

ESTHER PULLMAN

Greenhouses

From March 7 – April 20, 2008, The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present a selection of multi-paneled color panoramas from Esther Pullman's decade-long photographic exploration of light-filled greenhouse spaces. Each panel is an individually composed and framed photograph taken with a medium format Fujica camera. Assembled into sequenced panoramas of two to six segments, they provide striking wide-angle views of often overlooked structures where plants are cultivated, including contemporary commercial hoop-houses in England and Massachusetts, 19th century private estate greenhouses, and the historic cacti collection at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris.

Pullman completed her BFA and MFA degrees in graphic design at Yale University in the mid-1960s when the pioneering modernist, Josef Albers, exerted a profound and enduring influence. Another key figure was Walker Evans, whose impact on Pullman unfolded decades later after she turned her attention from graphic design to the light-dependent medium of photography. In particular, she notes her inspiration from Evans's interest in vernacular forms and the evidence of time and place he achieved through subtle compositions of unimposing details. In Pullman's first one-person show in New York, she emerges with an original body of work that pairs the formal underpinnings of her early training with her later experience as an avid gardener and student of garden history.

Pullman's photographs reveal that she is equally engaged by the profusion of lush foliage in a tropical greenhouse, the cool filtered light and modular structure of a 19th century glass house, and the surprising formal beauty of horticulture's utilitarian mechanical systems – vents, fans, pipes and curling hoses. Ultimately though, it is the interaction of nuanced light effects, textural details and slight shifts in perspective that drive Pullman's compositions. Her lens transforms our expected experience of these greenhouses whether empty or out of season, overflowing with abundant blossoms, abandoned or active. Amidst the plethora of sensory information, Pullman distills and guides our perception to the essential: dazzling light, cycles of growth and decay, contrasts between organic and mechanical forms, and textures that reveal the patina of time. These panoramic views capture the ancient art of cultivation and the fragility and transformative potential of the greenhouse environment.

In one five-panel panorama that measures more than 11 feet long, classical urns and balusters stored in a private 19th century American glass house evoke nostalgia for a bygone era, a sensibility reminiscent of Eugene Atget's 19th century photographs of Paris and Versailles. The curved glass roof provides a sense of enclosure, while the doorway at left offers a glimpse of the manicured lawn beyond. This dialogue between interior and exterior realms is a theme Pullman's work often articulates.

Pullman lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and has studied photography at The Art Institute of Boston, Harvard University Extension and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Her works have been shown at galleries and institutions in Massachusetts, Maine and London.

Gallery hours: Monday & Thursday-Saturday 11–5; Sunday 11-4

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