

## Mikael Levin

### INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY MIDTOWN

The human mind has a way of glossing over familiar horrors, including Nazi atrocities. What the photographer Mikael Levin did in "War Story," this brilliantly conceived and executed installation, was to make the familiar unfamiliar. And he did it by contrasting his spare, black-and-white photographs of an often serene German landscape with his father's stark news reports of death and destruction written from those same spots 50 years earlier. Levin showed photographs of a place called Ohrdruf: a desolate landscape of scrub and straggly trees, patches where no grass would grow, a footpath. Ohrdruf was the site of a death camp, which Levin's father described in unforgiving prose.

Another grouping of images—of an immaculate Elephant Haus Hotel and one of its comfortably appointed rooms—accompanied Meyer Levin's account of his arrival at the hostelry. The snooty desk clerk was forced to give him and the photojournalist traveling with him the only available rooms—the Führer's personal suite. "It seemed the last obscene irony," Levin wrote, "to come to Hitler's

Mikael Levin, *Buchenwald* from "War Story," 1995, gelatin-silver print, 16" x 20".  
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bed directly after Ohrdruf, and we felt it should have been the typhus-ridden wraith that had crawled out from the straw who should sleep here, tonight."

There was also a series based on the "Battle of the People Memorial" commemorating the defeat of Napoleon. These photographs, gorgeously toned in deep blacks and rich grays, are keenly felt and observed comments on man's capacity for great beauty and great evil.

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