

# UNTOLD STORIES



Courtesy, Mercer Union

Angela Grauerholz  
*Postcard* (1989)  
Cibachrome print, 48" x 64"

## Angela Grauerholz's

photographs are reproduced in books, magazines and catalogues; and on slides, posters and postcards. The different locations constitute varying conditions of looking and, by extension, prompt new readings. The transformation that a photograph endures in each change of context is articulated through viewing and re-viewing beyond the image's frame, into the intertextual sites of presentation: exhibitions, catalogues and postcards.

### Angela Grauerholz, Essays by Johanne Lamoureux and Cheryl Simon

Mercer Union, Toronto 1990, 32 pp., illus.

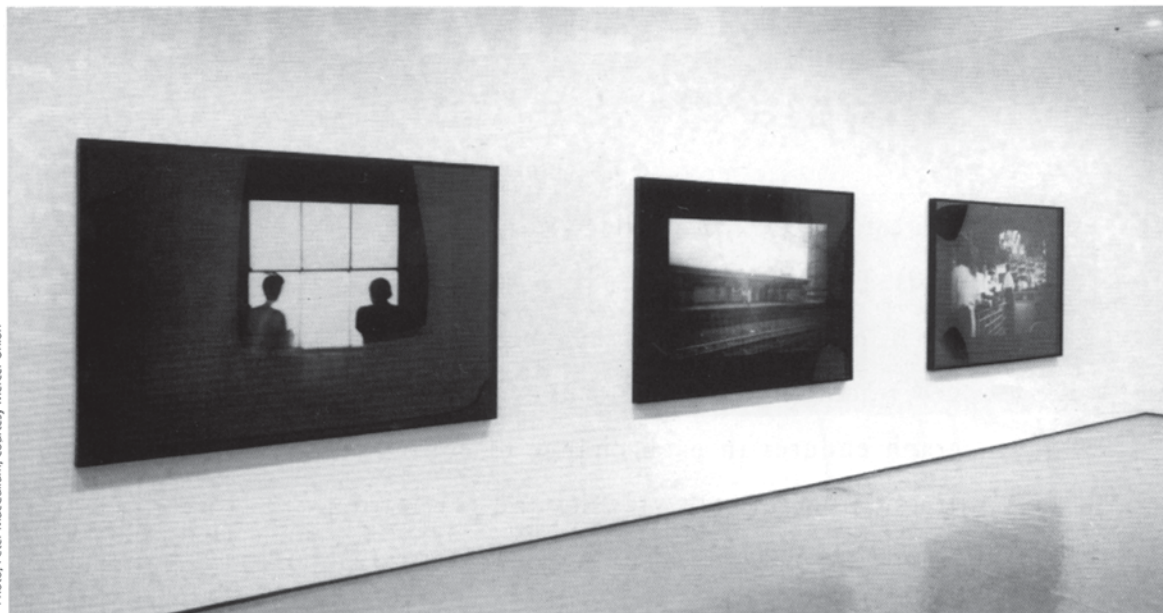
**G**rey, slim, elegant and light in the hands, the catalogue is a pleasure to hold. Exceptionally, Grauerholz and her assistant Bernard Lagacé designed it – few artists having such control in the production of an exhibition catalogue. Published to coincide with her exhibition at Mercer Union, it contains essays by curator-photographer-critic Cheryl Simon and art historian-critic Johanne Lamoureux as well as luxurious colour reproductions of Grauerholz's work.

The catalogue's layout is attentive to photos and their original frame. But the downscaling demanded by the catalogue does, nevertheless, recontextualise the photos. The reproductions are situated between the essays, printed in various sizes, some as large as double-page spreads. The black photographic border which entirely surrounds the original photographs is included in every reproduction. Sometimes the pho-

tos are printed on a white page, which sharply defines the border, while at other times black will cover the entire page supporting the image. In both photographs and reproductions, Grauerholz's self-conscious use of the border draws attention as a device for constructing meaning outside of the frame.

Lamoureux's essay places Grauerholz's photos in a semiotic framework; Barthes's *Camera Lucida* is her primary point of departure. After briefly mapping photography's relationship to the "real," Lamoureux asserts that Grauerholz's photographs construct a framework of time where "the references are younger than the photographs make them seem" and are "our future memories of the present." She uses *Ursus* (1989), a whitish photograph of a bear whose attention is captivated by something beyond the frame to exemplify the off-frame focus of many of Grauerholz's photographs.

Lamoureux describes Grauerholz's photographs as "hemophiliac." She envisions them as bleeding themselves of meaning, a process that will finally leave them indeterminate. The metaphor continues vis à vis the construction of meaning: "coagulation"



Angela Grauerholz  
Installation view,  
Mercer Union, left  
to right:  
*Window* (1989)  
*Harrison* (1987)  
*Café* (1989)

Cibachrome prints

occurs outside the image at the site of the spectator, stressing the spectator's responsibility to complete the interpretation of these photos. Shirking this "outsider" position, one will fail to grasp the subtleties of each photograph for the photographs will "risk dullness and repetition."

Simon's "Signifying Nothing" reads as a response to Lamoureux's suggestion that the viewer make the photographs meaningful. Fragments of bold texts from Grauerholz as well as Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Chantal Pontbriand, Beth Seaton, Susan Sontag and Keith Wallace are strung into Simon's nostalgic narrative of a woman travelling across Europe. Grauerholz's photographs of hotel lobbies, cafés, landscapes, etcetera now act primarily as illustrations for "Signifying Nothing," illustrations that lie somewhere between dream imagery and hazy travel shots.

Flipping through the saddle-stitched catalogue for the first time, one may stop at the "centre-fold," a reproduction of *Harrison* (1989), a seductive sepia photograph of a train station. The image, bordered above and below with black, bleeds out to the side-edges of the pages creating a tunnel effect, while the vertical white crease down the centre splits the page and the photograph in two, breaking up the wholeness of the image.

In Simon's fictional criticism, a traveller passes through *Harrison* and similarly in Lamoureux's text "Harrison," the photograph is emblematic of the "driving through" characteristic of Grauerholz's

photographs. Simon and Lamoureux describe and employ *Harrison* in related ways but many differences exist in their respective visual analyses, their references and research sources. The most important difference lies in their approach to the subject: Simon's open-ended reading as opposed to Lamoureux's prescriptive criticism.

Grauerholz's catalogue is an authoritative format that introduces the viewer to Lamoureux's academic text and Simon's fiction. The catalogue may be read in conjunction with the exhibition, but it may also be read as an autonomous document initiating comprehension of Grauerholz's photographs.

## Angela Grauerholz

Mercer Union, Toronto  
October 11 - November 10, 1990

The reading of exhibition reviews in Canadian art magazines often takes place long after the show has taken place. The reader may have only distant memories or a catalogue as a reminder of the exhibition. In order to realize the differences between immediately viewing the show and reading the catalogue, I visited the exhibition twice, bought the catalogue and wrote the review two months later. What I recalled, at this time, was the particular physicality, the "objectness" of Grauerholz's photographs.

This exhibition, Grauerholz's first solo exhibition in Toronto, consisted of fourteen large, black-bordered, cibachrome photographs. Seven photographs,

horizontal in format, measuring 48 by 64 inches, were hung slightly lower than eye level around each of the two rooms. Four smaller photographs lined the wall that joins the two main rooms of the gallery. All of the work had been completed over the past four years.

Grauerholz's photographs maintain enough commonalities to form a definitive signature style. She works either in black and white or in sepia tones. Blurs, darkness, or soft focus evoke memory, nostalgia and melancholia. Although she has previously shown distinct bodies of work in the course of her thirteen-year exhibition history, in this exhibition, Grauerholz has sidestepped the singular notion of series unified by subject matter. Here, images of varying genres – portraits, landscapes, interiors – are grouped together.

Fourteen of the photographs are individually bound in a heavy, oppressive framing device comprising a dense, dark photographic border. Approximately eight or nine inches deep, accentuated and surrounded by a simple black wood frame, the borders are generous; some might think too generous. The sheer volume of work in this exhibition stresses the visibility of the frames, but their presence diminishes considerably when few of her photographs are shown together; for example in a group exhibition.

The double frame distances Grauerholz's cibachromes from the viewer, as well as the surrounding gallery space. The image is pushed away from the present, further back in space and time so that the photograph appears to bestow a distant history. Each image's separation from the others encourages the viewer to isolate its meaning.

Conversely, each work is connected by similarities of technique and presentation. One is obliged to link the photographs using narrative chains of meaning. The sepia tones send waves of "oldness" – a combination of nostalgia and melancholy – passing through the meaning. Grauerholz employs technical irregularities in her photographs to convey the loss of cohesive vision and the loss of truth, issues that directly question the belief structures of modernism. Miniature reflections of other works on the protective plexiglass leave the viewer with the possibility of many new narratives.

*Harrison* (1989), a photograph depicting a train station hangs between *Window* (1989) and *Café* (1989). A water tower, echoing German photographers Hilla and Bernhard Becher, stands on the edge of the

frame of *Harrison*. The sepia, the train and the photographic border reinforce a feeling of timelessness, similar to the feeling of displacement and transience brought on by travels in foreign lands. Crossing over the black border, the spectator may find her/himself in a new territory of abstract musing until the next photograph in the exhibition is viewed.

In the exhibition, *Harrison*, comparatively reddish in tone, is printed on a small postcard. The signboard identifying *Harrison* is barely legible. The image, although self-referential, signifies a commodity: that of the tourist trade. Photographs on postcards traditionally extend to the edges, but here the black border envelops the image.

Some exhibition visitors may have no memories of *Harrison* nor of Grauerholz's other photographs. And there are those who might remember the finer details of each photograph. And those particularly moved by the show may recall stories evoked by the image. I remember the photograph's dense outer edges, the frames and their way of telling ...

## Angela Grauerholz in "Territoires d'artistes: Paysages verticaux"

Musée du Québec, Québec

Untold stories of working within the boundaries of the exhibition catalogue narrate subplots of Grauerholz's practice.

A detail of the Ursuline Monastery; a schoolroom in which uniformed students are overseen by a nun; an old operating room; a daguerreotype in the Louvre and an oil painting of people escaping from a fire after watching a diorama screening. These are some of the twenty-one images reproduced in "Territoires photographiques." This dense essay, both imagistic and textual, begins in the middle of the

Angela  
Grauerholz  
*Ursus* (1988)  
Cibachrome print  
48"x64"



Courtesy, Mercer Union



Angela  
Grauerholz  
*Café* (1989)  
Cibachrome print  
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catalogue for "Territoires d'artistes: Paysages verticaux," a broadly based group exhibition that includes outdoor, site-specific installations, literature and a sound work.

"Territoires photographiques" remains somewhat distinct from Grauerholz's signature style. Each image is fixed in an imposed order, unlike Grauerholz's framed photographs which are exhibited in varying orders, groupings and different locations. Most of the images are presented on a single page and are framed by the glossy white border of the page – a literary equivalent of sterile, white gallery walls – instead of Grauerholz's usual black borders. All images except one are read with black running titles evoking sound – *chants, silence, murmurs*, etcetera. At the end of the essay, Grauerholz incorporates notes on the image, headed by the running titles, explaining the images' sources or detailing their attributions.

Although some of these photographs were taken by Grauerholz, many were "borrowed." Two are from a book reproducing Max Ernst's engravings; one image is a reproduction of an oil painting from the collection of the Musée du Séminaire de Québec; and others come from the Musée des Ursulines and the Archives des Augustines in Quebec City. By placing her own imagery in the context of archival documentation, Grauerholz creates the illusion of "aging" her own photographs and blurs the classification of images as original or borrowed.

Whether exhibited individually, in groups or as a complete body of works, these photographs tell open-ended stories, often dominated by Quebec history. They portray powerful institutions, with their nuns, schoolgirls and hospitals, as well as spectacles – tabloid news, sports events, theatres. But Grauerholz also weaves in more art-specific sub-themes; she explores the histories of image-making, photographs, films and audiences. Her text, almost like

sound poetry, provides an accompanying "sound-track" that enunciates possible audience response to "Territoires."

The site-specific installations of other artists in "Territoire d'artistes" are simply catalogued by captioned colour photographs depicting an overview and sometimes a detail. But "Territoires photographiques," differs from such reproductions because it transcends factual documentation. "Territoires photographiques," the only visual work produced specifically for the catalogue, is presented as a chapter rather than an object in a group exhibition. It is, in a sense, impossible to reproduce; single images are unsatisfactory since the white "frame" of the page and the image's context within the catalogue will be lost. Unlike the other site-specific works in the exhibition, only one who has access to the catalogue may review the piece at any time, in its context.

In the last section of the catalogue, each artist is documented "at work," in black and white "snaps" presented in casual contact-sheet formats. Grauerholz, photographed from the back, is taking pictures outdoors. Echoing her own photographs, she is captivated by something outside the frame.

In a series of three photographs, Grauerholz is depicted in an office setting. One shows Grauerholz contemplating a table covered with slides and different sized photographs, all laid out in piles. The photos were eventually used in "Territoires." She appears to deliberate over which photos to use and the order they will take. These photos serve to contextualise Grauerholz's practice in personal terms.

The catalogue ends with a generic photo-index of the artists in small, square, black-and-white portraits, accompanied by short bibliographies. Grauerholz, presented in profile, looks off-frame, out of the catalogue. Compact text to the photo's right explains Grauerholz's practice. This is ironic, for her work is ambiguous and lacks clarity in specific signification. The obscurity of meaning shadowing "Territoires Photographiques" – created by the juxtaposition of many works that are open-ended but have different connotations – embodies one of Grauerholz's photographic paradigms pushed to the extreme. Like her photographs, which teeter on the focal edge, fading in and out of focus, "Territoires" literally fades out to a near total dissolve, leaving in its dimness, untold stories for us to complete.

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