

## Two Shows in Town.

Looking through a camera, a photographer finds worlds that can exist independently from their surrounding. Using the applied boundaries of the camera, unique places can be found and captured on film. These places lose their physical existence and are reincarnated photographically as somewhere else. And by nature of collection and association along with shooting with a similar style or consistent intention, every view transforms with a reinterpretation of structures, contexts and composition into a new surrounding. The photographer brings to life a new world created specifically by them. The photographs become elaborate sets that can be arranged and juxtaposed to create a theater of meaning that refers back to reality and how we perceive reality.

By working in this way, accumulated images form landscapes that now exist only in the photographs. Lost are their clumsy physical realities even if they were taken from the window of a speeding car or from an air conditioned hotel room high above a nightly screaming city. The views, the impressions, are stolen away and

reconstructed for another purpose. They are visual chapters to a story of the photographer's own making.

This often happens in the work of photographers and in the work of those who wish to document events or situations for further analysis. They visually collect their feelings and place them in an order that intensifies a meaning or an insight. Isn't this the result of any creation whether physical or imagined? Do we not assemble our own worlds where we can question things with an overview. We reach into a pallet of images and place them into a context where we find a thread or a purpose that links them together. Photographer Sanne Peper has worked a great deal in taking images within the theatrical world. Inside these theaters, she has found readymade reinterpretations, or representations of outside places that she interprets further. In theater, the confines of the stage force the set-designer to compose worlds using simplified or highly representational devices that signal the viewer towards places that may or may not be recognizable.

When photographing theatrical environments, a certain degree of translation has already taken place. The camera adds another level. Peper is aware of this.

To match the inside world and the outside world into one coherent piece, Peper takes her camera out of the theater to look at the other readymade set-designs that exist on a broader scale and appear in the lens of her camera. Thus, she turns the real world into her own theater finding elements for backdrops, screens, impressions and experiences to make up a controllable place. In working this way, Peper wishes to distantly touch on a theme she sees around her. It's the disintegration she feels is happening to the city and to society as a whole. She seeks to discover dystopia.

Discovering dystopia gives Peper's work an ironic edge. Usually, in an effort to create (or re-create) a society, we are often only interested in utopia. How does one create a dystopia then?

'All Dressed Up — No Place to Go' is Peper's answer. Using film to let scenes and props burn into the eye, we see a haunting series of scenic screens that launch us into an eerie sensation of doom. We find symbols, scraps, and omens. Holy crosses sear from the darkness pinned to the skin of a skyscraper. Edifices take on personas becoming actors in the drama. A crowded hillside is populated by decrepit dwellings. Two large bushes huddle together like apocalyptic monsters. Peper holds us confined and curious adrift in her play.

The images themselves, technically serve their purpose. They feel like gothic style sets modernized for Peper's theme. They are more current settings reminiscent of film noir or early cinema. In many ways, the forms, the lighting, the personification of figures is an update of Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919). The film itself was one of the first combinations of theater and live action. The walls of these worlds are similar because they both are literally falling down upon us cementing the idea of 'the end' with buildings and traces. Peper's camera behaves much like the chorus in a Greek tragedy.

And a tragedy is what Sanne has in mind. In 'All Dressed Up — No Place to Go', she has the intention to photographically journey through the story of Euripides's 'Medea'. The tragic story is also a fall into dystopia. Having aided Jason in securing his quest, Medea, the daughter of a king, accompanies Jason back to his homeland. But after bearing Jason's children, Medea is abandoned. Jason has decided he must marry Glauce, daughter of Creon the ruler of Corinth. Scorned and vengeful, Medea does the unthinkable. She murders her children in revenge. The play sums up the loss of hope, the hope that one should find Utopia. After all, the story in *The Medea* was to be the happily ever after that should have followed Jason's and Medea's success and their life together. This was not to be.

*'In vain, my children, have I brought you up,  
Borne all the cares and pangs of motherhood,  
And the sharp pains of childbirth undergone.  
In you, alas, was treasured many a hope  
Of loving sustentation in my age,  
Of tender laying out when I was dead,  
Such as all men might envy.  
Those sweet thoughts are mine no more,  
for now bereft of you  
I must wear out a drear and joyless life,  
And you will nevermore your mother see,  
Nor live as ye have done beneath her eye.'*

Nowadays, there appears to be no such thing as a 'happily ever after'. Or there is it a 'crumbling ever after'. With current trends in consideration, Peper has brought two worlds to bear on the current one and found a terrible beauty in the decay. After all, it's what we do to ourselves that ultimately sets in motion our mutual undoing. And that is the overall sensation from Peper's work. We feel helpless and in awe of our own actions. We are helpless. Peper's photographs turn us into fellow witnesses or viewers immersed in the odes and fugues and battles and choruses of a play. We sit trapped in velvet seats, gripping programs, watching everything unfold while sets and characters and gods and villains and heroes appear and disappear on stage frightening and intriguing the hell out of us. And then we walk outside.

— Tyler Whisnand