

# ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L



Karina Nimmerfall,  
*Double Location (The  
Ambassador Hotel)*,  
2008/2011, sculp-  
tural three-channel  
video installation,  
mixed media.  
Installation view.

## Karina Nimmerfall

### LAS CIENEGAS PROJECTS

Berlin-based Austrian artist Karina Nimmerfall, who spent the past year teaching at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, delivered her “take” on Los Angeles via her three-channel video installation *Double Location (The Ambassador Hotel)*, 2008/2011, just days before returning to Germany this fall. Focusing on the exceptional zone that emerges where the virtual space of film/television overlaps with the worldly dimension in which LA residents actually exist, she may well not have been able to craft this work anywhere but here. After all, LA remains the epicenter of the spectacle economy in the public imagination, whether or not it really is anymore.

The work’s title is telling, since filmic locations “double” no less than actors do, as both filmmakers Pat O’Neill (*The Decay of Fiction*) and Thom Andersen (*Los Angeles Plays Itself*) have previously articulated. And if this is obvious to any out-of-town visitor traversing LA’s concrete topography, then the Ambassador Hotel proves to be an especially haunting case study, as today it no longer exists anywhere but on-screen. Yet there its shadow looms large: Built in 1921, the hotel quickly became a fixture of a still-nascent Hollywood industry, lodging visiting stars and hosting a succession of Oscar celebrations. In 1968, it gained a historical designation as the tragic site of Robert F. Kennedy’s assassination; closing its doors to guests in 1989, the Ambassador would serve exclusively as a film set until its demolition in 2006. Now the only extant remains of the venue’s checkered past are those that have been inscribed on rolls of celluloid and magnetic tape, transferred to digital discs or to web-based “clouds”—and it is from these various secondary sources that Nimmerfall has reconstructed the Ambassador as an acutely ephemeral, ghostly image.

Assuming the form of a multichannel projection, the storied site was reconstituted via two static shots of separate sections of its empty lobby rear-projected onto large screens and a third traveling shot emitted via a wall-mounted flat-screen monitor. Flanking the freestanding projections, plywood forms echoing the hotel lobby’s columns pushed out into the gallery space, while within the shot, white smoke drifted just above the surface of the hotel’s floorboards. The resulting scene summoned memories of any number of “Old Dark House” films; as such, this clichéd effect straightaway inscribed the work within a gothic register. Meanwhile, the wall-mounted video cinched the point—a slow pan gliding across the length of the building’s interior in clear reference to Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*.

Houses become haunted by those who are victimized within their walls, by the spirits that seek justice in this world before passing on to

the next. The haunting of Nimmerfall’s Ambassador wasn’t caused by the downing of a Kennedy; the relentless shooting of the *space* was also to blame. The hotel is itself a ghost, having been shot to death on the ground where it once stood. Now shown as a computer-generated image and framed as “art,” Nimmerfall’s Ambassador haunted gallery-goers just a few miles from the establishment’s original address on Wilshire to effectively circulate as a ghost of cinema no less than the building that was caught in Hollywood’s sights, thereby doubling location once more.

—Jan Tumlir