



NO CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Karen Asher

Text by Natasha Peterson

Awkward Introductions

The photographic medium has become a cultural facet in which artists and non-artists alike explore their lived experiences and the lives around them, as well as the ways in which the camera and the photograph expose identities particular to their environment. Winnipeg-based photographer, Karen Asher, discovers a collective identity that parallels her city's character with that of the people it contains. Her work touches upon the continual state of shifting identity in which Winnipeg—a city that never escapes a state of flux—finds itself. In Asher's debut exhibition, *No Cause for Concern*, at first glance the work resembles a collection of b-sides, the images that would not be found in an album or displayed along a family's staircase. Yet there is an



unexpected beauty.

"I immediately envision the setting and their attire, and can only relax once I have shot them and then can finally cross them off the list." —Asher

It would seem that for Asher, her work is an aesthetic and cultural interplay that challenges people's expectations in reference to portraiture. The concrete or barren urban landscapes act as counterpoint to the often sterile, constructed and idiosyncratic interior environments that provide the backdrop for her portraits. Representations are influenced by culture and, in much the same way, have the capacity to shape culture and mould society's perceptions, along with the expectations of portraiture and of who is a worthy subject. These photographs by Asher cause the viewer to contemplate the culturally constructed idea of what constitutes a portrait

and an appropriate setting (public or private/urban or domestic). The images produced become a projection of the photographer and what she chooses to disseminate and, in doing so, add up to a series of images with harsh lighting and peculiar expressions in seemingly fictitious environments. Ultimately, Asher constructs a narrative in a disjunctive or even unknowable story. Seemingly banal moments are made intriguing through Asher's photographs as she acts as a pseudo-photojournalist, prodding the unique and peculiar characters living within her city.

"I'm like the bewildered child, [whisper] 'Oh my god, look.' Not in a way that I'm judging or making fun, but in a way that I'm enamoured and in awe." —Asher

Asher utilizes traditional photographic conventions and formal qualities, and then shifts these conventions with her use of harsh lighting, and in her strategy



for posing people. Once the subject has been posed, prior to depressing the shutter she waits for them to lose—even if only for a moment—their awareness of the camera. The contrast between personalities and settings, the subjects and the context of their portrait are subtly jarring. There is something rather intimate resonating in her work, a certain vulnerability. The ordinary becomes surreal. The environment and subject is staged yet the expressions that ensue are deliberate and uncontrived, resulting in an unlikely orchestrated spontaneity. Asher awaits her snapshot; the moment when the subjects are no longer performing, stripped of their stage, revealing their character albeit always controlled by the artist/recorder.

"Out of awkwardness I always laugh at the wrong times." —Asher

We are fascinated by beauty yet more so with the

bizarre. These mundane moments metamorphose themselves into something peculiarly remarkable; they add up to something other than the normal and desirable recordings of the everyday life. This constructedness segues throughout Asher's photographs, whether it is the contrast between subject and environment or the expressions recorded in these portraits.

"I'm not against pretty." —Asher

With this collection, Asher allows the viewer to linger slightly. Time and again, non-sequiturs reveal themselves in otherwise ordinary moments. At first sight these images might seem like typical portraits. The subtlety is what is so striking. The awkward facial expressions. The awkward environments. The awkward poses. The awkward introductions.

"Oh, I can't stop staring." —Asher

Karen Asher is a lens-based artist living and working in Winnipeg. She recently completed her BFA Thesis in photography at the University of Manitoba. Asher seeks out intriguing subjects to capture in a light that is authentic to their character. < www.karenasher.ca >

Natasha Peterson is a Winnipeg based photographer, arts administrator, and instructor who believes art can build community and is committed to integrating feminist practice into her work. She graduated with a diploma in Photography from PrairieView School of Photography in 2005, and is currently studying Art History at the University of Winnipeg. Natasha began as an Intern with PLATFORM centre for photographic + digital arts in the spring of 2008, and is now the Centre's Outreach Coordinator.

EXHIBITION

15 January–27 February 2010

RECEPTION

7 PM, Friday, 15 January

ARTIST TALK

3 PM, Saturday, 30 January

WORKS EXHIBITED

Welleh, 2008 (shown, inside right)
Legs, 2008
The Ice Cream Man, 2008 (shown, cover)
Johnny, 2008
The Marathon Winner, 2009
The Fall, 2009
Parade, 2009
Lyndsay & Her Mom, 2009
Bella & Marvin, 2009 (shown, inside left)
Mom & Man, 2009
Mom in Blue, 2009
Dad, 2009
Mom in Bed, 2009
Michael Benjamin Brown, 2009
Mike & Sylvia, 2009

All works C-Prints, 24" x 24"

PLATFORM gratefully acknowledges the ongoing financial assistant provided by Manitoba Arts Council, Winnipeg Arts Council, and The Winnipeg Foundation. The Centre would also like to recognize the support of its members, board of directors, and staff.

With support from
The
Winnipeg
Foundation
founded in 1911



WINNIPEG
ARTS COUNCIL



 **PLATFORM**
centre for photographic + digital arts

121-100 Arthur Street (Artspace), Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 1H3 | 204.942.8183 FAX 204.942.1555
info@platformgallery.org www.platformgallery.org