builders of these landmarks, using the powerful tools of contemporary photography to capture their creations with a heretofore unprecedented level of optical fidelity. In a sense, they make each and every previous rendering of these celebrated churches obsolete, as they document these touchstones of human cultural history with a level of exacting perfection our eyes can never match.

Collector’s POV: The prints in this show are priced between \$24500 and \$35000, based on size. Brunetti’s work has little secondary market history at this point, so gallery retail likely remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.