

LEO BAECK SALON NO 9 (THE FINE ART ISSUE)
BECKY BROWN

Project: VIEW FINDINGS, 2011
Slide show and sculptural elements in storage container

The window reminds us that we are captives of the room, by suggesting both flight and confinement... The meaning of the window makes one aware of absolute inertia or the perfect instant, when time oscillates in a circumscribed place. The window prevents movement by setting up a transparent barrier...

—Robert Smithson, “Ultramoderne,” 1967

A window is a transparent or a translucent opening in a wall or door that allows the passage of light and, if not closed or sealed, air and sound... Windows are held in place by frames, which prevent them from collapsing in.

—Wikipedia, entry on “window”

Robert Smithson theorizes on the qualities and implications of windows in the context of the “Ultramoderne”—his term for the sci-fi, “crystalline” (American) architecture of the 1930s. As an artist and city-dweller, I have been interested in windows literally, physically and metaphorically for some time: barriers/passages between public and private worlds, vessels of voyeurism, twinkle-studding features of the nighttime façade, the most obvious form juxtaposition in real space, the turned-mirror after dark...

I approached the Leo Baeck photograph archive without a set angle of research—as a half-Jewish New Yorker in Germany for the first time, I had personal interests in learning about the Jewish community here, but no particular family, location or subject of study. Access to the archive at the Jewish Museum’s library is provided only through a search engine that requires one to enter key words in order to see images. Not knowing where/how to start, I began with words, concepts and motifs of interest to me: art, airplanes, baseball, carnivals, and finally, windows. Using this search criteria yielded images of children smiling out of windows; old people sitting by windows; windows of synagogues and storefronts, soldiers waving out of train windows; anti-Semitic graffiti in shop windows; open windows onto landscapes, and much more. I decided that this visual motif—as banal as it is symbolic—could be the start of a system to organize, make sense of, *archive* (to the extent that we all structure a personal archive to make sense of things that matter to us) this extraordinary collection of images so packed with history, tragedy, joy, memory, family and just about everything else that humanity encapsulates.

I will re-photograph window-images from the Leo Baeck archive to create a set of 35 millimeter slides, distorting and obscuring elements to varying extents. I will combine these with other images (mine own as well as found slides) to create a slideshow that I will exhibit in my container at the Tolmien storage facility. Creating slides—an oft-thought “obsolete” archival form—to be shown in a determined time-based presentation will be my way of bringing the Leo Baeck material out of the digital abyss and into tangible, physical form, while using its contents to create a new narrative path. The window, which at once offers and limits perception, will be the literal and figurative entry point to the stories, ideas and emotions contained in these images.