

Broad Street Review

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Arresting photography at Print Center and Gallery 339

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In a world overwhelmed by fleeting images, Philadelphia's two premier venues for photography are presenting excellent shows of artists whose work detains us by revealing what we may otherwise have missed, whether in city neighborhoods or rural wilderness.

Daniel Traub: "Lots"; and Group Show: "Stalking the Wild Asparagus." Through March 5, 2011 at The Print Center, 1614 Latimer St. (215) 735-6090 or www.printcenter.org.

Rita Bernstein: "Ghost of Summer"; and Martine Fougeron: "After Prom." Through January 29, 2011 at Gallery 339, 339 South 21st St. (between Spruce and Pine). (215) 731-1530 or www.Gallery339.com.

Imperfectly remembered time

Gallery 339 presents two artists with radically different photographic styles, both of whom portray people close to their lives. The more transfixing and complex are Rita Bernstein's images of friends and family in a series entitled "Ghost of Summer."

Using a technique of hand-applied silver emulsion on Japanese Gampi paper, Bernstein lays down her soft focus black-and-white images, imparting an air of ambiguity and imperfectly remembered time. Her technique and choice of paper mesh with her intent to invite imperfection and impermanency into carefully wrought images; they suggest a found-image quality that disassociates itself from the fine craft of their creation.

Bernstein's figures in *Understudy* or *Façade* mysteriously merge into their surroundings. In other, more sharply focused images, like *Bathers*, *Swimmer* and *Joanna, Age 16*, Bernstein combines formal play with shadings of light and contrast.

Ghost of Summer evokes a deconstructed Monet; we see a bicyclist on a bright summer's outing where the shadowing has toned down to the almost nondescript, the ebbing brilliance of mid-summer.

Although her work is reminiscent of the pictorialism of early modern photography, Bernstein eschews the latter's romantic sentimentalism and estheticizing imperatives to present compelling contemporary work that embraces mystery and ambiguity. This may be Bernstein's most mature work since she took up photography in the 1980s after her first career as a public interest lawyer.