



March 18-25, 2004

Art

Reviews

Nancy Davenport, "Campus"
Nicole Klagsbrun, through Mar 5
(see Chelsea).

It may be hard to believe today, but not so long ago, college campuses across the country were an American ground zero, with administrators calling in the National Guard to block protests by Tom Hayden and the Students for a Democratic Society and other "outside agitators." Nancy Davenport takes a long, hard look at one outcome of this campaign to restore order: the "Brutalist" architecture that began to sprout up at universities in the 1970s. Davenport gives us a grim view of these structures as embodiments of fear and apathy.

Davenport begins with straightforward photographs of the buildings that now pervade universities—massive concrete forms that look more like army bunkers than educational forums. She then alters them using Photoshop. For instance, streams of sunlight—often used as a hokey symbol of enlightenment and learning in college brochures—are tweaked until they evoke nuclear blasts. In a series of nine moderately scaled prints, Davenport creates a scary world of libraries, performing-arts centers, classrooms and

administrative buildings, stifling in their overpowering uniformity, yet powerless in the face of an encroaching Armageddon. In these photographs, and the related video loop *Weekend Campus* (2004), students and professors appear unfazed by the digitally rendered cataclysmic events unfolding before them

Brutalist architecture on college cam-



Nancy Davenport, *Performing Arts Center*, 2004.

uses was intended to withstand assaults and instill stability, but its unintentional effect appears to be, at least from Davenport's perspective, an apolitical generation of students, who can only shrug and say, "Whatever." In these highly effective works, she makes us wonder what the current vogue for fearmongering will do—God help us—to the freshmen of the future.

—Barbara Pollack