

ART NEW ENGLAND

By Emily Avery-Miller | Preview: Massachusetts | September/October 2016 issue

CORRESPONDENCES: BERND & HILLA BECHER, SETON SMITH & A COLLECTION OF EARLY 20TH CENTURY POSTCARDS

Barbara Krakow Gallery * Boston, MA * barbarakrakowgallery.com * September 10 - October 15, 2016



Bernd & Hilla Becher, *Industriehallen (Industrial Facades)*, 2006, digital pigment print (Ditone) on photo paper, 41 x 42 1/4", signed "B Becher" and "Hilla Becher," numbered, all on verso.

The word "correspondence" signifies both the material and the nature of relationship or exchange. Those layers of meaning tie together the multiple series of photos and postcards in the *Correspondences* exhibit at Barbara Krakow Gallery.

Seton Smith's *Two Trees Before House* (2015) is an invitation in photo form. At 36 x 53 1/4 inches, one could almost step inside the print, weave around the gray trees in the center foreground, and follow the road to the shadowy front stoop of the white house. In *Slave House 17* (2015) and *Tim's House* (2015) the architecture and landscape differ, but the white exteriors, dark interiors, the soft focus, the dimensions, and the narrative of approach are similar. The correspondences among Smith's photos give the impression of stumbling upon something familiar.

Bernd and Hilla Becher, on the other hand, are famous for deliberately documenting architectural "typologies." Their lithograph series *Fachwerkhäuser (Half-Timbered Houses)* (1959-1973/1993) is also a collection of white houses. In each of 12 prints, the traditional German domestic structure is centered, identical to the others in shape and size, against a pale gray sky. The viewer's instinct is to catalog variations: windows or chimneys, the angles of the dark wood beams. The odd antenna or layer of dirt becomes the timestamp or signature of the image. As with a correspondence of letters--and as with Smith's photos - a narrative develops across the series. In the accumulated detail, one senses the winding story of seeking and collecting, which brought these neat rows of matching squares together.

The collector's work is especially apparent in the selection of about 60 early 20th-century postcards that round out the exhibit. All feature the east face of Boston's Old State House in ink, paper, and even leather. They echo the architectural focus of the art photography. They also anchor the theme of the show in a material form. The cards compose a corresponding set, and the images are literally vehicles for an exchange. "Come down in the evening if you can," somebody scrawled on one. The *Correspondences* at Barbara Krakow Gallery kindly await your reply.