

**Exhibition Review by Jill Waterman:**

"THE UNIVERSE NEXT DOOR, PHOTOGRAPHS by ABELARDO MORELL" at BonniBenrubi Gallery, 52 East 76th St., NY, NY 10021, October 19 - December 2, 2000. Tele:212.517.3766;<http://www.bonnibenrubi.com>.



Abelardo Morell

Abelardo Morell is a connoisseur of time and space. These are the fundamental bearings for his vision before a range of circumstance, which he aptly transforms into photographs. That time and space are essential components of photography is always a given. Yet what makes Morell's work particularly resonant is his exploration of these coordinates from a perspective spanning physical, emotional and conceptual states.

Morell was first introduced to photography in college while shifting gears from a planned course of study in engineering to an eventual major in comparative religion. The presence of both these disciplines punctuates his subsequent work with the rigor of structural inquiry and the sensibility of animistic belief. In his recent New York exhibition titled "The Universe Next Door," Morell presents recent photographs from three distinct strains of his work. Although divergent in approach, execution and scale this tripartite

focus charts a continuum from microcosm to macrocosm, the personal to the universal.

Morell's most restrained works are intimate studies of modest objects. A pencil and its shadow, a table under dappled light, the burlled ropes of a backyard swing are laden as photographs with the consideration of acute observance. Morell favors long exposures in translating the world onto film. The time spent exposing an image is a deliberate act for which this photographer accords great respect, theorizing that the resulting image is enhanced by his attention to its process.

A dominant theme in Morell's on-going exploration of books is the object as a treasury of information accumulated by the ages. The close-up of an antique dictionary transforms the surface of tabbed pages into a precipice of shrouded archways and raking light. Travel postcards and open tomes are sandwiched in dramatic constructions animated by cast shadows, shifting dimensions and transitions of scale. In this series relinquished artifacts are reconciled with post-modern analysis to infuse the past with a new and vital life.



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The most ambitious and widely celebrated of Morell's photographic series are created through the intermediary of a gigantic camera obscura. In this work the world outside a blackened window is literally mirrored, upside down and backwards, onto the surface of the darkened room inside. A photograph, with an exposure time ranging from many hours to several days, is produced by placing a camera in front of the room's aperture hole. The projected image is visible during exposure inside the room in a cinematic performance for a transitional space. Morell describes this work as recording "what a room sees". The resulting photographs are peppered with apt juxtapositions and ironic details. These include: a fantasy landscape dreamily afloat over neatly tucked beds; the Tuscan countryside sandwiched with a painters' bare canvas; an image of the Brooklyn Bridge projected onto a wall beside a framed print with a similar view. Temporal elements such as digital readouts, the hands of a clock and commuters in the street disappear into the time lapse. This work gives full reign to the complexity of Morell's inquiry. By distilling a simultaneous view of different aspects to our universe and collapsing them into one, the photographer becomes an engineer of experience. He prompts us to marvel at the space outside the window at a moment when there is little time available for the world as it is. Existing as we do increasingly in isolation before a computer screen, where there is barely time for dreaming, these pictures are a ready antidote for our contemporary world.

His previous exhibition "Abelardo Morell and the Camera Eye," organized by San Diego's Museum of Photographic Arts and presented last spring at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, is traveling over the next two years to a host of significant venues, including the University Art Museum in Albuquerque, New Mexico; the Detroit Institute of Arts and Rochester's George Eastman House.

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Jill Waterman is a photographer, photo editor and arts writer based in New York City. She received a Master's degree in photography from the NYU/ICP Program in 1988. She has been photographing in different cities around the world for the New Year's Eve Project since 1984. This project has received fiscal sponsorship from the New York Foundation for the Arts and Professional Women Photographers, New York. This series has been exhibited throughout the U.S. and has been funded for exhibition by the Texas Photographic Society. Waterman has received radio and television coverage for this work, which has also been published in international periodicals and web-sites. Waterman's photographs are included in collections worldwide. Since being one of the founders of the artist-run 494 Gallery in 1991, Waterman has served as an independent advisor on the presentation and marketing of photographic work. She has reviewed portfolios at numerous photographic conferences and currently teaches a workshop called "Exhibition Options for the Photographic Artist". In February 2000, Waterman served as one of six jurors for the Millennium Photo Project, an internet community enterprise to compile images of the Millennium for a major book project. Waterman's work can be seen on her web-site: <http://www.NewYearPhotos.com>.