

Mirages by Tami Amit

The *mise en scene* of Tami Amit's photographs offers viewers a striking encounter with an arresting series of images, evoking the most unsettling of Alfred Hitchcock's films (*Vertigo*) and the disquieting ambience of a David Lynch movie (*Lost Highway*). At times Amit's photographs make explicit reference to a body of literature that interrogates both image and appearance, as in her series dedicated to Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice in Wonderland*. While detailed and sophisticated lighting draws the viewer into each photograph, perfectly conceived décor sets the scene for the models (actors or professionals) who pose in stylised costumes, captivating viewers with their expressivity. The artistry displayed in the colour and artifice of these photographs creates a dream-like variation, suggesting hallucination, fantasy and nightmare. Yet it is possible to see in these images a representation of the exhaustion of fiction.

The relationship of Tami Amit's photographs to fiction is situated primarily in the photographer's construction of a series of images that *enhance* the photographic image's relationship with time; prolonging, in this evocative dreamlike state, the fantasies and the make-believe that these enactments provoke. Close observation of the roads, doors and windows that feature in some of Tami Amit's recent photographs reveals their representation as enigmatic entries into an unfolding universe whose strange invitation to enter into the image entices the viewer into a parallel world, imaginary and invented. From Duane Michals to Tracey Moffatt, a tradition of dreamlike photography exists where *mise en scène* is used to construct dramatic scenarios within the image, yet with Tami Amit the meaning of *these* fictions is fragmented, as with a shattered mirror. Piecing together the fictions from which these photographs are extracted is difficult, complex and ambiguous: these images with their mysteriously intense and elliptical narratives seem not to exist beyond the frame. It is difficult to find a thread, or trace a narrative, when, captured in a cubist and dissonant rhythm, these glimpses of a body, a shoulder, or a back, isolated and neglected, are followed by a road or forest landscape ... The magnificent women who pose for Tami Amit are set in scenes of suffering; alone or abandoned, often injured and sometimes victims of violence, amid a décor which steals their limelight, at the end of a story of which we know nothing.

This suffering inflicted upon the body sometimes finds its mirror and its *mise en abîme* in the object of the doll as simulacrum and fetish, a possible initiator or a broken figure, following its use by Hans Bellmer... Will the enigma of these solitary, exhausted, introverted women be resolved as their characters become the allegories of our cruel and modern fairytales? Hallucination, allegories, the exhaustion of fiction... Might Tami Amit's photographs be mirages?

The Introspection of Appearances

Tami Amit's work is that of an extraordinary, impressive and disquieting photographer of women. Fragile, fearful, overcome (by the sorrow or by the pain?), romantic and excessive, dispassionate, worried or remorseful, the women that Tami Amit photographs carefully and intuitively are always captured in a dazed, dreamlike state, expressing solitude, waiting and abandon... An introspection of appearances is invented.

In the *Hotel Boutique* sequence a young brunette's intense gaze seems to challenge the photographic lens, offering an uncertain welcome or perhaps a defiant stare. A room appears to replicate something of her mental world, the décor of her dreams furnishing a backdrop to her enigmatic desires. The bed sheets are crumpled, a mirror is visible, and the walls appear like monochromes bringing her body into sharp relief. Throughout, Tami Amit's meticulous attention to detail in lighting renders the colours of her images intense, harmonious and dynamic, full of contrast, otherworldly, strange and discomfiting. In this series, quiet impatience and apparent calm give expression to the inner sensations of desire, waiting and tedium, verging on a possible rupture. Time appears suspended, in an uncomfortable silence where a sense of danger is omnipresent. But from what, from which scenario, in which film, are the women photographed by Tami Amit the heroines? And what are they waiting for? What is the object of their silence?

The strange and cruel interplay between the photographer and her models is particularly resonant in two different sequences, *Untitled* and *The Butcher*, recalling the eerie figures in Villiers' *L'Ève Future* or the mechanical woman in Fellini's *Casanova*, evoking the world of Mary Shelley. Dread and the fantastic intermingle, Tami Amit's women are immersed therein. Towards the end of the book, the women's apparent solitude and desperation might be construed as self-portrait (the last sequence is entitled *The Woman Who Was a Replicant*), or perhaps the artist offers a more contemplative conclusion in the desolate snowy landscapes of *The Winter*, and the verdant world of lost paradises in *The End of Innocence*. These are endings, but they are also new beginnings... Tami Amit's photographs are a magnificent journey through a labyrinth of tragic female emotion, solitude and fantasy.

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