

Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Laura Letinsky: *Untitled #17*, from the series "The Dog and the Wolf," 2009, C-print, 25¾ by 40 inches; at Carroll and Sons.



LAURA LETINSKY CARROLL AND SONS

Eight tabletop still lifes of leftover food-stuff, decorative trimmings and flowers made up Chicago-based photographer Laura Letinsky's first solo exhibition at Carroll and Sons. The show's title, "Hot and Cold All Over," suggested the dichotomous nature of these pictures (dating from 2002 to 2009), which juxtapose positive and negative space, light and shadow, and themes of purity and corruption. Letinsky (b. 1962) uses a large-format camera to create her images to scale, and employs slow film speeds and long exposure times to manipulate color, tone and contrast. The resulting compositions evoke both 17th-century Dutch still-life painting and the commercial photography found in food and home decor magazines.

Letinsky has been focusing on everyday objects since 1997 (though her interest in issues of desire and satiation first appeared in her 1990-96 "Venus Inferred" series, featuring couples, variously clothed and unclothed, in domestic settings). *Untitled #64* (2002), from the series "Hardly More than Ever"—titled after a phrase from Gertrude Stein's 1914

prose-poem "Tender Buttons"—depicts a seemingly haphazard arrangement of an overripe peach, a split-open peach pit and a zested half of an orange. The fruits are positioned precariously along the edges of a soiled white plastic cutting board, which itself balances on a counter-type surface covered in a white sheet. A robin egg blue mug, its interior ringed with brown, stands beside the cutting board. Contrasting colors and bright spots of sunlight are brought together in a composition much greater than its mundane parts.

Letinsky's meditations on light are most dramatic when her formal setups are spare, as in *Untitled #1* (2008), from the "Fall" series. At the center of this vertical image, one deep-red cherry serves as the nucleus of a small gathering of cherry pits and stems on a white laminate surface. The tabletop, floor and bare walls, struck by varying amounts of sunlight, produce an almost musical arrangement of shifting zones of white.

Recently, in a series titled "The Dog and the Wolf" (referring both to Aesop's fable and to a French phrase signifying twilight), Letinsky's pictures have become darker, richer and more complex. *Untitled #17* (2009) features a shattered glass vase

whose orchids lie toppled on a wet and rumpled gray tablecloth. Nearby rests a graceful tangle of purple ribbon, while a group of chocolates and empty wrappers inhabits a seemingly deep gray space at the back of the table. For this body of work, Letinsky used extremely long exposures—sometimes overnight—to capture the diminished light of the period just after sunset. The effect is of a dim, otherworldly place in which ordinary objects take on a melancholic cast.

—Francine Koslow Miller