

Friday, March 13, 2009

# WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS LEISURE

The New York Times



GAIL ALBERT HALABAN/ROBERT MANN GALLERY

“Out of My Window, Brooklyn, Snow” (2007), a photograph by Gail Albert Halaban.

## Gail Albert Halaban

‘Out My Window’

Robert Mann Gallery  
210 11th Avenue, at 25th Street,  
Chelsea

Through March 28

Alfred Hitchcock’s “Rear Window” comes readily to mind when you look at Gail Albert Halaban’s large color photographs. Most depict tall New York apartment buildings viewed from a high window opposite.

Initially, Ms. Halaban’s pictures resemble formal studies in which architectural grids create syncopating, all-over visual rhythms. Then you notice that there are people in some of the apartments. None of them are doing anything exciting. There is no sex or violence. But there is something compelling about being able to see into the private worlds of ordinary people. The voyeuristic, slightly melancholy effect recalls certain paintings by Edward Hopper.

Ms. Halaban also took pictures of people while in their apartments with them, and these have a poignant intimacy. They resemble photographs by Philip-Lorca diCorcia. One breathtaking example shows a woman wrapped in a bath towel sitting on the edge of her bathtub and gazing out through glass walls over the city.

While the photographs shot from distant windows suggest a kind of surveillance, in fact Ms. Halaban collaborated with her subjects and asked them to pose and position themselves in their homes for the camera. So they are a form of portraiture. Scale is important too. Because the people are so tiny in proportion to the whole picture, there is an expansive effect. And for the same reason, there is a sense of social amplitude: so many buildings, so many people, so many stories in the big city. KEN JOHNSON