

Heike Liss

Curated by Lyn Hejinian

March 16 – April 22, 2006

(Opening Reception: Thursday, March 16, 6-8pm)

“Life requires space, of course, but even more fundamental to it is time; time is the most vital, the most lively, of the dimensions requisite for living. Heike Liss’ works, in portraying time, depict life.”

—Lyn Hejinian

Working in photography and video over the last few years, German-born artist Heike Liss finds meaning in the commonplace, and imbues the recurring events of day-to-day life, and its often banal rituals that signify the passage of time with poetic resonance. Part diarist and part instinctual recorder, she seeks out the universal aspects of human experience in varied socio-cultural and personal situations and expressions.

In *home/away* (2002-2005), Liss’ current series of thirty color photographs on view question the extent individuals define themselves in relation to “home” and explores what that means in a world where so many people live transplanted lives. The series is comprised of details of hotel rooms taken over the last four years during the artist’s travels back and forth between California and Europe. According to the artist, “these images, as portraits, speak of a sense of a lack of belonging: in a place, in a time, in the world.”

The impetus for *home/away* came during a visit with artist friends, who were renting a hotel from the 1950’s and using it as a work/live space in Switzerland. Except for the presence of some art supplies and personal clutter, the rooms, kitchen, and salons had remained unaltered. Struck by an inability to distinguish the setting as being either home or hotel, Liss began to look at hotels in a different way and started “collecting” details of hotel rooms, which evolved into the current series on view.

Liss engages the viewer to identify with the experience of entering a hotel room for the first time by infusing these mundane scenarios with sumptuous tonality. Her uncontrived yet formally composed photographs all share a painterly concern with texture, color, and form. In order to convey a neutral space, which anyone can inhabit, Liss avoids introducing any feelings of nostalgia into her photographs – a quality which already exists in many of the chosen hotels rooms – by working mostly in natural daylight, and deliberately printing in cooler tones. At times, Liss may train her camera upon an unoccupied

foreground, focusing on the play of light and shadow on the bare walls and floors. If someone has arrived before her, she may choose to focus instead on the traces of occupation left within the room. In *home/away* #30 (2002-2005), use of shallow depth of field, soft backlit lighting, and color serve as catalysts for amplifying the presence of a lone red sport shirt hanging from a window latch. Her heightened sense of tactility enables the viewer to feel the materiality and substance of the object portrayed, and though the occupants are clearly absent, this single possession indicates a sense of who they may be.



Heike Liss, *home/away* #30 (2002-05)
C-print, 13” x 30”.

Heike Liss, *home/away* #37(2002-05)
C-print, 13" x 30".



Liss always carries with her a reminder of home when she travels, and is fascinated by the incongruous ways proprietors may try to convey a sense of home in places occupied by transients. In *home/away* #34 and #37, a toy-like, piece of folk art used as a bathroom adornment or the random arrangement of a magazine with a glass bowl of potpourri placed atop a doily suggest something beyond *objets trouvés* as portrait subjects.

Working with a 35mm camera and using only short lenses enables the artist to physically engage her subject, and create intimacy with clear boundaries determined by range. Shooting at close proximity also mirrors Liss' own physical perception of the world. The artist's lack of depth perception and nearsightedness mean that details and textures carry tremendous meaning, and her crystalline treatment of surfaces texture achieves the hypnotic effect of placing the viewer in the space both physically and psychologically. By transforming ordinary and seemingly self-explanatory objects to a higher plane, she suggests that a greater narrative exists within the intent of those who placed them, and in the extent of how they are viewed by others. The implied and implicit beauty of her compositions prompts a greater consciousness of visual sensations and a deeper consideration of what looking really means.

The exhibition will also include *surface & time* (since 2004), a video work in progress comprising a series of 3-10 minute videos of images and sounds of everyday life, in foreign places so familiar and quotidian as to be often overlooked. Scenes include men working at a construction site, a cityscape at night, both taken from inside a hotel window, and a station stop taken from a train passenger window, among others.



Heike Liss, *surface & time* #4 (since 2004)
Video still.

Each video piece is conceived as a quasi-still photographic image, which expands by means of minimal motion and sound. Videos were shot from a single perspective, without camera movement, and left unedited except for starting and stopping points. Their formal structure goes so far as to emphasize a picture plane (ie. window, bed seen from above, a building's façade), thus acknowledging the video image as a surface itself. Images appear quite still at first glance, but there is actually a significant amount of activity taking place upon closer inspection. Though initially accompanied by ambient sound, Liss invited musician and composer Fred Frith to add a musical soundtrack in order to heighten a perception of dramatic development. She then layered composed soundtracks with ambient sound, thus creating layers of different depth and volume, while blurring the distinction between what is intentional and accidental.

Never entirely abstract, the photographs and videos on view are made visually ambiguous to spur profound examination of the particular ways we come to expect images to affect us. When placed together, Liss' visual incidents convey a sense of the passage of time, while simultaneously suggesting and resisting ideas about narrative progression.

The color printing for this exhibition was provided in part by Light Waves Photographic, Inc., San Francisco, CA.

RELATED PUBLIC PROGRAM: Friday, March 17, 2005, 7:00pm to 8:30pm.

Collaborative event and poetry reading: Exhibition curator Lyn Hejinian will read *Silence (Childhood)* which will be accompanied by projected images of work by Heike Liss. Lytle Shaw will then read from a selection of his poems.

(Cont.)

Lyn Hejinian is a poet, essayist, and translator. Her most recent books include *A Border Comedy* (Granary Books, 2001), *Slowly* and *The Beginner* (both published by Tuumba Press, 2002), *My Life in the Nineties* (Shark Books, 2003), and *The Fatalist* (Omnidawn, 2003). Since 1976, Hejinian has been the editor of Tuumba Press and from 1981 to 1999 she was the co-editor (with Barrett Watten) of *Poetics Journal*.

She is currently the co-director (with Travis Ortiz) of *Atelos*, a literary project commissioning and publishing cross-genre work by poets. In 2000, Hejinian was elected a Fellow of the Academy of American Poets. She teaches in the English Department at the University of California, Berkeley.

Lytle Shaw is a poet whose books include *A Side of Closure*, *Principles of the Emeryville Shellmound* and *Cable Factory 20*. He is author of a critical work on Frank O'Hara and has published essays and reviews recently in *Qui Parle*, *Documents*, *Time Out New York*, and *Cabinet*. He co-edits *Shark*, a journal of poetics and art writing with Emilie Clark.

ARTIST'S BIO:

Heike Liss was born in Düsseldorf, Germany. She studied Ethnology and Social Anthropology at the University of Tübingen. In 2002, she received her Master of Fine Arts from Mills College, Oakland, California. Her work has been shown in Europe and Canada, as well as in North and South America. She is the recipient of a 2001 Jack and Gertrude Murphy Fine Arts Fellowship (San Francisco), and a 2002 Fellowship at The Photography Institute (New York City). She works in video, photography, site-specific installation and public intervention projects. Liss also recently curated the video-screening program *Cross Currents* for the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg, France. This is her first solo exhibition in New York. The artist lives in California and Germany with her husband, composer Fred Frith, and their two children.

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CUE Art Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, provides educational and professional development programs in the visual arts. These include student internships, stipends, exhibitions, public lectures, and an in-gallery studio program, all of which draw from the talents and experience of the diverse community of artists, art critics, and teachers that the Foundation brings together.

CUE's exhibition season gives unknown or under-recognized artists public and professional exposure comparable to that offered by neighboring commercial galleries, without the usual financial restraints. The Advisory Council, an honorary group of artists and leading figures from the arts education, applied arts, art history, and literary communities, has the responsibility of selecting exhibition curators. The curators, in turn, nominate artists to exhibit at CUE, and continue to play a role throughout the exhibition process. Both the Advisory Council and the exhibition curators actively participate in the public lectures and educational programs.

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For additional information, please contact Kara Smith, Programs Assistant, CUE Art Foundation, 212 206-3583, or email kara.smith@cueartfoundation.org. Gallery hours: Tues. – Sat., 10am – 6pm.