

## NEW PHOTOGRAPHY

### ATLANTA

For *New Photography*, his first exhibition at the High Museum of Art [July 15—October 1, 2006], photography curator Julian Cox selected work by New York artists Taryn Simon and Sze Tsung Leong and Atlanta artists Ruth Dusseault and Angela West. These four photographers work with large format cameras to provide notably individual perspectives. Since the High Museum rarely shows the work of local artists, this exhibition was highly anticipated.

Cox's introduction to *New Photography* is egalitarian: the entrance diplomatically juxtaposes one image by each artist. From there, the exhibition proceeds much differently. Five large rooms are dedicated to the work of Simon and Leong. This allows viewers to expand their knowledge of the New York artists' practices. By contrast, Dusseault's and West's contributions are squeezed into the last two small salons.

In important ways, this presentation highlights the vast discrepancy between New York and Atlanta artists in terms of resources and exposure. Conversely, the layout simply emphasizes the fact that Simon's *Nonfiction* photographs hold more than enough weight for a solo exhibition. So much so, in fact, that the *Innocents* series fills an entire room with striking portraits of the falsely accused, a wall-projected video documentary, and copies of her namesake published book. Simon's vast and captivating body of work completely eclipses all the others. Nevertheless, each artist's work is thoughtfully presented, and the exhibition works through two types of movement—from global to culturally specific; from communal to personal.

Simon, a *New York Times* photographer, travels the world on assignment. She finds opportunities to reify cultural and political leaders along with victims of legal systems and natural disasters. Removed from their original contexts, the photographs encourage an unprejudiced view of each subject. Current events make this richly colored work come alive. Fidel Castro's recent grave illness brings poignancy to *Interior of Fidel Castro's Palace of the Revolution, Havana, Cuba, 2003*. Images of tsunami victims from 2005 are haunted by the specter of the tragic inundation of New Orleans one year ago. And it's almost certain that she has immortalized people and places that no longer exist, in Gaza and Lebanon.

Leong's repetitive, hazy Chinese city views follow. The remote perspective of these grand aerial views invokes a respectful outsider. Massive pollution partially obscures the topographical change that is their subject. Evoking classic landscape painting, these ghostly photographs might refer to an afterlife where contemporary Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai are the loci of death and rebirth, of government demolitions and unchecked capitalist growth.

There are rare moments of empathy in Sze's photos. Cave dwellings have been spared in Shan Province while



dwindling concern for the ephemeral human presence pictured in Tiananmen Square.

Ruth Dusseault's images document urban renewal as it effaces one particular site: the one-hundred-year-old Atlantic Steel Industries in Atlanta. The photographs' frontal view and human scale of certain photographs in the series communicate her subject's relation to the body, and by extension, to community. This dimension of the work would have resounded more clearly had the exhibition featured more than three of these large-scale compositions. A fabricated sense of history is furthered by the commercial and residential district's artificial "New England town" design. Dusseault's images also invoke the photographic tradition of sculptural documentation. The minimalist cobalt blue and ice gray of the new Ikea store's parking lot are unsettlingly beautiful. The terrain carved out to make way for construction also alludes to earthworks. This dimension of the work would have resounded more clearly had the exhibition featured more of these large-scale compositions.

After Dusseault's considered exposé, Angela West's verdant Southern landscape seems otherworldly. Her nostalgic work slips quietly into a small room at the exhibition's edge. Set in a dark-walled space, eleven black-framed photographs from her *Back Home* series lead into a brightly lit museum gift shop. Though a scant representation of her work, this selection is a convincing postscript to the exhibition: nature still counters culture. The dense jungle surrounding Dahlonega, Georgia, is illuminated from within. Here, a dense growth of bright trees hovers inside a mass of darker foliage. Elsewhere, woods embrace a mailbox. *Portrait of Snowball Bush*

temples in Beijing have not. A small, defiant dwelling survives in a flattened neighborhood. A migrant worker's slipper claims the ledge of a condemned building. Otherwise, the camera rests coolly on remote patches of artificial blue, green, and red in a gray architectural sea. In *Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 2002*, the pall cast over the Forbidden City in the background seems to signify a

(from *My 33rd Spring*), 2003, is more evidence of the artist's lush iconography. While some of West's images describe familial characters, the best of these few works are uninhabited idylls because, in that green place beneath the drooping yellow flowers, we can imagine ourselves.

—Cathy Byrd

ABOVE: Taryn Simon, *Dima Brais, 2 years old, Southern Gaza, 2005*, chromogenic development print, 40 x 60 inches (courtesy of the artist and Gagosiart)