

Shellburne Thurber: 9 Wellington Street



Shellburne Thurber, 9 Wellington Street: First floor library - Ralph's desk, 2004-2009, Color inkjet print, 20 x 20 inches Edition of 18



Images to the right: Exhibition Views from Shellburne Thurber: 9 Wellington Street at Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA

By Kyle Hoepner

A highlight of my past week was seeing a show newly up at the Barbara Krakow Gallery in Boston, called "Shellburne Thurber: 9 Wellington Street." Thurber is a photographer whose work I've admired for a long time. We ran a story about her last year in New England Home; one look and it will be clear why she would appeal to a New England interiors maven.

One small coup was persuading Thurber to shoot her own self-portrait for our article. She originally threatened to do it with a bag over her head, but eventually relented and only blew out most of her face as a huge highlight.

In the current installation her subject matter has even deeper local roots. "9 Wellington" refers to the long-time South End residence of painter and writer Ralph Horne. The show's presentation is especially fun, with bits and pieces from Horne's library and collections mounted against contrasting color-fields of wallpapers similar or identical to those shown in the photos. Even better, Thurber and the Krakow team have included a few of Horne's own intricate, obsessive, somewhat campy paintings-unfortunately not for sale, though.

The spaces Shellburne Thurber photographs are rarely attractive in the traditionally accepted sense, yet she invests them with the pregnant stillness of a Vermeer. Her vision brings to forlorn or abandoned

rooms the kind of feel - somehow both clinically detached and deeply affectionate - that Diane Arbus brought to the asylum inmates and other "freaks" she photographed. Echoes from or affinities with other photographers also come to mind, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Clarence John Laughlin and Robert Polidori. Photographers such as these (and, for instance, the ravaged, almost leprous wall abstractions Aaron Siskind used to shoot) make me wonder if nearly anything, paid due attention by a suitable gifted observer, isn't capable of attaining its own kind of beauty.

In an art world sometimes overwhelmed by the strident, political, over-fashionable, and "conceptual," it's nice to remember that there remain nonetheless other currents in the flow - voices in the background and in the corners, calling out softly and deservingly for our attention.

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,
10 Newbury St.,
through April 26th.
617-262-4490,
barbarakrakowgallery.com

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