



GALLERIES



A selection from Patty Carroll's 'Night Resorts'

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Time after time

The influence of the past informs three members of the Chicago Women in Photography Collective

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BY DAVID BALZER May 19, 2010 21:05

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Successful photography group shows are often greater than the sum of their parts. Art photographers tend to deal in containable motifs, and that adamancy is well served by being juxtaposed with others'. One of CONTACT's better shows is at new Dundas West gallery-space-cum-creative-think-tank The Department, and takes the festival's theme, "Pervasive Influence," in a refreshing direction. Here, through the work of three photographers — all from the Chicago

Women in Photography Collective — viewers are asked to interpret "pervasive" not just as shorthand for advertising, globalization and the empire of photojournalism, but as an adjective for the overall culture fostered by the image world — one which "pervades" time itself, in addition to minds and sensibilities.

Patty Carroll and Jennifer Greenburg are the show's most superficially in-sync artists, both exploring lingering mid-century aesthetics. Carroll's photographs (pictured), part of a series entitled "Night Resorts," are portraits of US establishments — motels, diners, bars — that haven't changed their facades much since their inception 40 to 50 years ago. Carroll obviously likes nostalgia, not just aesthetic but personal: her parents carted her to places like this as a child, when she had to be content to gaze at flashy exteriors and the promises they heralded from behind a car window. Carroll is thus concerned most with palette and light. Never trashy looking, her photos are as inviting and mesmerizing as the inside of a jukebox.

Greenburg photographs a subculture, rockabilly, that Torontonians know well, capturing impeccably dressed characters, sometimes couples, in their homes — idealized, cartoonish, tchotchke-filled iterations of 1950s domesticity. The photos have a similar allure as Carroll's: they are shot in the present, but simulate a past. Greenburg's studies are, in fact, noteworthy for how current they are, for never before have members of subcultures been so image-obsessed, making worlds for themselves as if they were directing their own movies. Tellingly, all of Greenburg's subjects seem glad to be photographed: it validates them, memorializing their taste and matching it with the old magazine spreads, record covers, etc. on which it is built.

Mary Farmilant's photos — shots of disused American hospital spaces — are an austere antidote, and should be viewed last. Resembling stills from a post-apocalyptic movie, Farmilant's work is about the gothic qualities of spaces where bodies provide the architectural baseline, and so their absence reads, particularly through the lens, as a kind of haunting.

» EMAIL DBALZER@EYEWEEKLY.COM; TWITTER [@DAVIDBALZER](https://twitter.com/DAVIDBALZER)

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