

After all, every one is as their land is, as the climate is, as the mountains and the rivers or their oceans are as the wind and rain and snow and ice and heat and moisture is, they just are and that makes them have their way to eat their way to drink their way to act their way to think and their way to be subtle, and even if the lines of demarcation are only made with a ruler after all what is inside those right angles is different from those on the outside of those right angles, any American knows that.

— Gertrude Stein

The history we are living today is no place for tourists.

— Hayden White

Conceptually we may call Truth what we cannot change; metaphorically, it is the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us.

— Hannah Arendt

The current exhibition of works by Andrea Geyer at Galerie Hohenlohe brings together her recent projects that transform the photographic genres of landscape and cityscape into vessels of discourse. In each case, a discourse in which the parameters of land and bodies, labor and art, rights and knowledge, is examined and debated. What is at stake? No less than the formations of the modern nation- and city-state, historical knowledge of their foundations, and the construction of subjects within these histories.

As a German artist living and working part time in the United States, Geyer focuses on epochal shifts in what Jeff Derksen has termed the “socio-spatial relations” that are at the center of her work. *Spiral Lands* (both *Chapter 1* and *Chapter 2*), examines, photographically and textually, the radical re-envisioning of the American Southwest through Native American culture and ongoing contests over the borders and meanings of Native American land and knowledge. *The Audrey Munson Project* (represented here by *Intaglio. Audrey Munson* and *Companions of Exile*) explores the spectacular clash, grand and violent, of bourgeois tradition and counter-hegemonic movements of the early 20th century. Two of these projects are exhibited here for the first time.

*Spiral Lands. Chapter 2* (2008) is exhibited as an installation composed of a series of projected slides and a recorded voiceover. In the voiceover, recalling educational lectures, Geyer asks: What does a landscape tell us about the land? What can the human sciences tell us about a people and its history? The projected photographs of winter landscapes were taken by Geyer recently at Chaco Canyon and Bandelier Canyon in New Mexico. Both sites were epicenters of cultural life and trade hundreds of years before Europeans stepped foot on the North American continent. Geyer show us these sites in their current state. These sites — variously, the embattled territory of land-rights dispute, sacred homelands, and tourist destinations — are frequently studied and represented by anthropologists, ethnographers and archaeologists, as well as artists, filmmakers and photographers. In a largely appropriated text punctuated by Geyer’s own semi-fictional travel writing and self-reflexive critical dialogue with her sources, the narration gathers together multiple sources, historic and contemporary, interrogating these lands from the perspective of several scholarly disciplines and other practices. These many voices consider the land as an object of the policy of Manifest Destiny through which the U.S. government sought dominion across the West without regard for the costs to its rightful indigenous inhabitants; the meaning of the visual practices of observation and representation specific to this land; and historiographic concerns regarding how historical knowledge is produced and reproduced.

The series of pictures that comprise *Intaglio. Audrey Munson* (2008) is drawn from Geyer’s efforts to photograph each of the public sculptures (and some in museum collections) in New York City for which Munson, an accomplished artists’ model in the early 20th century, posed. Although the artists — Isidore Konti, Adolph Weinman, Daniel Chester French, neoclassicists eschewing the new art movements simmering in America and Europe — were acclaimed, models including Munson suffered disrepute, and, at the hands of the artists, nearly disappeared into classical tropes. Photographed in a manner closely resembling portraiture, each of Geyer’s images captures the dynamism of Munson’s poses, however dramatic or delicate. This is a body of work that literally seeks a *corpus* — the back of a

neck, the curve of a shoulder, the slope of a cheek — becoming the body of the model. But Munson is only a cipher, never entirely, intrinsically, found in any of the particular sculptures, but rather a trace located in each. Elaborating on these traces, Geyer overlays dynamic historical events of the era in which these sculptures were created, returning their allegorical claims of civic unity and grandeur to their originally contested arenas. Silhouetted images, culled from archival documents, of suffragists and striking garment workers — groups of women seeking the political shelter of enfranchisement, campaigning for recognition as rights-bearing subjects — are etched into the glass that covers each photograph. Where Munson herself remains elusive, a portrait of the *social* body of early 20th century New York — especially its young women, represented as regal allegories of civic pride and wealth, and embodied as the marginalized by institutions of *polis* and capital — emerges via the palpable tension between these specters of past struggle and the durable stone and bronze monuments in which Munson's form survives.

*Companions of Exile* (2008) is constituted by a series of photographs taken by Geyer on the site of the former St. Lawrence State Hospital for the Insane, Ogdensburg, New York, where Audrey Munson, committed to the institution on her fortieth birthday, spent the last 65 years of her long life. While architectural elements of hospital buildings appear in the distance, Geyer focuses on the corporeal trunks of trees found on the institution's grounds, situating them in compositions charged via forcefully bisected picture planes counterbalanced by organic energy distributed throughout the frame. These trees, which outlive both Munson and hospital itself (much of it sits empty today), fork skyward and sprawl in tangled branches. Short texts written by Geyer in the form of prose fragments and free-verse poems, are etched onto glass so that words float just in front of the photographed trees. Each text is inspired by definitions of madness, insanity, hysteria especially in regard to women condemned through their passion or rage to the institutions of late Victorian constraint. Massive, individually distinct and expressive, the trees continue to grow, ever-more imposing, where human residents of the same land were once confined — exiled, even — to the rural fringe of a society recently reorganized around urban capital and conventionality.

Completing the exhibition is a selection from Geyer's *Spiral Lands. Chapter 1* (2007), which was first installed at Documenta XII in its entirety of nineteen frames (seventeen paired photographs and two sets of three photographs, each of which is accompanied by a pair of text panels). Geyer's photographs depict a gorgeously varied natural environment of vast horizon, desert scrub, and woodland, as well as elements of the built environment, both centuries-old petroglyphs that mark canyon walls and modern structures. Pairings provide extended views of a particular site, or, like a deconstructed stereoscopic device, subtle double-takes. Textual elements describe the artist's encounters with this land and stories she is told about it, drawn from sources ranging from Indian oral tradition and political discourse. Avoiding the romantic conventions of Hollywood Westerns, which all too often consign these lands to a mythic Technicolor past, Geyer confronts the Southwest in its present-day paradoxes: rich in culture that has survived wholesale attempts at its assimilated, protected and exploited, fragile and enduring, central to American imaginary and defined by reams of treaties that distinguish this land from other U.S. territories.

These works are unified by remarkable immersion — the artist's, the viewers — in the visual artifacts and discourses — intellectual, political, poetic — of the artist's adopted home. Rather than dispassionate *flâneur* who observes at some distance, Geyer is a deeply engaged surveyor of borders and claims, historical and present, that include and exclude, with stakes that are very high indeed. Her journey, and ours through her work, reveal the photograph, the written text, and the spoken word as palimpsests layered with the percolating conditions of their making. In this way, Andrea Geyer teaches us to see anew; to see this land, this city, this image, and this body, as if for the first time.

— Cynthia Chris, New York City, 2008