



Jean Albus: Rapture on the Plains



Yanis Gibson Square
MUSEUM OF ART

Jean Albus: Rapture on the Plains

Organized and Presented By:



Paris Gibson Square
MUSEUM OF ART

February 17 - June 4, 2011

Reception 5:30 - 7:30pm February 17th

ArtShare Presentation by Jean Albus at 7:00pm

Sponsored By:

Pam Hansen Alfred, State Farm Insurance



All images © 2011, Jean Albus, all rights reserved. Cover image: *Feathers before Wings*. Back cover image: *Still Life with Grass*. Online catalog ©2010, Paris Gibson Square, Inc. All rights reserved. Online catalog designed by Bob Durden, Curator of Art, Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art.

This project is supported by the Montana Arts Council, a state agency funded by the State of Montana and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding is provided by museum members and the Citizens of Cascade County.



Ice Anger

Rapture on the Plains: Observations

Bob Durden, Curator of Art

Encountering the work of Jean Albus, one immediately senses the joyful moments she experiences living on the northern plains in southeastern Montana. She exalts the rural condition by layering personal icons over images of the Montana landscape. The rapturous notions apparent in the work are constructed with a variety of cultural precedents in mind and express themes rife with married ideas: life/death, abundance/scarcity or isolation/contentment. Though Jean Albus has created a broad body of photographic work that shares a similar point of view about urban settings, The Square's exhibition focuses on subjects viewed directly from her rural home near Bridger, Montana. Her photographs add to the historical documentation of the northern plains while infusing it with contemporary narratives. These images emphasize the sublime aspects of the plains while revealing a personal story that intersects with primal and pristine places.



What Women Want



Hot Dirt

Everyone has a story, but it is in the sharing and the manner of sharing where we find a clearer sense of self and others. Jean reveals her story in a manner that allows the viewer to insert themselves into the visual narrative. Alternately, she invokes the past, captures the present and posits the transcendent possibilities of time with often gender specific images that remind us of the challenges encountered in the American frontier. Though modern conveniences are integrated into rural living, isolation remains as a condition of this lifestyle. In Jean's case the nearest neighbor is three miles away and the community of Bridger is nearly 8 miles down a county road. The decision to live outside the skirts of town may be calculated in part to cultivate a greater sense of being in a life shared with her husband Richard; however, in this remote location, she directs her observations toward humanity and its relationship with the natural environment.



A Memory of Grass



Magpie's Magic Spell

In most of the exhibited works, something is equally absent and present, providing an enigmatic point of view and creating a tension that asks: what is at stake in the visual narrative? The most obvious examples are photographs from two related series titled *If Dresses Could Speak* and *What Else Is There To Say About Land?* In the first series empty dresses represent, as the artist states, “a surrogate for self.” In the latter series, her appointed muse, Dale, appears. The addition of a human figure extends the artist’s introspection about self to others. All but one exhibited photograph, *Silence* (page 9), contains a direct reference to a human presence in the landscape, but it conjures human emotions about fear, predation and mortality, uniting the image with her larger body of work. In many of the photos, the reference to a human presence is a road that leads both into the distance and arrives at the center of the narrative. In these cases, the visual narratives emphasize the elements of time, space and distance while remaining consistent with the aforementioned dichotomies inherent in the artist’s work.

The empty dress is a signature of self for Jean Albus but it also honors the spirit of pioneering women who came before her. Out of necessity, those women often cast their femininity aside to survive and interact with the harsh realities encountered on the plains. Jean reminds us that femininity is not simply an outward superficial quality that can be donned and then packed away while attending to a rigorous life. It can be resurrected in an instance to celebrate the keener moments encountered along the way and this is expressed through the dress hovering in the landscape or operating as clouds in the landscape, connoting the elation or rapture in life. The derived meaning conveyed through these visual intersections can be equally glad or poignantly sad, depending upon one's point of reference. The vacillating message creates an intellectual/emotional tension worthy of repeated viewing. The floating feather in *And Other Beautiful Things* is as apt a metaphor for being caught, carried away or transcending the ordinary as is the artist's metaphorical use of the empty dress. The absence of the bird is obvious but the floating feather signifies that it exists/existed. The evidence of that life is carried by the wind above a human path, signifying a marriage between humanity and nature. It is this elevated point of view that has led Jean to become a highly sought out contemporary photographer.



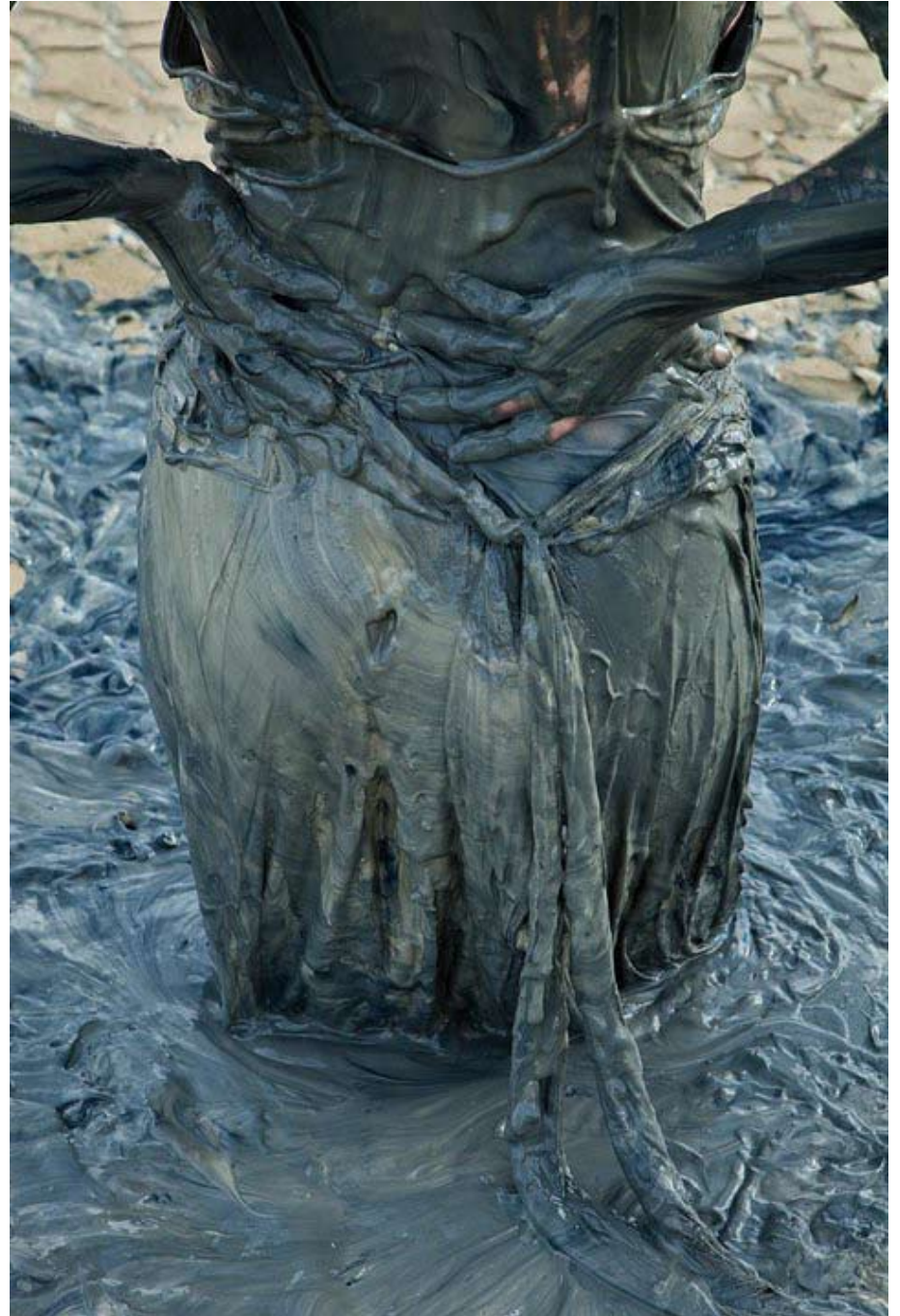
Ascension



And Other Beautiful Things

Jean Albus straddles a visually evocative line without revealing too much or discarding the mystery of the visual narrative (as seen in *Primordia*). The literal aspects of Jean's work are rarely ever too literal; and though often feminine in nature, the photographs do not exclude a masculine voice or response. In this respect, Jean Albus' work is connected to the images of rugged southeastern Montana captured and expressed by her predecessor Evelyn Cameron (1893-1929), who photographed eastern Montana at the turn of the 19th century. In the case of both photographers, humor plays as large a role in the visual narrative as does the abundance and objectiveness of nature, with a reverence to the chinking of life and the passage of time.

Primordia



Artist's Statement

“I was born and raised in Billings, Montana. I spent two weeks every summer on the plains of North Dakota where my parents grew up. I left Montana for nearly 15 years, and then returned in 1988 with my son. I lived in Red Lodge, Montana, over twenty years before moving just west of Bridger, Montana, where my husband and I built a house. Traveling from Red Lodge and the foothills of the Beartooth Mountains to the Clark’s Fork River valley via a winding back road reawakened my love for grass, rolling hills and cottonwood trees. The wind that blows through the pines near our house and through the cottonwoods in the canyon has truly become the only music I need. Solitude is my friend.

The landscape and sky and the activity of the elements and the creatures that abide here is the beauty that inspires me. Driving the back roads or walking through sage and grass makes me think constantly about my own connection to the land. I am confronted everyday with the harshness of living in the high desert. I didn’t know at first if I could ever come to love it or if it could ever replace my love for the mountains, but I have and it has. How to express that is the basis for all the art I make. Living in the unceasing beauty of sky, land, wind, animals and reptiles has brought home to me the realization that everything I see or hear is simply a reflection of me. The dresses became a means to express my feelings about that, and also a means to express thoughts about death, loneliness, joy and my own history. The dresses are really just surrogates for self.

My series of photographs involving the dress in the landscape, which is ongoing, evolved into a desire to express more about living here both in the high desert and the river valley nearby. I really wanted to start a kind of visual narrative about it. That’s when my friend became my muse for the series “*What Else Is There To Say About Land?*” Bringing the female figure into my photography expresses more in a physical sense my experience of contact with my surroundings and the things I love about it—the light, the wind, the dry heat, the cracked earth, blistering cold and even the dead things I come across. Then the images of things that worry me, the rattlesnakes, for instance, entered the picture. But for me it’s always about coming to terms with time, death, renewal, rebirth and love. I also just enjoy making interesting pictures for the sheer pleasure of the process and seeing what emerges from that part of the journey.

All my photographs represent real experiences I’ve had and continue to have, not just with the landscape, but with people. I can’t really separate the two. Since I’ve come to connect what I see in the physical realm of nature with what I experience spiritually or in relationships, things I ponder or emotions I experience, it all seems to come out in the work one way or another. I’m sure my experiences are universal and that we’re all connected on many levels with what exists around us. There are many landscapes inside and out. I think my art expresses that.”—Jean Albus



Silence

Jean Albus: Rapture on the Plains

Exhibition Checklist

1. ***When Bluebirds Die***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 24 x 16"
2. ***Feathers before Wings***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 16 x 24"
3. ***Pink Clouds***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 10.5 x 18.5"
4. ***Ascension***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 18.5 x 12.5"
5. ***A Memory of Grass***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 48 x 32"
6. ***Spiral***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 18.5 x 12.5"
7. ***Maggie's Magic Spell***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 16 x 22"
8. ***Hot Dirt***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 15 x 24"
9. ***Still Life with Grass***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 16 x 22"
10. ***Ice Anger***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 9.5 x 15"
11. ***Silence***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 18.5 x 12.5"
12. ***And Other Beautiful Things***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 16 x 24"
13. ***What Women Want***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 24 x 16"
14. ***A Memory of a Memory***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 20.5 x 16"
15. ***Ophelia's Passing***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 24 x 16"
16. ***Spring Tempest***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 16 x 24"
17. ***Echoes***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 24 x 16"
18. ***Primordia***, archival inkjet print, edition # 1 of 5, 24 x 16"

For more information about the artist,
visit www.jeanalbus.com.



Paris Gibson Square
MUSEUM OF ART

1400 First Avenue North
Great Falls, MT 59401
406.727.8255
www.the-square.org
info@the-square.org

Museum Hours:
Monday through Friday, 10 am to 5 pm.
Tuesday Evenings, 7 to 9 pm.
Saturday - Noon to 5 pm.
CLOSED SUNDAYS





Jean Albus: Rapture on the Plains