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Art in Review
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Christian Hellmich: Arrangement
Lehmann Maupin
540 West 26th Street, Chelsea
Through July 14

Christian Hellmich, an accomplished young painter who lives in Cologne, Germany, works under the influence of the Leipzig School's curiously dour revival of Modernist representational painting. In drab colors on canvases measuring about 7 feet by 13 feet, Mr. Hellmich paints sharp-edged, well-composed pictures of empty modern architectural situations: a spacious train station; the entry to an apartment building below a wall of decorative tiles; industrial ventilators on a rooftop; the vertiginous view from the top of a high escalator down to a shadowy, subterranean hallway.

Countering the vivid illusory dimension, Mr. Hellmich varies the paint quality to call attention to the material surfaces of his pictures. Paint is troweled, streaked, dripped, scumbled and otherwise given a suave, sensuously physical presence. In some areas representation gives way to abstraction, as in the checkerboard background of the picture of a fast-food stand called "Trinkhalle."

The overall effect is to evoke a nostalgic mourning for the undelivered promises of modernity and for the unrealized possibilities of collective public life. The once-gleaming modern architecture and the once-clean surfaces of modern abstract painting have become old, dirty and moldy. No people appear in the eerie de Chirico-like public spaces that Mr. Hellmich's paintings describe: by the end of the 20th century, utopia had been entirely privatized. KEN JOHNSON