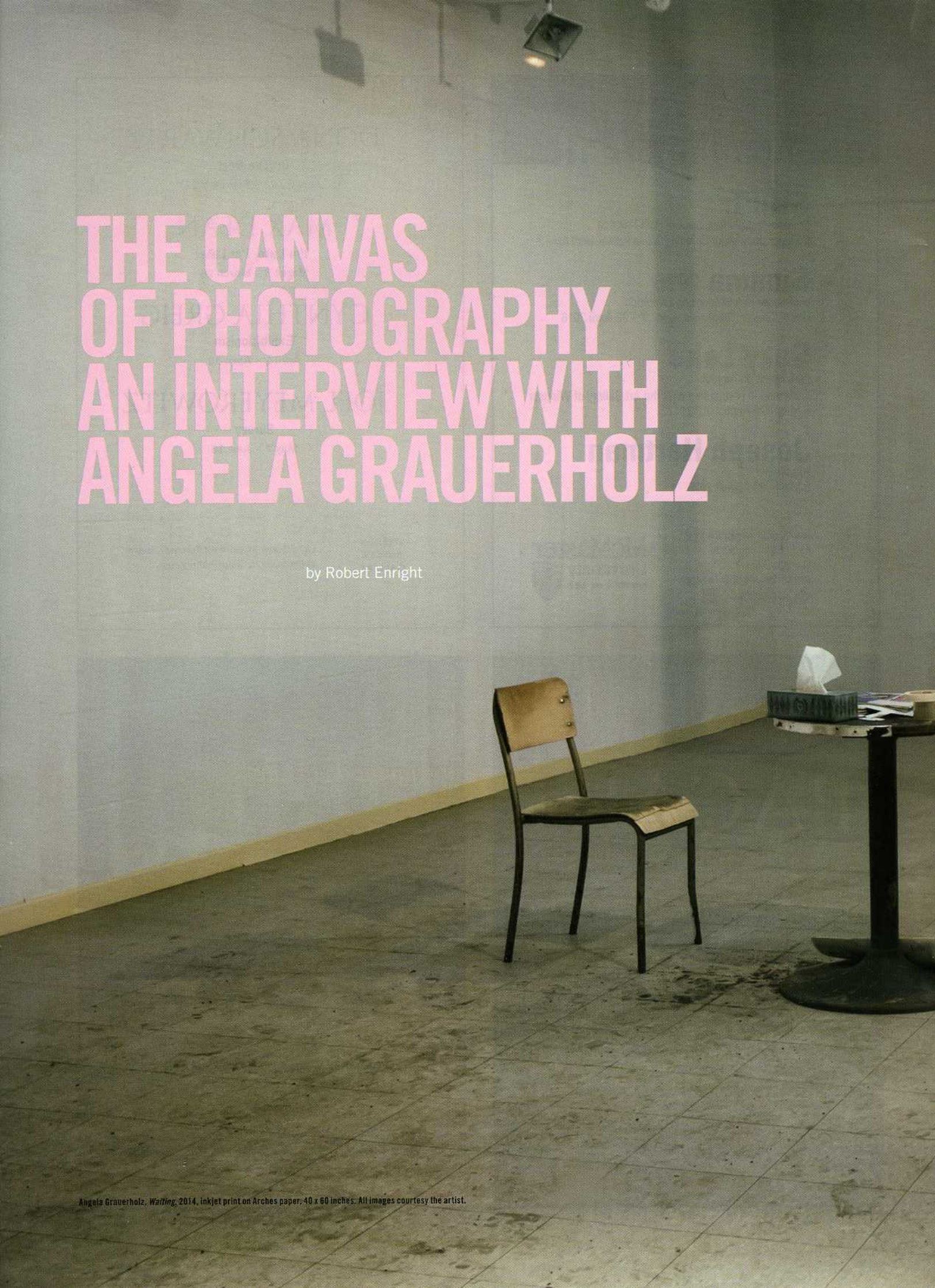
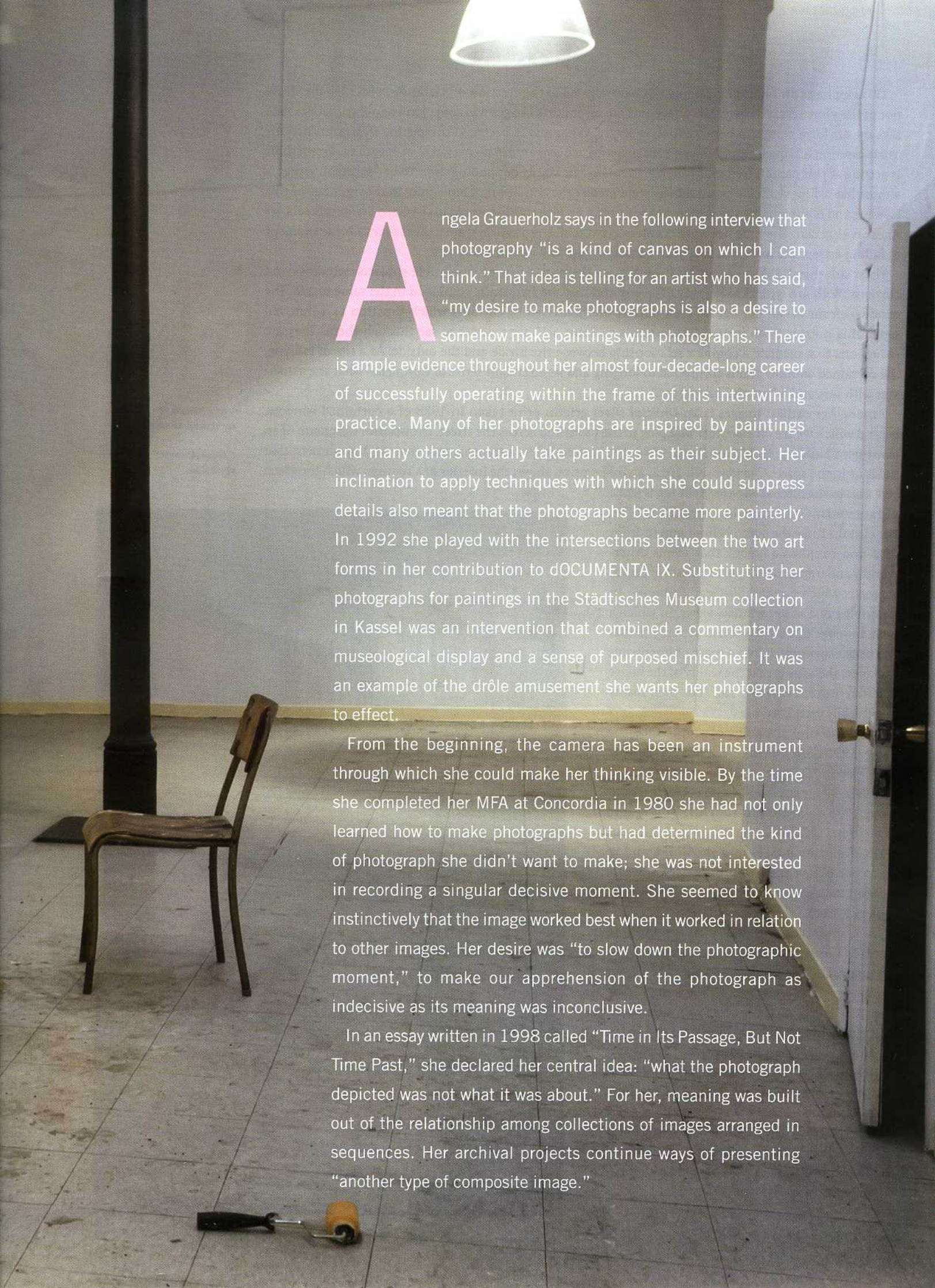
THE CANVAS OF PHOTOGRAPHY AN INTERVIEW WITH ANGELA GRAUERHOLZ

by Robert Enright



Angela Grauerholz, *Waiting*, 2014, inkjet print on Arches paper, 40 x 60 inches. All images courtesy the artist.



Angela Grauerholz says in the following interview that photography "is a kind of canvas on which I can think." That idea is telling for an artist who has said, "my desire to make photographs is also a desire to somehow make paintings with photographs." There is ample evidence throughout her almost four-decade-long career of successfully operating within the frame of this intertwining practice. Many of her photographs are inspired by paintings and many others actually take paintings as their subject. Her inclination to apply techniques with which she could suppress details also meant that the photographs became more painterly. In 1992 she played with the intersections between the two art forms in her contribution to dOCUMENTA IX. Substituting her photographs for paintings in the Städtisches Museum collection in Kassel was an intervention that combined a commentary on museological display and a sense of purposed mischief. It was an example of the drôle amusement she wants her photographs to effect.

From the beginning, the camera has been an instrument through which she could make her thinking visible. By the time she completed her MFA at Concordia in 1980 she had not only learned how to make photographs but had determined the kind of photograph she didn't want to make; she was not interested in recording a singular decisive moment. She seemed to know instinctively that the image worked best when it worked in relation to other images. Her desire was "to slow down the photographic moment," to make our apprehension of the photograph as indecisive as its meaning was inconclusive.

In an essay written in 1998 called "Time in Its Passage, But Not Time Past," she declared her central idea: "what the photograph depicted was not what it was about." For her, meaning was built out of the relationship among collections of images arranged in sequences. Her archival projects continue ways of presenting "another type of composite image."

This emphasis on multiple relationships naturally led to the creation of narratives, although decidedly not of the photo essay variety. The effect of these resonating images was some kind of photo-poetics. She says the art form closest to her intention is poetry. What makes poetry so compelling is that it functions as an essence; a reduction of language intended to achieve an expansive range of meaning. Grauerholz is getting at this compressed multivalence in saying she wants her photographs to be "something that is almost like a film stuffed into an image." She prefers the condition of ambiguity that comes out of this layering and is attracted to states of in-between-ness, an idea she discovered in the German literary scholar Andreas Huyssen. The time her work occupies is twilight; the physical state it gives over to is the moment of falling asleep, the inter-zone between consciousness and unconsciousness.

These are threshold moments and she locates them in a pair of irresistible subjects: windows and curtains. Both are critical to her way of seeing and they are frequently combined in the same image. The windows from which her figures look out are often covered by curtains which function as a thin veil separating outside from inside. Grauerholz's curtains activate a desire to see through them. They are seductions that mediate a complex relationship between the inside and the outside. As a site of looking, the curtained window seems connected to longing and its attendant sense of nostalgia—what she associates with loss and a "painful happiness."

Among her earliest images is an *Untitled* silver gelatin print taken in 1978 of a curtained window, behind which we see an electrical wall plug in the room and across the street, the massive silhouette of an apartment building. In *Mozart Room*, 1993, the curtain is less a transparency than an impediment that holds us in the space; *Chambre vert*, 2012, an inkjet print, shows the interior of a room in which the green bed seen in the filtered window light reads like a distant verdant landscape. In *Cinema bleu*, 2014, the curtain fuses the space behind and in front of it and conjures a colour that seems otherworldly and transcendent. It is a palette of unreal intensity which Grauerholz clearly admires. In describing one of her window views, in which a woman looks out onto a construction site that has been transformed into a space of impossible radiance, she admits that the reality of the image is different from what we see, "but then reality never really interested me."

All Grauerholz's bodies of work since the early 1990s—including "Secrets, a Gothic Tale," 1993; "Eclogue or Filling the Landscape" and her 324-page book called *Aporia* (both from 1995); "Sententia I - LXII," 1998; and "Privation," 2001–02—have explored different ways of putting images into the world, and in the process have insisted on the necessity of a careful reading of what we look at and where we look at it from.

In transferring to her medium Roland Barthes's idea that the reader completes the text, Angela Gruaerholz posits that the viewer completes the photograph. What is manifestly apparent is her pictures offer so much possibility for completion that there is no end to the looking we give them in return.

This interview was recorded on January 16th of this year by phone to Montreal. Angela Grauerholz is the winner of the 2015 Scotiabank Photography Prize. Her exhibition will open at the Ryerson Image Centre on May 3, 2016 and will run until August 21. The extensive catalogue accompanying the exhibition is published by Steidl.

1. *Spiral Staircase*, 2011, inkjet print, 40 x 60 inches. Edition of 3.

2. *Éblouie (Alison)*, 2011, inkjet print, 40 x 60 inches.

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BORDER CROSSINGS: We've never had an opportunity to talk about how you became an artist. You were born in Hamburg. Did you grow up around art?

ANGELA GRAUERHOLZ: Not at all. I did not even want to be an artist. I did everything not to become one and resisted to the very last. Then I got a grant to come to Montreal to do a master's in fine arts. It was an opportunity to do whatever I wanted and I decided to do photography, even though it intimidated me. Concordia decided to give me a qualifying year and I ended up taking undergraduate courses for a year at the same time that I was in the graduate program. I quickly learned pretty much everything there was to learn about photography and eventually decided to head off into something I felt was my own. The teaching methods at the time were to do exercises: do a photograph like Atget or a photograph like Cartier-Bresson. It turned out to be quite useful.

One of the few direct homage photographs you have done is the *Tuilleries Fountain* for Atget.

Yes, but in colour.

Circumstances may have dictated that you do an undergraduate and a graduate degree simultaneously but you did the same thing in Hamburg, where in a four-year period you studied graphic design, linguistics and literature.

I'm afraid it's a theme in my life. I always seem to have my feet in two puddles. In the '80s I was running a graphic design studio, just after Anne Ramsden, Francine Périnet and I had opened ARTEXTE.

You were only 20 years old when you decided to go into graphic design. What attracted you to it in the first place?

I didn't know what I wanted to do other than I wanted to be an architect. The educational system is a bit different in Germany so you have to do practica and I applied everywhere. One day this very nice man sat down with me and said, "You know what, dear, I don't think I can recommend that you do this; you will be a furniture salesperson in a Department Store. So just think about what your strengths are. You're obviously creative, so why don't you become a graphic designer?"

Did that interrupted interest in architecture stay with you? One of your photographs is called *Architecture*.

Yes. I rarely read about photography other than for teaching purposes. I read about space and place, media, all sorts of things. I'm not really a scholar of

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photography. Photography remains an activity that I enjoy but at the same time it's a kind of canvas on which I can think. But this love for architecture is still there. In the early '80s I designed an architecture magazine here in Montreal and learned an awful lot. Actually, the "memory palace," the isometric drawing you get at the end of visiting my Internet piece, *atworkandplay.ca*, was an exploration for which I asked a friend who had studied architecture to work with me to see if we could envision an architecture. In the end, we realized it was never meant to be, that a memory palace is, and should remain, virtual. But I liked playing with the ideas.

Early on you completely reject the Cartier-Bresson notion of "the decisive moment" as a way of making photographs.

That was then and I don't think I wholeheartedly reject it now. When you are that young you need to reject things to find yourself. I was looking for my own way of photographing. I felt that I had to slow down the photographic moment. I wanted something more contemplative, something that is almost like a film stuffed into an image, giving a sense of time that is somewhat in opposition to the decisive moment. I was after a sense of duration and got a lot of flak for it, to the point where I almost didn't get my degree. They hated it and Tom Gibson, who was my teacher, was disappointed because he had so much hope for me. It was very sad, but that kind of rejection makes you either give up or become more determined.

It looks like you constantly made decisions that were contrary to the expectations people had of you.

Almost. I think it is a combination of things. It had a lot to do with the experience I had as a young woman when I was told that I couldn't possibly advance in certain areas, like architecture, and I am very stubborn. It's a survival instinct, too.

Why is memory so important to you?

I'm not quite sure. It has always been there and it got formulated through photography. I have something of an immigrant mentality. All my learning years were steeped in German culture and I read a lot of German literature. I had to adapt to something quite foreign to me and it must have caused a sense of return and longing, which was very strong in my early work. That obviously changed into something else, and I think the work is very much settled on exploring issues of constructing identity.

It is an obvious thing to note that you love reading. Libraries and books have played a significant role in your work.

That's true but there was a long period when I didn't do much reading, partly because circumstances didn't allow it. Today my preferred authors are what might be called literary philosophers. But the idea of reading, and I'm learning this more and more, is about the exchange you have with the written word, or literally the exchange that goes on with the author for the time you're reading the book. It's an idea that is an extension of my

1. *Raymonde*, 1984, azo dye print (cibachrome), 48 x 64 inches. Collection of the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal.

2. *Draped Foot*, 1993, azo dye print (cibachrome), 60 x 40 inches.

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preoccupation with the role of the spectator, and how we negotiate space. I think these considerations and questions around how we encounter and read an artwork eventually led to the archive works.

You told me in an earlier conversation that the sense of nostalgia in your work was something you learned on the job, that is, in making the photographs. Now you're suggesting you also might have had a predisposition towards nostalgia. How does that dynamic operate in the work?
I couldn't understand when I first arrived in Canada why everybody was so opposed to any notion of nostalgia. I suppose it comes from equating nostalgia with sentimentality. I just knew I had a drive to visualize through photography a sense of either loss or "painful happiness." In the end, I recognized this sense of melancholia that a lot of German writing is steeped in is cultural. It made me feel somewhat like an outsider, an observer. Eventually this sense of alienation was a motivation to describe the discrepancy between what we see, what we are, what our society looks like, and what we would like it to look like. It's like a transposition into a desire. Quite opposite to the existential writing I was used to and influenced by in the late '60s, which articulated a kind of hopelessness.

You talk about a sense of foreboding in your work. Does a certain fear or nervous anticipation come out of the images?
I think so. I go after that in the work. In fact, I have to generate it in order to see what I see. It's a form of concentration for me. That's why I always photograph when I'm travelling because that's when I'm out of my comfort zone. I have to be uncomfortable in order to recognize when something is out of joint.

You need to be off-balance?
Yes. This is not necessarily the case any more because I now know where the potential lies and I can be quite confident in going there. When I know I am confronted with a potential image I go about trying to photograph it.

What are the exposure times in your blurred images?
I don't know anymore. I did know when I first started photographing with a Brownie Hawkeye. It had two exposures, leave it open, or a 30th of a second. Both gave that slight blur, or a lot of blur. So I learned to feel the exposure. Eventually I was able to control that quite well. I was physically in tune with the camera. That doesn't happen anymore with newer equipment and especially digital cameras.

Do you miss that direct connection?
Not at all. I'm not a person who looks back.

You mention the idea of being outside observing. One of your most effective devices is showing people looking out windows.
It's an image I carry around with me and when I see it I will photograph it. It's the same with curtains; I cannot resist photographing curtains. There are images that I can't help but photograph. Now there are lots of images with the same subject matter. In the late '90s when we first met, I was ready to give it up because black and white photography was finished and I realized I was repeating myself. I had to ask, "Why do it?" But then a new technology provided the potential for me to discover colour. I didn't care so much anymore if I was repeating myself. I was having fun learning a new way of photographing, but it was certainly a painful transition, too.

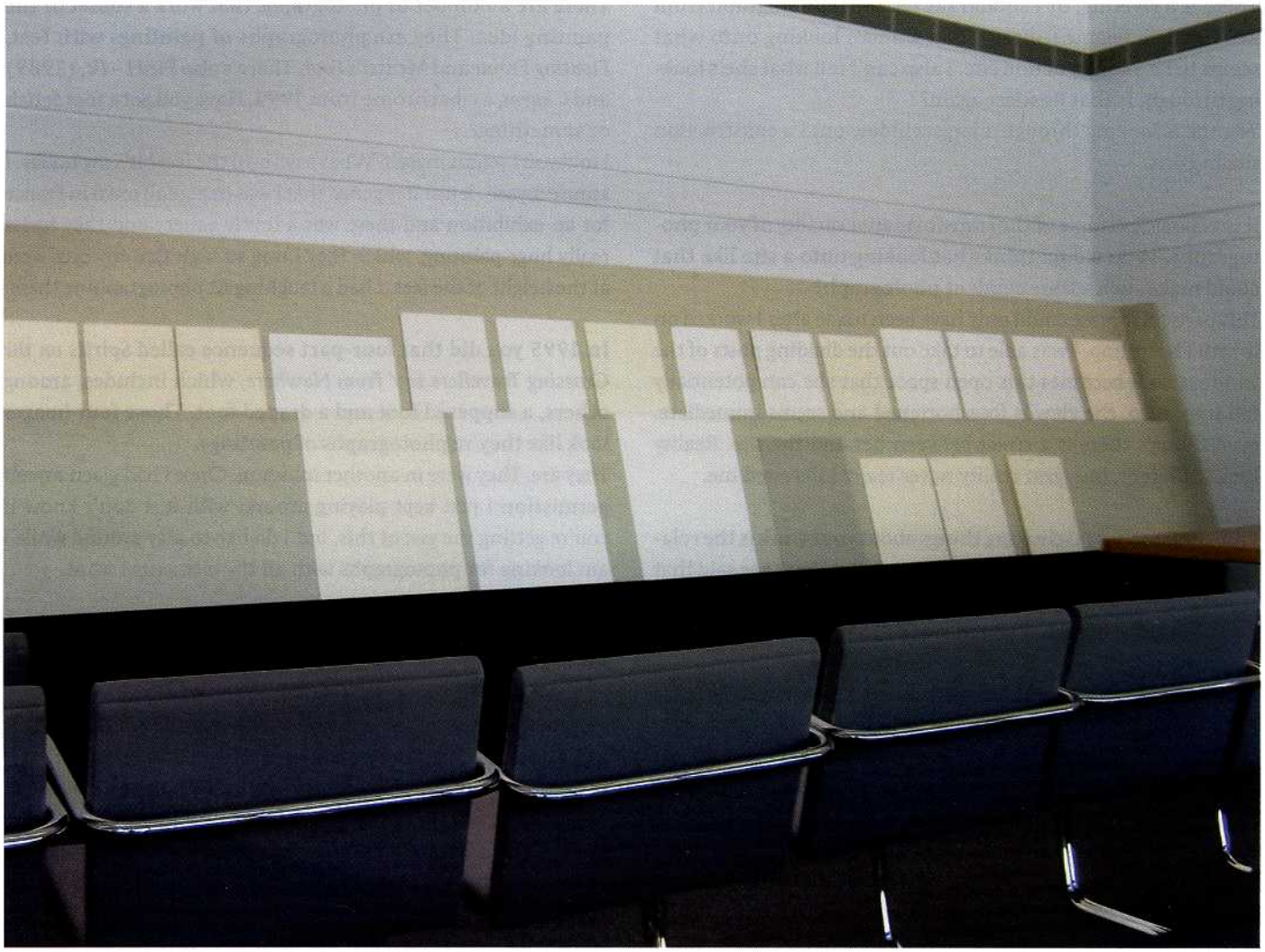
Why was the adjustment to colour so difficult? Did your mind and eye only think in black and white and the range of tonalities inside that frame?
Yes, amongst other things. I never took photographs that were souvenirs. So it was a conceptual switch because colour photography in my mind was very much connected to amateur photography. However colour started for me at the same time as I finally began digital photography, which is connected to a whole other kind of photography I've been trying to understand ever since. There are advantages that I can appreciate. I can enjoy altering images because it replaces some of the strategies I used before, such as suppressing detail by printing down, actually having a very particular way of printing black and white. Now I can suppress detail by simply taking it out.

Why did you want to suppress detail?
I felt that in street photography there was always too much stuff and I wanted to go towards a more minimal impression. I learned a lot through the portraits. At that point, I was still very preoccupied with technique. I knew what I wanted to do, went after it, and figured out the technical aspects. I'm totally a snapshot photographer even if the end result does not look like it.

In 1984–85 you did portraits of 10 women. They don't strike me in any way as being conventional portraits.
It's contextual. At the time, a portrait would be a combination of posture, age, a particular moment in time, environment and a certain pretense of the photographer to capture some essence of the person. I set out to do it differently. I wanted to figure out how to mirror some state of mind, or state of being by focusing entirely on the face, by not giving all the details, maybe by showing some gesture. These women were all fairly close to me. I loved it when the art writer, Cheryl Simon wrote—and it was something I hadn't realized—that they were self-portraits. In some way they were all a reflection of me. I wanted to recognize them, obviously, but in some way I wanted to recognize myself, too. That kind of complicity between women when they are hanging out and sharing was also an important dimension in that group of photographs.

Then five years later you did a portrait of the photographer Raymonde April.
It is a very rare cropped image. I didn't like the one I had taken and when I cropped it, I loved it. The essential sensuality of Raymonde was right there; I didn't need the whole face.

In 1997 you did a rather remarkable series of 28 gelatin silver portraits of another photographer, Alison Rossiter.
She was my real photo friend, we talked a lot about photography and we would go off and photograph together. I was already at



I am convinced that my visual education comes from painting so my desire to make photographs is also a desire to somehow make paintings with photographs. In a way, the making of the photograph is the point.

Viewing Room, 2014, inkjet print, 40 x 60 inches.

the point where I had stopped taking black and white photos and I had started something with Polaroids. So a third of the images in the series were taken over a 15-year period and the others were experimentations with Polaroid film, all done in a very short time. It became a mini-archive.

You have religiously stayed away from the nude, except in the Rossiter photographs.
You remind me what got it started. We were always joking around, saying if you really want to make money, you have to shoot nudes. So I made two nudes jumping out of the woods, inspired by a Courbet painting, actually a self-portrait as a desperate artist. I included one of this series in documenta IX, where I integrated a lot of different types of photos into the 19th-century painting galleries. It is an interest of mine to analyze how curators put images together in painting galleries, so taking that apart was a treat.

You use the word complicity, and one of the things I noticed about the Rossiter work is that it's called *the photographer and her model*. The implication is that you are in all the images, so it is another self-portrait.
Absolutely. It really is about this idea of the model and the photographer. Most of the time we get the male gaze and we rarely get the idea of women's complicity in art making.

Picasso was always rendering himself as a Minotaur or a musketeer in his iterations of *l'artist et son modèle*. Yours is a very different read of the relationship between model and image-maker.
It touches on something that I am questioning and working with: the idea of a very self-conscious gesture. I have always been bothered that art making is such a self-conscious activity. I'm grappling with that idea. Sometimes I do a heightened take on it and sometimes I try to hide it. I thought the work with Alison was super-heightened, almost a spoof.

There is a riveting, or I should say dazzling, photograph from 2011 called *Eblouie (Alison)*, of a woman looking onto what seems to be a construction site. I also can't tell what she's looking through. Is that Rossiter again?
Yes, she is looking through a large window onto a construction site in Paris.

It is a classic example of the transformative quality of your photography. Who would think that looking onto a site like that could make such a transcendent photograph?
This particular piece could only have been made after I worked on it with Photoshop. I was able to take out the dividing posts of the window, so it becomes this open space that she can potentially fall into. Also, the view is foreshortened and seems immediate, even though there is a street between her and the site. Reality looks different, but then reality never really interested me.

One of the other fascinating things about your work is the relationship between painting and photography. You have said that you wanted to bring photography into the scale of painting and I want to tease out what you meant by that. Is scale a measure of size or effect?
Both, I would think. It has something to do with photographic space. When I started, photographs were generally 8 x 10s, maybe 11 x 14s, but 16 x 20 already seemed enormous and 20 x 24 was huge. When I did the first series of portraits it was 16 photographs of 16 x 20. That was what I was able to afford. Photographers were rarely working big at the time. Cindy Sherman was doing smaller sizes. But I felt that the 8 x 10 photographs were just not accessible enough, you didn't enter into them; you had a distance from them. Again, it was the idea of the filmic; when you immerse yourself in an image-driven medium like film you're not just in the narrative, you're also being moved through the images. I wanted to be closer to that idea; I wanted to open up the image and make it more inviting. The first ones had a black frame around them to allude to the idea of a screen inside a black space. When increasing size became more acceptable, it opened up other options and possibilities for presenting images and making connections. In my case, the relationship to painting was easily made because in suppressing detail, they became much more painting-like.

A number of your photographs literally have paintings in them; there's *Mirror* (2008); an *Untitled* image of a white and lavender room with a painting on the wall; *Floating Frame*; there's *Portrait Gallery*, a black and white photograph from 2011; and there's the upside-down equestrienne. These are clearly deliberate attempts to play with painting's relationship to photography.
Absolutely. History has taught us that painting provided the vocabulary to talk about photography. Roland Barthes's punctum gave us another way of talking about and reading photographic detail. I am convinced that my visual education comes from painting and so my desire to make photographs is also a desire to somehow make paintings with photographs. In a way, the making of the photograph is the point.

There are a number of photographs that work a subset of the painting idea. They are photographs of paintings with feet, *Floating Frame* and *Menzel's Foot*. There's also *Pied I – IV*, (1989) and *Charm*, a cibachrome from 1994. Have you got a foot fetish or something?
I told you I repeat myself. What's with all the feet? It's my hobby. I amuse myself. It just happened that I was in a small town in France for an exhibition and there was a lovely gallery and they had a really huge painting, which they hung so high that my eyes were at the height of the feet. I had a laughing fit photographing them.

In 1995 you did that four-part sequence called *Spirits on the Crossing Travellers to / from Nowhere*, which includes, among others, a slippered foot and a draped foot. Those four images look like they're photographs of paintings.
They are. They were in another museum. Once I had given myself permission I just kept playing around with it. I don't know if you're getting the gist of this, but I do like to play around while I am looking for photographs with all the elements I want.

So your interest in feet is a photographic fetish and not an anatomical one.
I think a guiding theme in my work, or the way I go about photographing, is that it has to create a kind of *drole* amusement for me, as well as an absurdity or maybe a form of mystery. I find it completely absurd to look up at paintings where the feet are in your face. I could come up with other examples of why I took a photograph and it is mostly because of this strange dichotomy of seriousness and complete absurdity. I also continue to be very concerned with time and the time that we spend understanding something. We're invaded by images, so why bother making images unless you start finding something that will make you realize, even if just for a split second, something different, curiously unknown and yet déjà vu.

There is something weirdly wonderful about your *White Figures* diptych. Is the left-hand side a photograph of an unfinished painting, which explains why those white figures appear as they do?
That's another Menzel. It is an unfinished painting and it hangs in the Nationalgalerie in Berlin. As I said, I go through galleries and snap away and the Menzel fascinated me. Eventually I saw its relationship to the positive figure as volume, so it was a very simple restatement of absence/presence.

The painting has the quality of your photographs; there is a sense of diffusion, of something happening that you can't entirely read, a feeling of being a bit destabilized in the space.
It is actually very chaotic, and not only because it is unfinished; a lot of people are mulling about in this painting. That was what made me photograph it. The fact that it is unfinished is an added bonus, so rare.

You have a recent photograph called *The Viewing Room* (2015) that looks like half a Thomas Demand. The top half could be made of constructed paper and the chairs on the bottom half look real.

1. *#150*, "Privation," 2001, from a series of 75 inkjet prints (Giclée) on Arches paper, 45 x 36.5 inches.

2. *#141*, "Privation," 2001, from a series of 75 inkjet prints (Giclée) on Arches paper, 45 x 36.5 inches.

3. *#55*, "Privation," 2001, from a series of 75 inkjet prints (Giclée) on Arches paper, 45 x 36.5 inches.

4. *#54*, "Privation," 2001, from a series of 75 inkjet prints (Giclée) on Arches paper, 45 x 36.5 inches.

5. Installation view, *Reading Room for the Working Artist*, 2003–2004, mixed-media installation, VOX – Centre de l'image contemporaine, Montreal.

That's a new photograph that's never been shown before. That is exactly what I said when I saw it, "Hey, I've got a Thomas Demand." It's a viewing room at The National Gallery in Ottawa and what you're looking at are pieces of cardboard on which photographs would be placed for viewing.

You get into a lot of empty rooms. How do you do that?

I just wait until they're empty. I must have the kind of experience I talked about earlier; once I step into a room it has to tell me something. I can't help but take photographs in certain kinds of spaces. *Rose et Bleu* was taken in a cafeteria in a museum and the beauty isn't just in the colour but in the combination of the old and the postmodern furniture. It's the contradictions that attract me. The first photographs I ever took were of lobbies of hotels and apartment buildings. This is very North American and doesn't exist in Europe, where you have couches and seats and plants in the lobbies but nobody ever sits there. That kind of contradiction appealed to my sense of humour. Empty spaces fascinate me because I can be alone in them. They make me feel either comfortable or not comfortable. What I'm hoping to do is to give the viewer an experience of my own experience through my photographs.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When you're in an empty room all possible meanings are at your disposal. You don't really know what has, or what will happen, so it is not a narrative sequence. But there is something about the empty room that seems richly metaphoric.
I guess what you're saying, and what I'm thinking, is that once you enter into something you are reacting. To photograph that reaction or response seems to be the secret of photography. You can photograph a room very easily but the trick is to represent the feel of that room so it will actually allude to a sense of isolation or emptiness and not just describe it.

What is your interest in landscapes? You talk about interior spaces but you have also photographed a lot of landscapes, which are exterior spaces.
I find landscape a more difficult subject because a beautiful landscape will get us every time but a photograph of it will not. So for me it was the usual question, "What am I going to do with that?" I want to understand how you photograph landscape. In the case of the "Landscape Trilogy" of 1995, I was lucky enough that I got so much material and was so involved in trying to understand it that three works came out of it. The series started at the Domaine de *Kerguéhennec* in Brittany and since I had carte blanche there I said, "Okay, I'm going to indulge myself. As my alter ego, I can make pictorial landscapes; I can make anything I want because it is not really me." By couching it as an archive I gave myself further permission to do what I usually don't do. It's a strategy I now follow. Things change when you put many images into an archive situation because the many become one, and they take on a different value. I could make one or I could make a thousand. It's simply variations on a theme, like making music.

So you want the single image to retain some value, and you also want the mobility of film and the ways that sequencing and collecting can work. In other words, you want to have your photographic cake and eat it, too?
Right again. It is just a matter of how you approach something. That landscape work taught me that contextualizing and recontextualizing your work allows you to talk about it in a different way. At the same time the display and the placing will encourage different readings. If you see it in a book your experience is entirely different from seeing it on the wall. Obviously, I have explored different ways of putting images out in the world. Something I think about a lot is that if you understand the viewer's expectations you can work with it, you can play and tease out the viewer's desire to experience the work. I do understand why a viewer would say, "I want to see the interior" of the *Eclogue* piece, for example, and for me that is also an essential issue when thinking about photography. I like to think of the camera obscura as an introduction to the idea of exchanging inside and outside as a form of seeing. It makes me understand photography as a reversal or dialogue of my inside with the outside. What I learn on the outside is somehow internalized and given back, becoming a visualization of this exchange. The photographs of windows are really a representation of that kind of viewing and mirroring for the spectator.

In *Eclogue: or Filling the Landscape* (1995), you literally have photographs in which you are both entering the landscape and leaving it. You present a mechanism that shows that inside/outside dialogue.
Yes, and when you look at it carefully, entering the landscape is a form of leaving the photographer.

I assume your sequencing is poetic rather than literal? It's in this sense that your photographs don't mean one thing but a number of things.
If you compared what I do with any literary form, it would be poetry. Maybe that is the confusion that one senses sometimes, the same ambiguity that you find in poetry; this sense of understanding and incomprehension is almost essential to my work.

You have no hesitation in repurposing your work? An old image can be put in a new context and it becomes a different image.
That is actually the interesting part of image making.

So the image isn't static. It's in that sense that the moment isn't decisive as much as it's generative?
Almost any image is very malleable; it is fluid like meaning is fluid.

Do you approach different subject matter in different ways? Taking a portrait is no different in your mind's eye than looking at a landscape, or the interior of a room?
I equalize it all. It's a reflection of how I see, and I don't see that many different ways. I project my own sense of things onto it. I didn't always know that, so it was something I had to learn.

***Aporia: A Book of Landscapes* is a lovely title. Did you pick it because it was about this sense of a gap, and a recognition that things aren't fixed?**
For me it is mostly about the idea of the impasse, of the absolute incomprehension. It was made at a point where I was finished with the landscape idea and where I knew I was fazing out of black and white photography. It still took some time—it took a good eight years to understand where I could go—but I always had other things to do. I think that's one of the reasons why I do many things at the same time. I need a long time to work through stuff and it helps me to do other things until I get there.

You dedicate one section of the book to six women, including Diane Arbus, Sylvia Plath, Francesca Woodman and Virginia Woolf, all of them suicides.
Yes. They are there to be named as women artists who have committed suicide. It's because the original piece in Brittany was the story—narrated in pictures—about this photographer, my alter ego in the 19th century, who eventually drowns herself. The piece was called *Secrets, A Gothic Tale*, the gothic novel being a literary form where women were allowed to be successful, and many used it as a form of resistance in writing.

Is there a logic to the structure of the book? I counted pages in each of the four sections and looked to see how the images were sequenced.

1. *Silhouette (London)*, 2011, inkjet print on Arches paper, 40 x 60 inches. Edition of 3.

Actually, the structure was a big puzzle. I wanted to have basically a *mise en abyme* experience of the castle, so that one would always come back to it. One would start there, get lost in the landscape and come back to the castle; then get lost again in the landscape. So there is that rhythm. Structuring it was pretty intuitive but I needed a formal device to help me keep going. The reader can go forward or backward, or start anywhere; it is supposed to be a very fluid experience.

What was the reason for basing your *Reading Room for the Working Artist* (2003–04) on Aleksandr Rodchenko's *Worker's Club* in Paris in 1925?

I always had a photo of it on my wall because it combined a lot of my interests. I wrote my thesis on three photographers of the Modernist period, among them Rodchenko. The work itself was intriguing to me in that the ideas were political at the same time that they were completely utopian. It was a complete contradiction to invite workers to spend their lunch hours reading when half of them couldn't read. But this pairing of work and leisure reminded me of the commonly held belief that artists never really work; it all just comes to them and they only have fun. One of the 12 books in the piece is dedicated to that idea. So Rodchenko's *Reading Room* furnished me with the background through which I could project myself into a Modernist mode. I wanted to talk about process and about all the things that are rarely talked about in the context of an artist's production. It incorporated what I read, what everybody around me read, the discussions I had, images and things I collected, the art I looked at and the artists that influenced me and, of course, my own photographs. So it became a hybrid work of collector/artist, writer/artist, curator/artist and not just working artist. There was another motivation behind it as well; until about 2000 I had compartmentalized my teaching and design work, and had kept them as far from my art as I could. I wanted to make a work where the two got together. It fulfilled a need. Again, Rodchenko was the model and furnished me with the opportunity to explore my interests in design and literature as well as art, and allowed me to discover other media, such as film.

Is your visual memory good? If I mention a specific photograph will you remember the conditions and reasons behind your taking the image?

Yes. I have an incredible memory for images. I probably learned that from making books for other photographers and artists. Otherwise, I have a very bad memory. That seems to be what occupies my head. The photo has become the experience and I often don't have the real experience of the situation, I only have the photograph.

The idea of losing books is a troubling one, which makes me marvel at the way you handled the fire that destroyed your and your husband's library in the *Privation* series.
Initially, of course, it was a difficult experience, but eventually it was quite liberating. It was an absolute joy to find a way to recuperate the loss in another way. That's not easy in life and I think it is fantastic that I had the opportunity.

How did you decide which ones were to be photographed and which were not?
The original strategy was very simple: I photographed those books that had no covers, that were, in other words, completely anonymous. So the grey, red, yellow, and black and white books were the first 45 or 50 that I made. It was important that they had no identity anymore. That was the first recognition. I had kept many more, and so eventually I began looking at the ones that had some leftover identity and discovered, for example, that for some reason six of what I call "Logo" books, where you have a very '60s or '70s cover design, all survived quite well. So I made a series of them. All in all, I scanned over 300 book covers, front and back, and apart from the approximately 75 photographs, I made an artist's book of these book covers. Each piece of paper was printed with both covers of the lost book, thus reconstituting—once assembled and bound—part of a library of books that could never be opened again.

There are foldings and reveals that are quite dramatic. Did you "pose" the books in any way; was there any manual shaping of them?
Absolutely not. They are what they are. For me, this logic of scanning meant that they were true objects, true documents, direct and even concrete reproductions. It became a way to understand that digital photography is a form of reproduction. That's why I think documentary photography is widespread, because it brings us back to wanting to understand photography as real, even though we can manipulate it much more now than we could before. Walter Benjamin's text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, receives a new reading in this context.

It's interesting when you say that you use them as objects because the title of the book designated as No. 159 is *Word and Object*, which articulates how you are viewing the works.
I never thought of that but that's beautiful. Yes, the work is somewhat rhetorical.

***Privation Book No. 45* shows an airplane that has been hit, and smoke is streaming out of its fuselage. There is something particularly haunting about that image.**
The airplane obviously has a great intensity. It was one of the first images where I said to myself, this is too good not to publish.

***Yellow Book No. 150* is orange with an intense crispy black flare-up section. It reminds me of a painting by JMW Turner.**
You're right. The way we start seeing things is very subjective. Everybody has something they can invest into the image, and that awareness has preoccupied me ever since. I'm interested in what it can bring up in the spectator. Barthes talks about there being no such thing as the author, it's really the reader who is the author, and transposed to photography, it is the viewer who completes the picture. All any artist can ask for is that somebody will follow them down the path. Obviously, all these images are out there, and when you look at Facebook it becomes more and more important that the photographic image distinguishes itself from all the other stuff that is floating around.

What about the *Schriftbilder* from 1999, a body of 22 photograms of dead scripts and languages? It brings together two of your interests, graphic design and the archive.
I found it at a moment where I was looking at a lot of typefaces for my teaching. I had even visited the Impremerie Nationale in Paris. Discovering them was a fluke and for the longest time I didn't quite know what to do with them. Again, it's a play on words. *Schriftbilder* literally means "writing image" and so using the photogram to make the image was a logical thing for me to do. The kind of rhetoric that operates in these works continues in "The Reading Room," where I play on words and make them meaningful by getting deeper and deeper into the subject.

1. *Chambre verte*, 2012, inkjet print on Arches paper, 28 x 40 inches.

2. *Deux prises*, 2012, inkjet print on Arches paper, 28 x 40 inches.

One of the books included in the "Privation" series is *Camera As Weapon*. You don't use the device that way. If there were a book title for you, it would be closer to something like *Camera as Seduction*.
Oh, I think it is the photo that is the seducer and not the camera. The camera is a kind of physical extension, an operating mechanism, an apparatus that helps you see and think. For me, the camera is actually a protective device. Somehow it gives me the distance and the capacity to assimilate or integrate experience.

Does it finally make you feel at home?
Yes, it always does. ∎

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