

ANN PIZER

FOLLY



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

AUGUST 3 - SEPTEMBER 9, 2000

AUSTIN, TEXAS

Folly

You wouldn't think the Topiary Gardener and the Photographer would have that much in common. Each possesses an acute eye, attuned to fine nuances of form and subtle changes of light and shadow. Both manipulate the passage of time—one with muffled shutter clicks that capture and record an instant, the other with rhythmic clicks of cutting shears whose blades manage slow growth cycles. Observe the garden and the darkroom: even their working methods seem parallel. The Topiary Gardener trims and shapes by keeping the desired form in mind and clipping away everything else. Yew shrubs—the living plants that are used for topiary—can take up to fifteen years to grow to full dimension, so to fill out a line, to define a snout or an ear, the Gardener cuts and waits, cuts and waits. The Photographer's task is more immediate: she looks through the viewfinder and shoots the picture out in "the field." Yet the photograph is truly defined in the darkroom, where the Photographer sees what actually appears in the printed image and then crops and edits out the extraneous visual information. Throughout the process, both the Topiary Gardener and the Photographer work for an audience; theirs is a personal, often solitary quest to produce an unforgettable image, the launching point for memories, associations and narratives that can shift according to vantage point. At the end, the photography—like an unexpectedly sculpted shrub—embodies both the real and the artful and acts as an enticement, an offering, an object of wonder.

Ann Pizer's newest body of work stems from her long-time interest in topiary, a fascination that began with a few childhood years in England and a series of magical children's books—the "Green Knowe"



Sapling, 2000. C print, 19" x 23"

series—by British author Lucy Boston. On a recent visit to England, she set out to explore some of Britain's extraordinary gardens, with a special interest in the carved yews whose whimsy she hoped to capture on film. She calls this new series of images "Folly."

A folly is by its very nature lighthearted but contradictory: an act of foolishness, undertaken without good sense, an irrational plan or idea. Pizer's lush photographic images of ornamental English gardens suggest the folly of planned beauty. Through small details and carefully chosen perspectives, the pictures emphasize the accumulated human effort necessary to maintain these fictions, these specialized environments whose illusions of untended natural grace belie their artifice and their mystery. Saturated with a rainbow of color from carefully cultivated flowers,

populated by fantastically sculpted topiary, and compulsively ordered by neat, defining rows of hedges, these gardens exemplify nature as a human construction. Serving no practical or natural purpose, they are created solely as an offering for human delight and pleasure.

Pizer's work explores a variety of perspectives on beauty and pleasure. As a student, she photo-transferred female body images onto delicate women's undergarments, creating hybrid sculptural photographs charged with intimacy. Her MFA exhibition featured two powerful installation works that utilized the photographic image: a dreamlike, life-sized image of rumpled sheets floating lightly against the wall, and a wall-full of dozens of fragile butterflies, also photo transfers, ephemeral both in reference and physical representation. Last year she produced a successful series that was exhibited throughout the state—several luscious

pictures of sugary confections, lovely in their pastel colors and smoothly iced decorations. Photographed just seconds after being tossed in the air, the cakes convey the tension of imminent disaster, their seductive flirtation with loss rendering them all the more tantalizing. All of Pizer's works celebrate an unabashed gorgeousness that triggers the imagination and sense of desire. Raised primarily in New Orleans and influenced early on by images of that city's turn-of-the-century brothels by noted photographer E.J. Bellocq, Pizer often presents unexpected juxtapositions of sensual pleasure with fragility and decay. Her works allude to the tainted perfection of beauty as it can be affected by time.

In "Folly," Pizer seems to examine intentionality, for it is in the moments when the intentional and the unintentional merge that her photographs communicate the most provocatively. Dead leaves scattered by the wind across a pristine lawn, the blurred image of a bird in flight above a perfect tropical rooftop garden, a leafless tree masked by the blooms of surrounding foliage: nature intruding upon a controlled environment presented as both tamed and conditionally wild. These mediated living things exude a remarkably stubborn yet humorous presence. The geometric sculptural forms of manicured topiaries and the conical volumes of trees lend themselves to association with minimalist aesthetics. Their solid shapes assert their objectness; firmly anchored and displayed against a blank, white sky, they are unequivocally odd, quirkily imperfect. In her juxtapositions of carefully controlled and carefully disordered areas, Pizer seems to display the backside of nature, rather than the facade, the 'planned' face. She focuses her camera on the places where control is relinquished.

It is appropriate that Pizer's photographs include no representations of people. We never see the gardeners, or any other visitors to the gardens, for that matter. The agents of this garden beauty are invisible, allowing for the uninterrupted illusion of nature, and we in effect become the garden's visitors. Despite the absence of people, there is a distinct human presence in Pizer's images, conveyed not only through the carefully trimmed lawns and sculpted topiary, but by the almost anthropomorphic characteristics of the trees and bushes. We can project conversations between flowers and familial relationships among trees. Through Pizer's lens we become witnesses to another world—exotic, but with an immediate relationship to our own.

Rather than producing a straightforward celebration of nature's bounties, as envisioned by the Gardener, Pizer the Photographer subtly illustrates the fluidity and tension between nature and the resulting effects of human intervention. A photography project such as "Folly" could be read as a kind of metaphor for the photographic process itself. At the heart of this work is the question, "What is 'natural'?" The photograph, serving as a constructed space, echoes the English garden, a constructed environment. By revealing the quirks, the unintentional blurs of movement and unplanned details, these photographs call attention to the layers of creation embedded in their image of "reality."

Like Thomas Struth's or Candida Hofer's snapshot-like photos of building interiors, Pizer's new images seem candid and at first glance the care with which they have been composed, edited, sized and printed is not apparent. Yet they subtly capture what is both unique and unexceptional about a specific place. Her work in this

series is perhaps more comfortably aligned with the photographs of renowned American artist William Eggleston in their primacy of color and detail. Grounded in the commonplace, Eggleston creates images of everyday people and their surroundings in moments seemingly too real to be real. His ability to present an exhaustion of details capable of transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary resonates with Pizer's emphasis on those aspects which subvert, as well as those which enhance, the beauty of the formal English garden.

Beauty has once again become a viable subject for contemporary artistic exploration, and our evolving relationship with nature serves as its primary focal point. Whether through the flowing curtains of artificial flowers created by Jim Hodges, or Yoshihiro Suda's intricately carved and stunningly realistic faux foliage, young artists draw our attention to the complexity and artifice of nature by seducing us through beauty. The densely articulated loveliness of Pizer's images is qualified by our realization of both the Photographer's and the Topiary Gardener's interventions. For Pizer, the magic in her personal experience of topiary is the recognition that these garden follies are "all planned to the last detail—all planned for me." Through this new series of recent photographs, the pleasure of that mystery and wonder is offered, in turn, to us.

Stephanie Hanor,
Assistant Curator of American & Contemporary Art,
Annette DiMeo Carlozzi,
Curator of American & Contemporary Art,
Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art,
The University of Texas at Austin, 2000.



Flowering Shrubs, 2000. C Print, 19" x 23"

ANN PIZER

Born New Orleans, Louisiana
Resides in Austin, Texas

EDUCATION

- 1999 M.F.A. in Studio Art with Concentration
in Photography
The University of Texas at Austin
- 1994 Post Baccalaureate course work
in Studio Art
- 1994 Tulane University, New Orleans, LA
- 1993 B.A. Art History and Archaeology
Tufts University, Medford, MA

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 1998 Marshall Wells Scholarship,
University of Texas at Austin

- 1997 M.K.Hage Scholarship in Studio Art,
University of Texas at Austin
- 1996 University of Texas Recruitment Fellowship

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2000 *Folly, Women & Their Work Gallery*,
Austin, TX
- 1998 *Bedroom Suite*, Site specific installation,
Austin, TX

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2000 *Click Chicks*, Arlington Museum of Art,
Arlington, TX
- 1999 *Vision in Light*, 1/4 Hora Project Space,
Elgin, TX
- PhotoAustin: Inaugural Exhibition*
Flatbed Galleries, Austin, Texas

61st Annual Faculty Exhibition
Blanton Museum of Art,
University of Texas at Austin, TX

Four Walls Three Years
Blanton Museum of Art,
University of Texas at Austin, TX

True Stories, Arlington Museum of Art,
Arlington, TX

1998 *Text Next*, Gallery Lombardi, Austin, TX

1997 *Luminous Code*, Texas Fine Arts
Association, Austin, TX Touring Show,
Juror: Jennifer Blessing, Associate Curator.
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,
New York, NY

1995 *Louisiana Open*, Contemporary Arts
Center, New Orleans, LA
Juror: John Yau



This Panel: *Roof Garden*, 2000. C print, 19" x 23"
Cover Panel: *Topiary Garden*, 2000. C print, 19" x 23"
Back Panel: *Flowering Shrubs*, 2000. C print, 19" x 23"



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Now celebrating its 22nd 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 1594 artists in 196 visual art exhibitions, 98 music, dance, and theater events, 19 literary readings, 12 film festivals, and 153 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.



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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