

Still Waters

By Leah Ollman

An image of a breakwater, one of David Fokos' six utterly beautiful photographs at Paul Kopeikin Gallery, not only typifies the artist's Minimalist style, but emblemizes well the philosophy underlying his approach to picture-making. Like the wall in the photograph, which separates the sea from a sheltered cove, Fokos tames what is chaotic, turbulent, vast and random--the visual field--and renders it calm, ordered, contained. He creates a safe haven for contemplation or simply pure reverie.

Stunning in their simplicity and elegance, Fokos' large, black-and-white prints picture primarily the sea, but an altered sea--one whose texture and motion have been calmed into pristine flatness by long exposure time. Ripples and waves have melted into one another, into the uniform smoothness of a level plane, and the only indication of rough waters is an occasional swirl of white, like that edging the breakwater.

Fokos has pared down these seascapes to their geometric essence: plane, line, point. In each serene view, the stripe of sky stays uninterrupted, but the sea might contain a row of posts or a pair of stones, invested with monumental attention, like the stones of the Japanese rock garden of Ryoanji. Editing out the color, clutter and noise of daily existence, Fokos frames a zone of absolute peace and quiet. His photographs are welcome moments of reprieve, visual sanctuaries in black, white and gray.

Leah Ollman, special to the Times