

KIMBERLY GREMILLION

Double Vision



W O M E N & T H E I R W O R K

OCTOBER 3 - NOVEMBER 7, 1998
AUSTIN, TEXAS

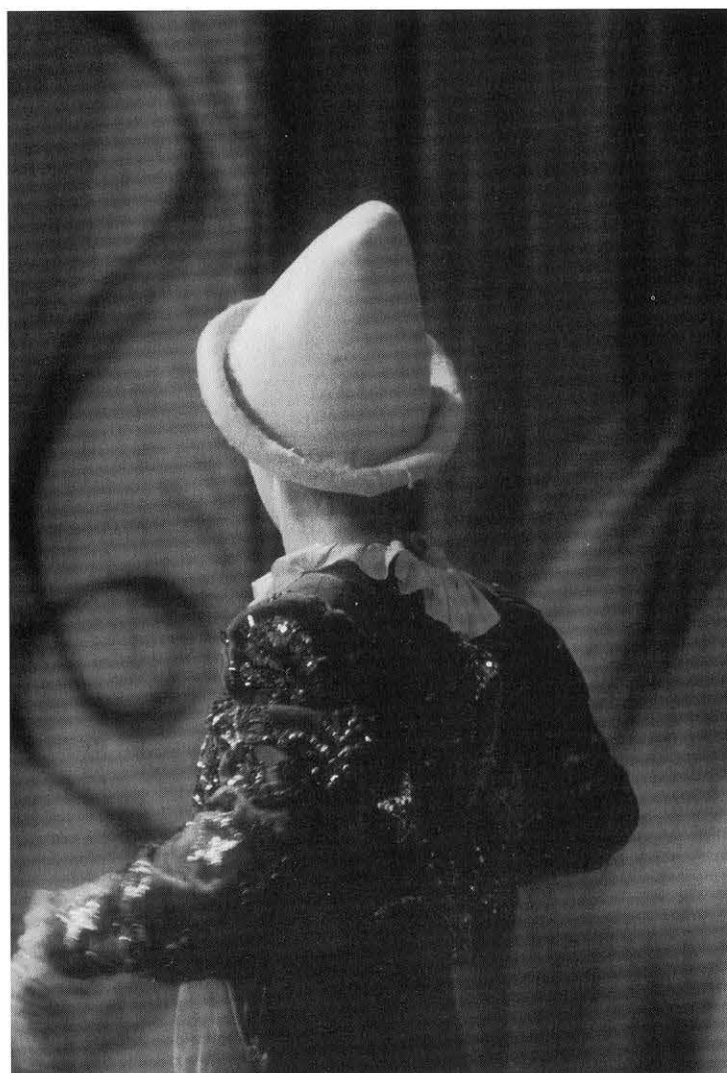
TO DREAM THE MYTH FORWARD

In the dim light, we see a half-length view of a circus performer (*Clown #7*), wearing a light-colored, cone-shaped hat and a highly ornamented tunic decorated with shimmering stars and swirls. The androgynous youth moves away from us, arms bent at the elbows, the left arm and hand caught in blurred motion. The performer pauses before a patterned backdrop on which a sensuous, curvilinear shape unravels on the left. This exploding spiral is a symbol of growth and expansion, of breathing and the creative breath of life, and of the dance of healing and incantation. As a creative force, spirals are associated with spinning and weaving of the web of life.

Although a clown is the nominal subject of Gremillion's photograph, the symbolism refers to the classic hero. The youth is about to undertake a heroic journey in search of knowledge and self-realization. Gremillion's photograph updates traditional hero symbolism because her androgynous hero is not a man in costume but a woman. The figure is momentarily poised in thoughtful reflection. Her cone-shape hat is an emblem of good fortune, and fruitful, creative production. Coupled with the geometric shapes, the work takes on new meaning. The hero is the artist who, as storyteller, embarks on a journey of self-realization. The work is a metaphorical self-portrait of the artist, and is an important signature piece among the series.

The concepts of archetypes and the collective unconscious of Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung are relevant to Gremillion's *Circus Series*. Gremillion works intuitively to create powerful and emotive images that resonate with symbolic meaning. Her use of archetypes—universal symbols that are not bound by a specific culture, time or space—allow us to respond with deep emotional recognition.

In *Shadow #25*, an intricately constructed web is seen from below. Symbolizing a



Clown #7, Silver Gelatin Print, 18"h x 12"w

creation myth, her narrative describes an original ordering of the universe. Creation myths use symbolic narrative to explain beginnings and make sense out of the chaos of life. The spider woman is a weaver of destiny who spins the thread of life from her own substance. The mythic web she spins also functions as a veil of illusion. The power of Gremillion's photographs turn on this duality between reality and illusion; this concept has been critical to photographic discourse since its inception. In this mysterious image, we see both the performer and her cast shadow. As a weaver of tales, the spider woman often has a trickster aspect due to her ability to weave a clever, beautiful, intricate, and dangerous

web. The spider is in creative control; the shadowy figure in its twisted contortion, is caught in the web. Both figures represent aspects of the artist's personality in her journey toward self-realization.

The shadow is an important Jungian archetype, described as both the whole unconscious and the un-lived part of the personality. Made up of both personal and collective elements, shadows are a compelling symbol for the unconscious in that they appear to have substance, yet they remain elusive and illusive. Representing the collective dis-owned, devalued, or unrecognized parts of the self, shadows come to symbolize events in an individual's personal history as well as the values and ideals of the culture at

large, for societal values often determine what parts of the self need to be hidden or disowned.

When the public and shadow elements of the self are combined, an individual becomes a total, fully actualized person. In Gremillion's photograph, we see both the lived and unlived aspects of the spider's personality going through the process of recognition and ultimate reintegration.

Jung spoke of the obligation of each generation "to dream the myth forward" by filling the archetypal structure with content relevant to our lives. Gremillion dreams the myth forward by giving modern form to the archetypes that reflect our contemporary times. The vivid use of symbols in her constructed narratives tie her work to the realm of dreams, fairy tales and folklore. Her work is like a waking dream, that creative space between consciousness and unconsciousness, between sleeping and waking.

As a storyteller, Gremillion's use of shadows in the *Circus Series* reminds us of a child's early interest in shadow play. Children are fascinated when they discover their own shadows, and many adults have vivid memories of their own early shadow experiments. Playing with shadows is often the first inkling we have that shadows have a connection to ourselves. Children's imaginations give them free rein to create and project characters of both good and evil. To recreate this childlike sensibility, Gremillion often simplifies her compositions by reducing the number of pictorial elements. The photographs are sometimes taken from a low vantage point so that figures float above her as they would if she were a child.

Shadow #3, (on the cover), is the cast shadow of a Ringmaster. On another level, it is a dual character reminiscent of a child's shadow play or nightmare. As an ominous emblem of authority, this threatening male silhouette looms large in the projected light. In psychology, black often refers to the nocturnal, the subterranean; that which cannot be consciously known. White suggests daylight, clarity, and order. This doorway is also symbolic of an entryway to the unknown. Is this figure a personal

threat to us, or is he a threshold guardian—one who prevents us from experiencing the realm of the unknown before we are sufficiently prepared to enter? The image is foreboding, yet ambiguous in its meaning.

Symbols of transformation are found in Gremillion's photographs. *Tiger #1* shows the animal leaping through a hoop of fire. The tiger, an emblem of bodily strength (and an ambiguous symbol of both sun and moon, creator and destroyer) passes through the circle, the symbol of the self and the round of existence. The hoop is on fire, another dual symbol of the divine and demonic, the creative and destructive. Passing through the circle of fire denotes a rite or passage and personal transformation.

In this exhibition, **Double Vision**, Gremillion presents work from both the *Circus Series* and the *Ballroom Series*. The two bodies of work are united by the notion of spectacle, a public presentation that is strange and remarkable to behold. Because the performers are in a public arena, the role of the viewer as witness is especially important to the work. The circus performers entertain and impress us through skill, daring and humor. The ballroom dancers work together as couples to entertain and delight us.

Gremillion uses these diverse subjects—the circus and ballroom dancing—to create her own interpretations, to show us what we cannot see. Her circus prints are dark, both visually and emotionally; the ballroom images are lighter in tone, yet still edgy and provocative.

The *Ballroom Series* isolates moments in time amid the dynamism and primal energy of the dance. The series is about glamour, sexuality, and illusion and our mysterious fascination with this spectacle in her photographs. The couples almost bewitch us with their sophisticated charm and allure. In this highly ritualized activity, the regimented costumes (tuxedos for men; fluffy, flashy dresses for women) denote their embrace of standard male/female roles and expectations. Through their synchronized movements, they interpret the music while strictly adhering to traditional dance

steps. As an enduring symbol of patriarchy, the man leads his partner in the dance.

The dancers undergo a personal transformation from their everyday personas when they enact the roles of lovers and step onto the dance floor. When the couple comes together in the dance, they are also visually transformed in the photographs. The dancers create an illusion of romance and gaiety in this most serious competition for points and prizes.

Photographing the dancers allows Gremillion to create relationships between men and women that are enigmatic and emotive. She expertly captures the sensuality of ballroom dances and the sexuality of Latin dances. Stopping the movement of the dance, (*Ballroom #15*), the photographer creates the intentional blur of a couple after the woman has completed a turn. Although we are aware of the man's dark trousers and shiny shoes, we focus instead on the woman's high heels, her fluttery skirt and sequined bodice. In *Ballroom #2*, Gremillion isolates a moment in which the distortion of the ceiling and floor borders on the surreal. Seen in mid-throw, the fishnet-stockinged legs of the woman point to the elaborate hotel chandelier above. It is only the small face of a spectator in the lower left hand corner gives that gives the viewer a point of reference and a sense of equilibrium. At first glance, we are disoriented. Compositionally, the inverted pyramid makes the most visual sense after we first turn it upside down. Looking again, we realize that the artist is a visual trickster who has isolated a fragment of time we have never seen before.

Out of the creative struggle between image and idea, Kimberly Gremillion has developed a distinctive and authentic voice. The work signifies the archetypal and speaks about universal feelings and experiences. She reminds us that things are not as they seem, and reality is constantly obscured by illusion.

Jean Caslin
Executive Director/Curator
Houston Center for Photography

KIMBERLY GREMILLION

Born in Chicago, Illinois
Lives in Houston, Texas

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1999 *Circus Shadows*, Blue Sky Gallery, Portland, Or.
Circus, Fotografie Forum Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany
Circus, Galerie Mistral, Montreal, Canada
- 1998 *Double Vision*, Women & Their Work, Austin, Tx.
Shadows, Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, Tx.
Recent Photographs, Wyndy Morehead Fine Art, New Orleans, La.
Shadow Play, FotoFest '98, Parkerson Gallery, Houston, Tx.
Dark Edges, FotoFest '98, Wortham Center, Houston, Tx.
- 1997 *Hansel and Gretel* and *Verdi's MacBeth*, Houston Grand Opera, Houston, Tx.
The Greeks, The Alley Theatre, Houston, Tx.
Salome, Houston Grand Opera, Houston, Tx.
AIDS Foundation Gala, Jags, Houston, Tx.
1996 *A Christmas Carol*, The Alley Theatre, Houston, Tx.
Florencia, Houston Grand Opera, Houston, Tx.
Grand Kabuki Theatre of Japan, Society for the Performing Arts, Houston, Tx.
Circus Flora, Children's Museum, Houston, Tx.
Streetcar, The Alley Theatre, Houston, Tx.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1998 *Back Stage*, Serge Sorokko Gallery, New York, N.Y.
Circus, Paul Kopeikin Gallery, Los Angeles, Ca.
Dada Moon, Austin Visual Arts Association, Austin, Tx.
1998 Juried Members' Exhibition, Houston Center for Photography, Houston, Tx.
Austin 1998, R. Peeples Jr. Gallery, Austin, Tx.
The Print Center, 72nd Annual Competition, Philadelphia, Pa.
- 1997 *Annual Governor's Exhibition*, Texas Photographic Society, San Antonio, Tx.
Realities, Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York, N.Y.
8th National Exhibition, Viridian Artists, New York, N.Y.
12th Annual Exhibition, Texas Photographic Society, San Antonio, Tx.
PaperWorks '97, The Ridgefield Guild, Greenwich, Ct.
Arts in Trance, Rice University, Houston, Tx.

PUBLICATIONS

- 1999 *Aperture*, "Explorations, Nine Portfolios"
- 1998 *Photography Quarterly*, Center for Photography at Woodstock, Woodstock, N.Y., September
The New Orleans Art Review, A Journal of Criticism, New Orleans, La., May



Shadow #25, Silver Gelatin Print, 18"h x 12"w

- The Times Picayune*, Lagniappe, New Orleans, La., May 22, 1998
The Best of New Orleans, *Inside Art*, New Orleans, La., May
The Houston Chronicle, *This Week*, Houston, Tx., February 28, 1998
1997 *FotoMundo*, *Tango*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, December
Opera Cues, Houston Grand Opera, Houston, Tx., Fall
photo metro, San Francisco, Ca., July
Contact Sheet, Texas Photographic Society, San Antonio, Tx., February

AWARDS AND HONORS

- 1997 *The Print Center*, 72nd Annual Competition, Philadelphia, Pa.
The Ernst Haas International Print Competition, Second Place, The Maine Photographic Workshops, Rockport, Ma.
PaperWorks '97, Award of Merit, The Ridgefield Guild, Greenwich, Ct.

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

- Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Tx.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, Ca.
The Disney Corporation, Kissimmee, Fl.
W.M. Hunt, Dancing Bear, New York, N.Y.
Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin, Tx.
British Airways, Houston, Tx.
Alley Theatre, Houston, Tx.
Aerial Communications, Houston, Tx.
Continental Airlines, President's Club, Newark, N.J.
The Hertzberg Museum, San Antonio, Tx.
Camden Property, Houston, Tx.
Hermann Hospital Collection, Houston, Tx.
Texas Heart Institute, Houston, Tx.
Brigham Young University, Provo, Ut.
Shook, Hardy & Bacon, Houston, Tx.

GALLERY REPRESENTATION

- Paul Kopeikin Gallery, Los Angeles, Ca.
Lallak & Tom Gallery, Chicago, Il.
Ricco Maresca Gallery, New York, N.Y.
Stephen L. Clark Gallery, Austin, Tx.



Cover Image: *Shadow #3*, Silver Gelatin Print, 18"h x 12"w

Inside Flap: *Ballroom #2*, Silver Gelatin Print, 18"h x 12"w

Back Image: *Ballroom #15*, Silver Gelatin Print, 12"h x 18"w



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Now celebrating its 20th anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1555 artists in 182 visual art exhibitions, 81 music, dance, and theater events, 19 literary readings, 12 film festivals, and 118 workshops, in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, ArtForum and National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Women & Their Work reaches over 5,000 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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