

Photographer Shellburne Thurber finds beautiful glimmers, bursts of light in her family's New Hampshire lake house



Shellburne Thurber's "Late Afternoon Light Across Bed in Parents' Room," 2019.



Shellburne Thurber's "Geof and Steve holding hands' Room," 2019.

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

A home is a portrait of its inhabitants. Shellburne Thurber, one of the renegade Boston School photographers who in the 1970s and '80s specialized in raw, candid portraiture, spent the last 20 years looking deep into houses' empty hallways and neglected corners to find who lives there.

In her latest project, "Phantom Limb," now at Krakow Witkin Gallery, Thurber for the first time depicts a place personal to her: the New Hampshire lake house that has been in her family for years.

Nobody's there, except in titles such as "Parents' Bedroom at Night," and in one black-and-white photo that crops an old portrait of her brothers as boys: "Geof and Steve Holding Hands." We see no faces, but the clasped hands and the formal clothing of another era read like tender ghosts.

Otherwise, in an affecting and engulfing installation, Thurber sets us chasing light as it waffles and glimmers across rugs and down roadways (she takes us outside the house as well, into woods she knew as a child). Arrays of images strike varied rhythms against photo murals that evoke the lakeside setting. An almost musical line rises and falls under a gibbous moon; lamps chime in with light, the oval orb of a humble ceiling fixture in "My Dresser at Night" high in the center.

Light and shadow move through the house like characters. Thurber knows well where sunlight lands here, and where the water throws shimmers, soothing hard edges and anointing doorways ("Back Door with Light Mark") and bedsteads ("Late Afternoon Light Across Bed in Parents' Room").

The sparkling mural "Light Hitting Open Water" is the backdrop to a gorgeous arrangement of photographs — less musical, more like the tips of waves rising and falling. Right in the center of the mural's dazzle, Thurber positions an iridescent starburst, "Blinding Light Coming Through Geof's Window."

We sense our homes almost as phantom limbs. Porches and windows become repositories of feeling. With light and shadow, Thurber animates the energy of memory and familiarity — the energy of her family — that lives in this house and keeps moving through it as if tending the place, even when no one is there.

Shellburne Thurber
Phantom Limb

At: Krakow Witkin Gallery,
10 Newbury St.,
through November 2nd.
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