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495 BROADWAY / 3RD FLOOR
NEW YORK / NY 10012
TEL 212.925.2035
WWW.SWISSINSTITUTE.NET

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VILLAGE VOICE / MAY 25TH / BY ROBERT SHUSTER

Arnold Odermatt at Swiss Institute; Laurent Millet at Robert Mann; Darren Almond at Matthew Marks

By **Robert Shuster** Tuesday, May 25 2010

Thumbing through **Arnold Odermatt's** startling photographs of highway accidents collected in *Karambolage*, his first book, is a little like watching the sequence of road horrors in **Jean-Luc Godard's** surrealist film *Weekend*. The camera's impassive view makes you increasingly eager, without shame, for the next wreck.

A policeman in **Switzerland's** Nidwalden canton for 40 years, Odermatt took his pictures mostly as investigative material, waiting until the ambulances removed the injured or dead; unlike others who have recorded the aftermath of violence, he wasn't reaching for any obvious pathos. In this small exhibit—which includes 10 prints and the photographer's three books—the bloodless, black-and-white scenes (shot between the late 1940s and early '80s) don't reveal the human toll. Instead, more like forensics, they simply chart the vicissitudes of Fate, the coincidence of crossed trajectories. A **Saab** dangles precariously on a guardrail, with only its rear wheels preventing a plunge into the lake below. Skidmarks, outlined in police chalk, describe the path a **VW Beetle** took before its collision with a tractor. In *Karambolage*, where you'll find the most astonishing images, a Mercedes sedan has been impossibly, and literally, wrapped around a telephone pole.

The central appeal of this work may be the spectacle of anonymous tragedy. But Odermatt's studious formality lends these accidents, even those that clearly involved fatalities, a strangely elegiac—and decidedly discomfiting—beauty.



Courtesy James Kelly Gallery, Santa Fe

A crash course in photo appreciation: Odermatt's *Ennetmoos*, 1967

Details

Arnold Odermatt
Swiss Institute
495 Broadway, 212-925-2035
Through June 26

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