ROSE MARCUS

The Four Seasons

May 30–July 11, 2015

Mies van der Rohe was in the mood to tell secrets when he designed the Seagram Building at 375 Park Ave in 1957. No more plastering the sides of buildings with swirls and flourishes. Instead, he conceived of a building with a radical exoskeleton, where the steel I-beams, the very bones of the building, would be visible to all. Unfortunately, U.S. fire codes wouldn't allow it, as all structural steel must be fireproofed, which in this case was achieved by encasement in concrete. The beams disappeared. Disheartened, but determined, Mies compromised by facing the building with non-structural, bronze-toned I-beams to signify the internal structure. How early the functional form at the heart of modernist design had doubled back on itself! It became an updated sort of ornament, less an exposition of the truth, and more an emblem of it.

When Frederick Olmstead designed Central Park, he took significant inspiration from cemeteries like Greenwood and Mount Auburn. It is strange but not surprising that a space of daily leisure might be inspired by a space of final rest. The park is meant to ease us back into non-productivity, and what better model for contented non-productivity than the perfect tranquility of death? Also unsurprising is that the aesthetic of this restfulness sits diametrically opposed to the aforementioned aesthetic of corporate modernism - no ornamental I-beams in the park, thank you. One walk through the park after it closes at 1 AM, after every horse and cyclist has passed, and the specter looms heavily: every day, a little death.

What is architecture? Whenever I wear those little wire framed glasses people ask, "What are you, some kind of architect?" It's probably because the glasses are also tiny window panes, so standing there I remind them of a far away building. That's another way of saying I have a lot of secrets, like a skyscraper lit up at night. A well-built building veils truth, just like a well-built body.

Rose Marcus photographs these two places, then she prints those photos and adheres them to the ready-made materials of architecture - sheets of plywood, aluminum, and acrylic. It is important to note that just like the millions of people now shooting billions of photographs each day, Marcus' images begin digitally. The impulse to press these disembodied, structureless images back onto substrate, onto the real stuff of the world, is ultimately a gesture toward reconciliation. Why then, does she slice these images with handsaws and mechanized lasers, only to reassemble them fractured and mismatched? One idea is that she is enacting, disrupting, or even making parody of secret architecture - the ornate, psychological architecture that scaffolds our perception. Looking - that is, naming and identifying subjects - is a fundamental kind of human work, a fierce and silent action. Urban spaces are designed to make you feel something, in public. In them, emotional experience can become a type of ready-made. Marcus situates this work within the tension of these exchanges. The critical challenge posed here is how to reclaim the psychological task of looking for ourselves - to reposition it somewhere safe, like we would a secret.