LAURA LETINSKY

Now Again

Text/Tekst Karen Irvine

Galerie Kusseneers

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Alone, Somewhere

Of her photographic series from the 1990s, Venus Inferred, which depicts couples in their private, tensely psychological and erotic spaces, Laura Letinsky has said that she wanted to photograph what love looks like. To that end, she explored the pitfalls of day to day familiarity and captured the uneasiness of men and women enduring the collapse of infatuation that is inherent to idealized romance. This book presents two series she has made since Venus *Inferred*: pictures of tabletop still lifes (Hardly More than Ever, 1996-2004), and unfurnished rooms and formal gardens (Somewhere, Somewhere, 2003-present). These photographs are all un-peopled, thoughtful compositions in which Letinsky extends her investigation of qualified intimacy by recognizing that certain spaces and domestic details are psychologically charged.

Letinsky's photographs from the series Hardly More Than Ever record the aftermath of human consumption in domestic spaces. Like Flemish still-life paintings of the seventeenth century, Letinsky's photographs emphasize daily life

and abundance, and continue a long tradition of translating objects with verisimilitude. Like the painters Clara Peeters (1594 – c. 1657) and Jacob van Es (1590-1666) from Antwerp, Letinsky's tabletop arrangements are positioned against a neutral background, accentuating the colors, volumes, and surface textures of the objects on display. Exquisitely detailed, the pictures present a cornucopia of objects that evoke sensory impressions such as melon rinds, sticky candy wrappers, and polished silverware. There is an aesthetic leveling that occurs between luxury items and regular everyday objects as they are placed side by side and carefully rendered – a bottle twist top, for example, looks as beautiful as the silver bowl beside. it. As the Flemish masters did before her. Letinsky records sensuous, short-lived effects such as wilting flowers or fruit at various stages of ripeness. Like stains, her photographs are permanent, however, and at odds with the decaying nature of the scenes.

The morning light in these pictures signals that this is the day after; there is only the residual evidence of social clatter. Whereas the Flemish masters typically depicted food and fineries before or during consumption

in order to serve as a memento mori - a reminder of the fleeting nature of life and the transience of earthly pleasures -Letinsky's pictures record the aftermath of experience, scenes in which the pleasure has presumably been exhausted. Photography's seeming ability to seize a moment from the flow of time has long been held as a register of mortality and proof of the inevitability of death - an idea perhaps most notably discussed by writers Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes. By focusing on what is decaying and discarded over what holds promise and allure, Letinsky endows her work with a finality that amplifies the idea of photography as memento mori. As our imagination is invited to reconstruct actions instead of anticipating them, her pictures operate as melancholy analogies for memory.

Letinsky is also clearly interested in spatial ambiguities. Like Van Es or Cézanne who famously ignored the rules of scientific perspective, Letinsky creates complex and awkward compositions in which objects seem precariously balanced. Tabletops appear to tilt at us with glasses and plates hanging off their edges, endowing the pictures with a sense of anticipation.

Often shot from a high vantage point to minimize the overlapping of objects and to enhance the overall tension in the composition, objects appear to be at oblique and disparate angles. Letinsky exploits the flattening mechanisms of photography and undermines the propensity for the camera lens, and our brains, to correct. Just as Cézanne understood that paintings are not faithful representations of reality, by making her photographs feel not-quite-right, Letinsky reminds us that all photographs are abstractions – and constructions.

Letinksy's most recent photographs from *Somewhere, Somewhere,* of empty rooms in just-vacated houses and formal flower gardens extend the ambiguous narratives of her still lifes. Also un-peopled, these pictures of human intervention and exodus in defined spaces are psychologically and culturally weighty. In many ways these pictures are the antithesis of the still lifes – they provide views of spaces but with only minor evidence of human occupation. We must contemplate shady pathways and vacated architectural shells alone – as we always do as imaginative decipherers of photographic space.

In her interior photographs Letinsky helps to animate the empty rooms for us. Like the architect who builds the right angles, plans vantage points, and predicts the effects of light in the room, Letinsky adds details such as tape rolls standing on edge or forgotten house plants that encourage our interaction with the surface of the picture and draw us into its imaginary space. We soon realize, however, that these forgotten items are not the only things occupying the room. The non-object of space and the weightiness of memory also exist there, a point British artist Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963) eloquently makes by casting interior domestic spaces in concrete. Furthermore, like photographs, rooms are inherently empty, and require ideas, from both producer and receiver, to be complete.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard points out that the imagination is predisposed to responding to domestic space. The house, our first frame of reference, shelters the imagination, and is therefore fertile territory for daydreaming.² A photograph, of course, is a different kind of threshold – to stand in front of its flat surface and read it as inhabitable space requires an unanchored mind. A photograph of a room provides a complicated abstraction of the experience

of being there – a space that only our imaginations are able to roam.

To experience it is therefore to daydream.

In this regard the photograph is like

Bachelard's house – when experienced it is no longer an empty vessel; it cannot be an inert box.³

The melancholy of an emptied house is perhaps a cultural construct, but if we follow Bachelard's line of thinking and consider that we transform spaces as much as they transform us, then the shell of a house is indeed resonant.

Through association and similitude Letinksy's generic spaces can remind us of our own past or present dwellings and thus evoke emotional content.

Where imagination collides with memory is always unclear territory but the two phenomena are certainly interdependent. As our minds walk down Letinksy's empty corridors and produce narrative content, we perhaps find ourselves in the intimate space where memory, fantasy, and imagination meet. It may also prompt us to wonder, as we associate our own memories with someone else's home, if we fundamentally voyeurs of our own memories?

The serene formal garden is yet another space of contemplation and fantasy. The image of the leafy garden is lodged firmly in the annals of Western culture, typically serving as the setting for romance and fairy tales. Letinsky's garden photographs hint at this history of enchantment in the soft flares of light that emanate from corners or hover in the foreground of the images, as if indicating a supernatural presence. Like her still life and house pictures, there are always resonant details – a lemon that hangs precariously from a scrawny branch, a section of bright green garden hose resting on a gravel walkway - that grab our attention and makes us conscious of the process of looking. They also remind us that even within these seemingly ordered places, anomalies and chaos reign - taming nature is a futile pursuit.

And within that nature, and all of its unpredictability and wildness, humans build shelters and relationships that over the course of a lifetime come and go. Like the space of a room that we can only imagine when contained in its shell, we depend on the people and places around us to help define, limit, and protect ourselves. But self-knowledge or the knowledge of

another, like a photograph, spans both reality and illusion, and is, excitingly, ungraspable. By photographing the remnants of meals shared around tables, houses that have been recently lived in, and tranquil garden spaces that invite contemplation, it could be said that Letinsky has been busy exploring what love looks like in a more solitary sense. However, photographic evidence, by marking departure, speaks more strongly of absence than presence – destabilizing the sense of well-being that these places can provide.

Karen Irvine, Curator Museum of Contemporary Photography Columbia College Chicago

Laura Letinsky, e-mail correspondence with the author, 6/25/05.

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 3-6.

³ Ibid., p. 47.























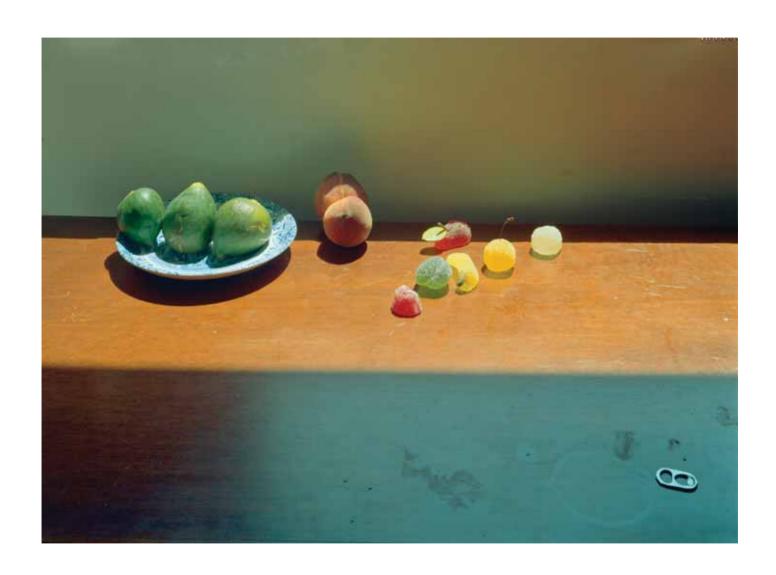


































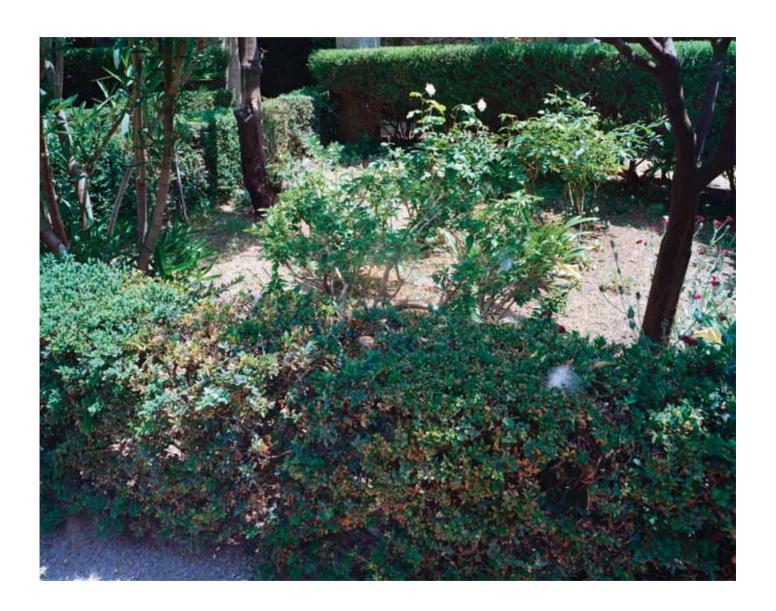
























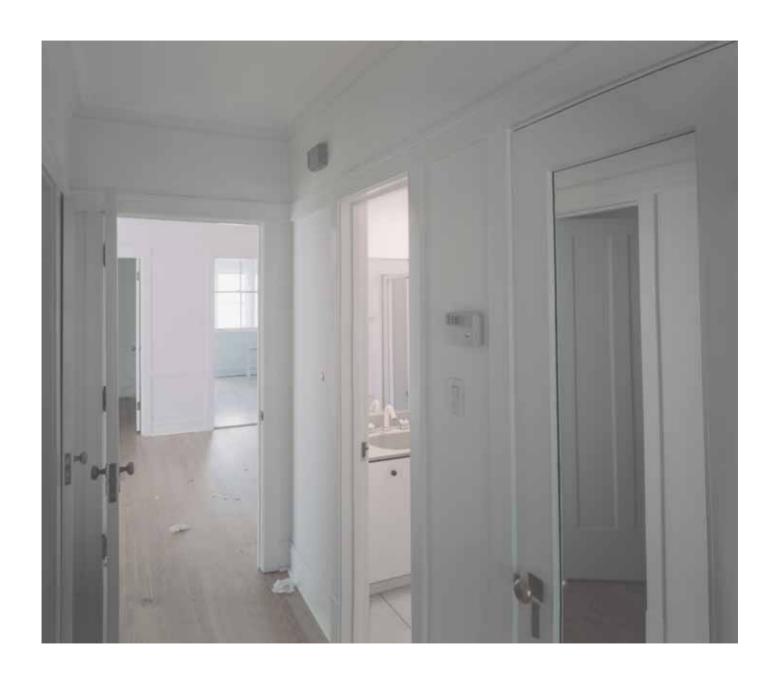








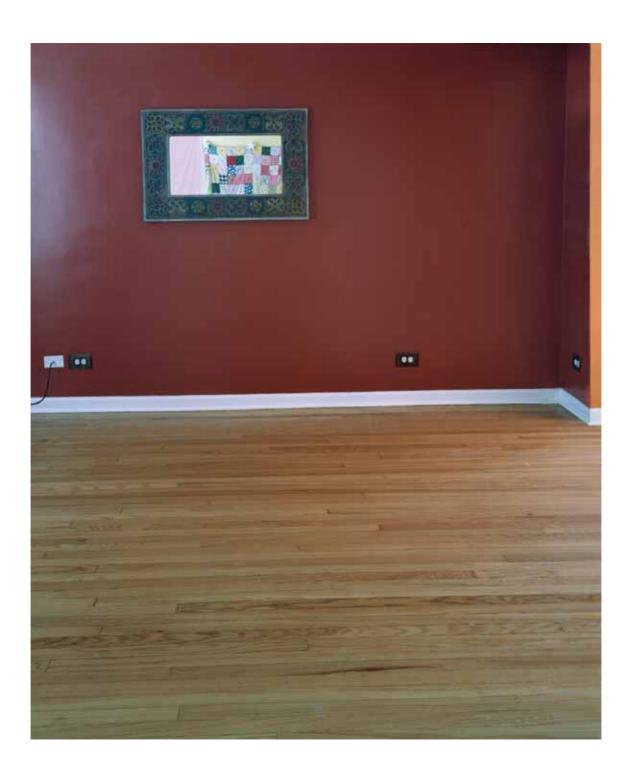














LIST OF WORKS

- 1 Untitled, #75, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 27.95" x 22"
- 2 Untitled, #76, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 27.93 x 22"
- 3 Untitled, #77, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 28.7" x 22"
- 4 Untitled, #13, 1999 from series "Morning, and Melancholia" 24" x 18"
- 5 Untitled, #10, 1999 from series "Morning, and Melancholia" 24 1/16" x 19 5/8"
- 6 Untitled, #4, 1999 from series "Morning, and Melancholia" 24 3/4" x 19 1/2"
- 7 Untitled, #3, 1997 from series "Morning, and Melancholia" 25 1/4" x 19 7/8"
- 8 Untitled, #85, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 27" x 18.87"
- 9 Untitled, #22, 1999 from series "Morning, and Melancholia" 29 5/8" x 18 5/8"
- 10 Untitled, #32, 2001 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 23 5/8" x 15"

- 11 Untitled, #48, 2002 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 35" x 24.3"
- 12 Untitled, #23, 1999 from series "Morning, and Melancholia" 18 5/8" x 23 7/8"
- Untitled, #89, 2004 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 40" x 27.01"
- 14 Untitled, #71, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 35" x 17.56"
- Untitled, #24, 1999 from series "Morning, and Melancholia" 24 3/8" x 19 1/2"
- Untitled, #82, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 35" x 25.5"
- 17 Untitled, #35, 2001 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 24 1/2" x 17 7/8"
- Untitled, #49, 2002 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 28" x 19.1"
- 19 Untitled, #33, 2001 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 23 5/8" x 18 3/4"
- 20 Untitled, #81, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 35" x 27.8"
- 21 Untitled, #38, 2001 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 24" x 17 1/8"

- 22 Untitled, #40, 2001 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 23 3/4" x 17"
- 23 Untitled, #63, 2002 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 31" x 22.2"
- 24 Untitled, #55, 2002 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 35" x 28.1"
- Untitled, #60, 2002 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 37" x 29.2"
- 26 Untitled, #88, 2004 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 31 3/8" x 20 9/16"
- 27 Untitled, #79, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 34.242" x 22.237"
- 28 Untitled, #91, 2004 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 20" x 25.63"
- 29 Untitled, #90, 2004 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 20" x 24.153"
- 30 Untitled, #73, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 35" x 20.5"
- 31 Untitled, #54, 2002 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 31" x 22.8"
- 32 Untitled, #80, 2003 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 33" x 28"

- 33 Untitled, #92, 2004 from series "I did not remember I had forgotten" 31.57" x 22.29"
- 34 Untitled, #2, 2004 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 28" 35 1/4"
- 35 Untitled, #4, 2004 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 28" 35 1/4"
- 36 Untitled, #3, 2004 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" x 36"
- 37 Untitled, #1, 2004 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" x 34 1/2"
- 38 Untitled, #7, 2004 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" x 34 1/2"
- 39 Untitled, #106, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" x 35 1/4"
- 40 Untitled, #100, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 28" x 38 1/2"
- 41 Untitled, #101, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" x 36 1/4"
- 42 Untitled, #110, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" 35 1/4"
- 43 Untitled, #96, 2004 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" 35 1/4"

- 44 Untitled, #103, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" 35 1/2"
- 45 Untitled, #95, 2004 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 26" x 38 1/4"
- 46 Untitled, #104, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" x 31 3/4"
- 47 Untitled, #105, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 36" x 27 3/4"
- 48 Untitled, #109, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" x 36 1/4"
- 49 Untitled, #107, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 27 3/4" 35 1/2"
- 50 Untitled, #111, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 34" x 27 3/4"
- 51 Untitled, #114, 2005 from series "Somewhere, Somewhere" 34" x 27 3/4"

LAURA L. LETINSKY

° 1962, Canada

EDUCATION

1991

1986

1986

EXHIBITIONS - Selected Solo & Two Person		
2006	Hardly More Than Ever, Pilar Parra & Romero, Madrid, Spain	
	Somewhere, Somewhere, Oakville Galleries, Oakville, ONT	
2005	Now Againr, Gallerie Kusseneers, Antwerp, Belgium	
	Somewhere, Somewhere, Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago, IL	
2004	Hardly More Than Ever, The Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL; Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto, ONT;	
	Robert Klein Gallery, Boston, MA	
	Aftermath: Still-life photographs by Laura Letinsky, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH	
2003	I did not remember I had forgotten, Shine Gallery, London, England; Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York;	
	Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago, IL	
	Morning, and Melancholia, Iowa University Gallery, Iowa	
2002	Morning, and Melancholia, Edwynn Houk Gallery, NY	
	Venus Inferred-Self Portraits, Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto	
	Morning, and Melancholia, Copia: American Academy of Food and Wine, Napa Valley, CA	
2001	Laura Letinsky, Vox Gallery, Montréal, QUE	
2000	Morning, and Melancholia, Carol Ehlers Gallery, Chicago, IL	
1999	Venus Inferred, Bishop's University, Québec	
1998	Venus Inferred, Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (Touring), Ottawa, ONT	

Yale University School of Art, New Haven, CT, M.F.A. Photography

Manitoba Artists for Women's Art, Winnipeg, MB, Mentor Program, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB, B.F.A. Honors, Photography

1997	Coupling, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL
1995	Venus Inferred, The Print Club, Philadelphia, PA
	Venus Inferred, Arts Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
1994	Intimate Stages, Presentation House, Vancouver, BC
	Venus Inferred, Lawndale Art and Performance Center, Houston, TX
1993	Intimate Stages, Photographers' Gallery, Saskatoon, SASK
	Intimate Stages, Le Mois de la Photo, Optica Gallery, Montréal, QUE
1992	Intimate Stages, Exit Gallery, University of Nevada, Reno, NV
	Intimate Stages, Florida International University, Miami, FL
1991	Intimate Stages, Floating Gallery, Winnipeg, MB
1985	Recent Work, Floating Gallery, Winnipeg, MB

EXHIBITIONS - Selected Group

2006	15th Anniversary Exhibition, The Print Center, Philadelphia
	Taken for Looks, Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona Beach, FL
2005	Crossings: 5 Artist Cultural Exchange, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL;
	Musuem of Fine Art, Kaohsiumg, Taiwan
	Ripe for Picking, Jim Kemper Fine Art, New York, NY
	Epilogue, Janet Jackson Gallery, Atlanta, GO
	About Place, Galería Pilar Parra & Romero, Madrid, Spain
	Ripe for the Picking, Jim Kemper Fine Art, New York, NY
2004	About Face: Photographic Portraits from the Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
	Acting Out, University of Iowa, Neuberger Museum of Art, NY (Touring)
	Truth Matters, Houston Center of Photography, Houston, TX
	Self-Exposed, Stephen Daiter Gallery, Chicago, IL
	DOMICILE, Center for Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA
	About Face, Benise Bibro Gallery, New York, NY
	Smart Collecting: A Thirtieth Anniversary Celecration, Smart Museum, Chicago, IL
	Dust to Dust, University of Essex, England

	Beyond Compare: Woman Photographs on Beauty, BCE, Toronto, Vancouver, Montréal, Amsterdam, Portuga
2003	Locating Intimacy, San Francisco Cameraworks, San Francisco, CA
	Feminine Persuasion, Kinsey Institute, University of Indiana, IN
2002	Home Stories, Winnipeg Art Gallery (International Touring Exhibition)
2001	Subjects/Objects, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
	The Power of Reflection, Saidye Bronfman Center, Montréal, QUÉ
2000	L'image complice, Nederlands Foto Instituut, Rotterdam, Brussels, Casino, Chicago (Touring)
	Crossing the Line, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
	Voyeurism, Catherine Edelman, Chicago, IL
1999	Starry Nights, Carol Ehlers Gallery, Chicago, IL
	Affinities, Sadiey Broffman Museum, Montréal, QUE
	Domesticated, Worcester Museum, Worcester, MA
1998	Surface: Contemporary Photographic Practice, London, England
1997	University of Chicago Faculty Exhibition, SMART Gallery, Chicago, IL
1996	Kiss This, Focal Point Gallery, Essex, England
1995	Undertow, NAME Gallery, Chicago, IL
	Versimilitudes and the Utility of Doubt, White Columns Gallery, New York, NY
	The Body Photographic, The Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, LO
1994	New Acquisitions, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
1993	Intimate Stages, Midtown Y, New York, NY
	Photo National Exhibition Juror: Charles Stainback, Zoller Gallery, Penn State, PA (touring)
1992	Exhibition of Photography, Juror: John Szarkowski, The Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, MA
1991	The Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (touring)
1990	Latent Images, Gallery 44, Toronto, ONT
1989	Illicit Acts Invitational Show, Flamingo Motel, Winnipeg, MB
1987	Merchants of Love, SAW Gallery, Ottawa, ONT
	Contemporary Art in Manitoba, Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, MB (touring)
	Multiplicities Ukrainian Cultural Center, Winnipeg, MB (touring)
	A Multiplicity of Voices, 13 Women Artists, Plug In Art Gallery, Winnipeg, MB
1986	Recent Acquisitions, Portage la Prairie Art Center, Portage la Prairie, MB
	Environments and Situations, Juried Exhibition, Janet Ian Cameron Gallery, Winnipeg, MB

AWARDS AND HONORS - Selected

2003	Richard Driehaus Foundation Award, Chicago, IL
2002	Illinois Arts Council Grant
2001	Anonymous Was A Woman, New York, NY
2000	Guggenheim Fellowship Award – Photography
1998	Canada Council Mid-Career Grant for Visual ArtistsPhotography
1997	Community Arts Assistance Program, Department of Cultural Affairs,
	Chicago Illinois Arts Council, Fellowship FinalistPhotography
1994	Canada Council "B" Grant for Visual Artists Photography
1993	The Barbara Spohr Endowment Award for Excellence in Photography, Banff Center for the Arts
1992	The Banff Program Photography Residency
	Canada Council "B" Grant for Visual ArtistsPhotography
1991	Yale School of Art George Sakier Award for Excellence in Photography
1990	Manitoba Arts Council Award
1989	Manitoba Arts Council Project Grant
	Lila Wallace Acheson Readers Digest Award
	Winnipeg Arts Advisory Council Grant
1988-7	Manitoba Arts Council Visual Arts Grant
	Manitoba Arts Council Project Grant

REVIEWS AND ARTICLES - Selected

2004 House and Garden, "On Edge" April/May, interview with Carol Cunningham

Mouth to Mouth, interview

New Yorker, review

New York Times, review by Grace Gluck

University of Chicago Alumni Magazine

Artforum, January, Stephen Frailey, "Laura Letinsky: Renaissance Society", in "Preview: 50 Shows Worldwide"

University of Chicago Chronicle

	Contemporary Magazine, March, interview with Charlotte Cotton,
	New York Times Sunday Magazine, FoodArt Forum, "50 Top Previews", Laura Letinsky at the
	Renaissance Society
2003	Vince Alletti, "Voice Choice", Village Voice, December 3
	Polly Ullrich, Review, "Laura Letinsky: Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago", Frieze, October
2002	Grace Glueck, Review of Morning, and Melancholia at Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York Times, March 8
2001	Vick Goldberg, Review of Size Matters, New York Times, August 5
2000	Susan Snodgrass, Review, "Laura Letinsky at Carol Ehlers", Art in America, December
1999	Lynne Tilman, "Nude Notes", Art On Paper, January/February, Vol. 3, No. 3
1998	Nico Israel, Review, "Laura Letinsky: Guy McIntyre Gallery", Artforum, Summer
	Elizabeth Anderson, Review, "Coupling Exhibition", Parachute, Summer
	Grace Glueck, Review of exhibition at Guy McIntyre Gallery, New York Times, January 23
1997	Interview with Ken Rockburn, "Venus Inferred", Canadian Broadcast Company Radio
	Interview with Sandra Abma, "Venus Inferred", The Arts Network, on Canadian Broadcast Company Radio
1994	Review of Intimate Stages at Presentation House, The Vancouver Sun, October 1
1993	Lisa Marks, Review of Intimate Stages at Optica Gallery, Montréal, Backflash Magazine, Summer
1991	Review, "Intimate Stages", Winnipeg Free Press, September 28
1987	Review, "A Multiplicity of Voices", Border Crossings, June

PUBLICATIONS AND CATALOGS - Selected

20	005	Now Again, Gallerie Kusseneers, Antwerp, Belgium
		Art and Photography, Susan Bright editor, Thames and Hudson, London
		Invented Melodrama in Contemporary Photography, UIMA and The Neuberge Museum of Art
		Still-Life, Iris Publications, Stoke-on-Trent, UK
2	004	Hardly More Than Ever, The Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL
		Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images, Terry Barrett, McGraw-Hill Higher Education
		Chicago Photographs: From the LaSalle Bank Photography Collection, LaSalle Bank
		Charlotte Cotton, Contemporary Art Photography, London: Thames and Hudson
20	003	Jamie Horowitz and Pauletter Singley, Ed.s, Eating Architecture, Cambridge MA: MIT Press

2002	Feminine Persuasions, Bloomington, Indiana: Phaidon Press Blink: 100 Contemporary Photographs, London: Phaidon Press
2002	Lauren Berlant, essay and interview in Venus Inferred, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, (Monograph)
2000	Lauren Berland, Ed., Intimacy, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
1999	Steven Diamond, Ed.m Voyageur, New York: Harper Collins Border Crossings, November
1997	Lynne Tilman, essay in exhibition brochure for Coupling, Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Photography
	Surface: Contemporary Photographic Practice, London: Booth Clibborn Publishers
1996	Robert Hirsch, Ed., Exploring Color Photography, 3rd Edition, Madision, WI: Brown and Benchmark Publishers
1995	The Body Photographic, Exhibition Catalogue, New Orleans: The Contemporary Art Center
	Bill Arning and Gregory Crewdson, essays in Verisimilitudes and the Utility of Doubt, New York: White Columns
1994	Parallelogramme, Vol. 20, No. 2
	Parallelogramme, Vol. 19, No. 2
1989	"The World Going On Without Us", Border Crossings, January
1987	A Multiplicity of Voices, Exhibition Catalogue, Winnipeg, MB: Plug In Art Gallery
	Contemporary Art in Manitoba, Exhibition Catalogue, Winnipeg, MB: Winnipeg Art Gallery