

# CURRENCIES

Photographers face major challenges in picturing wealth because aspects of riches are often implied. This section highlights works that suggest unseen foundations of wealth, called currencies. Currencies can be both physical and abstract. Physical currencies, such as the U.S. dollar, the Continental Euro, and the Chinese yuan, are assigned values that are linked to the global market. We become acutely aware of these values when we exchange money on trips to other countries. Abelardo Morrell is interested in photographing the physical “thingness” of currencies—Swiss franks and gold bars. But his titles suggest currency values are constantly in flux in spite of their physical concreteness; moreover, the recent fluctuations of the market have underscored currency’s complexity and mystery. Sze Tsung Leong shows currency through changes in China’s urban landscape, where historic structures are razed to create modern buildings for a rapidly growing economy. This transformation illustrates China’s entry into the world economy.

# SPACES

Spaces, such as rooms and architecture, offer subtle and obvious visual clues about prosperity. Artists have pictured exteriors open to the public as well as very private interiors. In *Chanel, Paris, September 25, 2003*, Jacqueline Hassink provides access to an exclusive haute couture fitting room where wealthy clients try on dresses with ostentatious pricetags. The room's sleek glass surfaces, classical architectural elements, and muted earth colors embody Chanel design. In short, the space is branded to associate prosperity and exclusivity with Chanel and its clients. Eve Sussman's *The Aquarium* interprets the transparent and industrial architectural space of modern design as the essence of style. Using actors dressed in fashionable 1950s-style clothing, she films their methodical movements during a party. Audiences watch through a fixed camera as though the party is under surveillance. Sussman suggests the layered glass space of modern design is made for people to be seen, and that modernity signifies cool sophistication and exclusivity.

# RITUAL & STYLE

Prosperity offers a great deal of leisure time and money to take part in exotic rituals that feature high style and fashion. In a global economy, one might ask, “Is there an indigenous style of prosperity?” In other words, do the wealthy in Dubai spend and party the way they do in England? Marin Parr depicts rituals of luxury in different parts of the world. *Cambridge* captures a private party displaying the codes of wealth—tuxedos, dress shoes, fancy drinks, and a classic red dress. *France, Paris. Prix de l’Arc de Triomphe, 2008*, depicts gentlemen gathering at a prestigious horse race in France. *Cartier International Polo Challenge, Dubai, 2008*, reveals a cultural collision as a Saudi man appears with a fancy Western baby carriage. In *Untitled*, photographer Cindy Sherman dresses the part of a wealthy older woman who poses in front of a projected image of an elegant apartment building. She emphasizes the thin layer of artifice that demarcates style.