

BIG BEN SHINY

GROUP PORTRAIT @ PRC

by BEN SLOAT

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On view at the Photographic Resource Center until January 22nd is the exhibition of images titled *Group Portrait*. Comprised of work from five different photographers from the Northeast and the Midwest, the images focus on the intimacy of domestic situations, revealing a narrative that often appears to have a twist towards the fictional.

As the characters within the images are caught within a heightened psychological relationship, the viewer also becomes a participant within the circumstances presented. Ben Gest's *Chuck, Alice, and Dale* takes place in a home library, the three protagonists reaching for a different element in the room. Given the wide angle of the lens, the implication is the involvement of the viewer, reaching forward into the situation.

In other images, the viewer is again active, but witness to a different set of psychological conditions. Jessica Todd Harper photographs herself and her family engaged in heightened domestic activity, while Sage Sohler plays with the palpable friction within the aging visual presentations of herself and her mother, a former model. Amy Montali's characters bring erotic undertones to understated scenes filled with luscious color and ambiguity of circumstances.

Beyond the viewer as the cohort (albeit a white and upper middle class one, within this range of images) within an interior environment, these photographs also serve to reveal the unique moment held by photography itself. Currently in a technological transitional state from the analog to digital, from the negative to the computer file, from the darkroom to digital forms of output; photography is also in a conceptually transitional state as well. What has been accepted to be a "photograph" has changed, as well as the visual means of what a photograph can become

Julie Blackmon's series of images are no doubt computer enhanced, but as they thematically reference certain elements familiar in painting, the additive process of their construction parallels painting as well. In the midst of this, photography becomes liberated, a record of the imagination as much as anything else. Similarly, Ben Gest's work is constructed from composites of people at different moments in the same space, giving a sense of interactivity that may not have occurred at all and capturing a varying time frame in the single still image.

Still, within this acceptance of contemporary photography's manifold features, little can rival the stunningly vivid quality of Amy Montali's large-scale darkroom printed chromogenic prints. Of note is the photograph, *Late*, where a wall of an intoxicating red simply dazzles. Around here we tend to like things that are red. And big.



Kate & Ben, archival inkjet print, 40x41 inches, 2004