

## VISUAL ARTS

# Memorable show focused on memory

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Some people will remember Montreal artist Angela Grauerholz's highly acclaimed show at the Musée d'Art Contemporain a few years ago. A delightful and moody sampling of her recent works, collectively called *Sententia*, is now on view in Art 45, an Old Montreal storefront temporarily rented by her dealer, Serge Vaisman. As confirmed by the current exhibit, Grauerholz continues to examine the nature of memory, time and space.

Together, the latest pieces — large, misty black-and-white photos contained in handsome black frames — constitute a kind of open-ended sentence, but one crafted from images rather than words. Using the so-called real world as a point of departure, Grauerholz creates a parallel universe, in which the pictures generate memories of memories; it doesn't matter that these may not be ours. The moments depicted seem placeless, yet eerily familiar, as if, when all is said and done, memories are generic.

In Grauerholz's multi-image stream-of-consciousness, there is, in a sense, no primary subject matter, no home base, just space itself. For instance, an inexplicably powerful image, *Sententia* No. XLVII, focuses mainly on the corner of a room, vacant but for the two long doors leading off to one side. This chamber is in Ludwig Wittgenstein's custom-built house in Vienna, a shrine most sacred to linguists and wordy conceptual artists. But like the great philosopher himself, the room, as depicted by Grauerholz, comes close to being pure idea, with physical substance a mere afterthought.

Grauerholz's world is one of spatial co-ordinates, not hard matter. In the image of Wittgenstein's room the ceiling, floor and walls, each coded in different inflections of gray, become our compass. Everything else alternately materializes and de-materializes, at least in the imagination. No sooner do we peer into the room, than the surfaces begin to dissolve. What "read" as wall just a second ago now becomes mere light and shadow. It would be easy to imagine that here, the real subject is the plunge into craziness. And the architectural disintegration in Grauerholz's picture, far more subtle than that depicted in the movie *Repulsion*, is abetted by the fuzzy edges of some of the structures.

Light sifts softly into the room from some source hidden off-stage. This luminescence is met by the shadows emerging, smoke-like, from the edges of the floor. The wall-sockets become



**Sententia No. XXIX (1998), by Angela Grauerholz.**

part of the composition, serving as tiny punctuation marks in the over-all vista.

If, in some pictures, we come face-to-face with an existential wall, in others, space is divided into two. Grauerholz is the poet of here-vs.-there; and in a stunning piece, such as *Sententia* No. XXIX, she delves into the full meaning of spatial relativity. Our vantage point is a dark interior sliced clear through by a vertical shaft of light. If we squint, the image becomes abstract, a visual elegy in black and gray by a somewhat tranquilized Franz Klein.

The band of light becomes, on closer

scrutiny, the outside seen through a window onto another building, its facade veering toward us at an angle. Apertures in this looming gray wall allude to the presence of other spaces. If memories breed memories, the spaces in Grauerholz's art also have a tendency to propagate; but, as we watch, the wall begins to "melt," leaving a residual geometric grid of lines and fissures in the stone.

Here, as in much of Grauerholz's work, we get a sense of becoming, with our eyes trying to focus on things that stay maddeningly out of reach; the visual and psychological process of "en-

tering" Grauerholz's works serves as metaphor for the human need to constitute reality — to give it form and symmetry, no matter how artificial. Indeed, the sublime paradox of Grauerholz's best works is in the delicate balance achieved between motion and quiet. These images are, almost unaccountably, at once snapshots and altarpieces to the holy trinity of form, time and space.

♦ *Sententia*, by Angela Grauerholz, at Art 45, 206 De l'Hôpital St., is on until Oct. 31. Call (514) 843-5024.