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Shellburne Thurber
Psychoanalytic Interiors

March 7 - April 4, 2004
Opening Reception: Sunday, March 7, 7-9pm

From March 7 - April 4, 2004, PARTICIPANT INC will present *Psychoanalytic Interiors*, a solo exhibition of photographs by Shellburne Thurber. This selection of approximately thirty chromogenic prints represent a portion of Thurber's ongoing series depicting the unoccupied office spaces of psychoanalysts. In 1998, Thurber began this project in Buenos Aires, and a Bunting Fellowship (Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University) in 1999-2000 enabled her to continue to pursue this project in Boston.

While the *subject* of psychoanalysis has appeared in the work of many contemporary artists, particularly through the citation of psychoanalytic theory, this is not the route that Thurber has taken to arrive at one of her most recent and ongoing bodies of work, *Psychoanalytic Interiors*. Unlike art practices that seek to demonstrate theoretical premises, Thurber's work, instead, elaborates upon a long photographic history, fusing particular formal concerns with an interest in people: their varying abilities to communicate, and the ways in which the constructed environment – homes, hotels, offices – can articulate the complexities of the lives that pass through them. The issues most clearly raised by her psychoanalytic interiors and the ideas they evoke – absence, emptiness, the unconscious, the unstable boundaries between self and other – are the subject of Thurber's work as a whole.

Exhibition projects such as *Boston School* (1995, The ICA, Boston), placed Thurber's work alongside a constellation of peers who, in the mid-seventies, broke with documentary traditions by turning the camera inward. Her investment in the photographic medium continues to reside in its ability to address familial, intimate, and often claustrophobic interpersonal relationships. The quirky intimacy of the psychoanalytic interiors reveals yet another aspect of Thurber's long-standing interest in "holding environments" and the emotionality of space.

The fact that people occupied much of Thurber's early work serves to underscore the issue of absence that characterizes the vast majority of her recent work. Portraiture, and the self-portrait, always remain central, whether she chooses to photograph a landscape, a house, a room or a chair. But the social character of Thurber's populated early work, however autobiographical, also addresses class anxiety in general, the external realities that separate people, and the desire to break away from proscribed social groupings and the awkward trappings of domestic space – the space *between* people.

Perhaps the transient spaces of the empty *Motel Interiors* (photographed in the late seventies) mark a beginning of Thurber's ongoing effort to describe more fully the interior life of people. In this series, familiar details of generic or institutional décor are emphasized through attention to their rich surfaces. The spaces are often made enigmatic by the presence of reflections, the doubling of the room in a mirror, the space of the television screen. In their strangeness, these images also reveal familiarity – the uncanny sense of looking toward an unstable, mirroric interiority.

In Thurber's work, anxieties associated with the latent eccentricities of presumably rational, calculated spaces are depicted as fraught with emotionality – somehow charged with the traces of their absent inhabitants. Her photographs seek to render even an ordinary room or landscape an interior landscape, and the absence of literal human subjects causes slippage, a continuous displacement of meaning onto seemingly prosaic details. By photographing intensely intimate, however "public," spaces such as motels or offices, Thurber indicates the unique interstices of public and private that these spaces represent, pointing to their layered internal significance.

In the case of the *Psychoanalytic Interiors*, Thurber's photographs destabilize perceptions of the neutral psychoanalytic office – as impartial projection space for the imaginary or unconscious – by divulging idiosyncrasy amidst methodological order. The photographs elaborate a poetics of repression and displacement, insinuating a disturbance in the presumably impassive organization of space. They refer to places, however proscribed, that serve a function of transitory connectedness, holding intimate meaning for many that leave their impressions. Within the relative sameness of the arrangements and kinds of furniture, the *Psychoanalytic Interiors* represent an assertion of peculiar affinities, indicating places that refuse to belie their particular, and increasingly outmoded, brand of intimacy. Thurber's project does not seek to document or imitate a set pattern, but instead comments on a cultural moment of growing detachment that would render such places obsolete.

Shellburne Thurber lives and works in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her one-person exhibitions include: the Boston Athenaeum; Elias Fine Art, Boston; the Weatherspoon Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, NC; Stark Gallery, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, Boston; Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Jack Shainman Gallery, NY; and Susan Inglett Gallery, NY. She has participated in numerous group exhibitions including: *Undomesticated Interiors*, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA; *Family Ties*, The Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA; *Treat Yourself*, The London Science Museum; *This is Then*, Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT; *Playing off Time: Contemporary Photographers in Dialogue with the Past*, Aldritch Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT; *Jim Dow & Shellburne Thurber*, Escuela Nacional de Fotografía, Buenos Aires, Argentina; *Domesticated*, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA; *Spectacular Optical*, Thread Waxing Space, NY; and *Boston School*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

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PARTICIPANT INC is located at 95 Rivington Street, between Ludlow and Orchard Streets on the Lower East Side.