

Photographs rise from the ashes

GALLERY GOING
GARY MICHAEL DAULT

When a fire swept through the Montreal home of artist **Angela Grauerholz** and her husband two years ago, the couple lost, among other things, most of the library they had been lovingly and painstakingly collecting for 25 years.

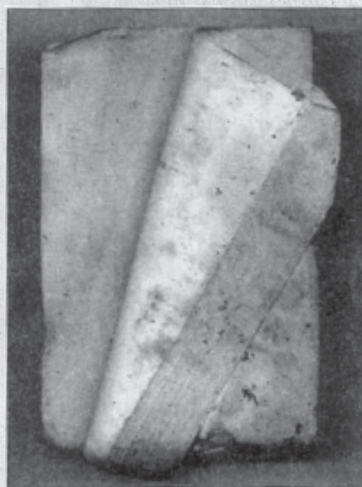
Born, more or less literally, from these bibliophilic ashes, however, has come Grauerholz's eerily impressive new exhibition of photographs, *Privation*, now at Toronto's **Olga Korper Gallery**.

"When I first saw slides of these new works, I wondered why on earth Angela was suddenly making photographs of Raku pottery?," Korper told me. "Or maybe, I thought, they were ancient tombstones, or burnt buildings. Then, of course, I came to see that these were photographs of the incinerated books themselves. And they seemed to possess a terrible beauty."

It must have been painful sorting through the twisted and sodden wreckage of her library, but Grauerholz clearly came to see how formally and emblematically forceful these hand-held ruins were. She scanned a number of the damaged books into her computer, and had the digital images reproduced as large and surprisingly sumptuous Giclée prints on soft Arches paper. There are 48 of them in the exhibition.

It does take a few minutes — one understands Korper's initial disorientation — to see that these strange, distorted objects are the charred corpses of books. The flames and smoke and water have transformed them into alien and otherworldly sculptures.

The conflagration has left some of the books torqued into baroque writhings, as if they had become the agonized incarnations of the intellectual energy they once contained — bodies from which the souls have fled. Sometimes you can



PHOTOGRAPHER/CREDIT

Privation Book #42 (back) by Angela Grauerholz

still make out a few sentences here and there. But mostly the books are fossilized things, ethereally handsome brick-like objects, licked by flame into outlandish colour-smoky purples, pinkish-browns, bleached creams. Some of them still look warm, suffused with smouldering reds and oranges, as if still burning at their cores.

The burning of books is a terrible thing. And Grauerholz is surely justified in citing, in her exhibition statement, the burning of other famous libraries (Caesar's firing of the great library at Alexandria in 48 BC, for example) as analogues and precedents. She should probably be gently rapped on the wrist, however, for implying that her loss ought to remind us of the Nazi book burnings at Nuremberg, or of the "cultural cleansing of all the libraries in Kosovo." There is a dreadful difference between immolation and holocaust. \$6,500 (U.S.) each. Until Oct. 31. 17 Morrow Ave., Toronto; 416-538-8220.