



ESTHER PULLMAN



*Succulents, Private Estate Greenhouse, Wellesley, Massachusetts, April 2003*

# ESTHER PULLMAN

## G r e e n h o u s e s

September 11 – October 25, 2008

Essay by Belinda Rathbone

**VICTORIA MUNROE FINE ART**

179 Newbury Street Boston MA 02116  
Tel 617 523.0661 Fax 617 523.1354  
[info@victoriamunroefineart.com](mailto:info@victoriamunroefineart.com)  
[www.victoriamunroefineart.com](http://www.victoriamunroefineart.com)

## ESTHER PULLMAN: Greenhouses

A greenhouse is to a garden what a factory is to a showroom, a kitchen to a restaurant, a backstage to a theater. The scene behind the scene is in many ways the more interesting one; it is the creative heart of the enterprise, with its own order and its own beauty. But it takes an artist to show us how.

As far as I know, Esther Pullman's ten-year study of greenhouses is the first of its kind, and we could not hope for a more eloquent introduction to the subject, if not the last word. Ambitious both in scope and in the scale of their production, her polyptych photographic images take us into the inner sanctum of plant cultivation in its many varieties, from America to Europe, from the tropical to the temperate, from the thriving to the derelict, from the small-scale to the mass produced. In each we enter a space in a way that no single image could approximate, and we focus in a way we wouldn't if we were actually there. What we learn is that there is much more to these spaces than meets the casual eye or the gardener in search of a plant. Pullman gives form to their function, subtly imposing her vision on something we thought we knew.

Pullman started out as a graphic designer, for many years working with the elements of line, color, and type. Her well-honed graphic sense is combined in this series with her abiding love of flowers and gardens. As a child she enjoyed the constant view of her mother's garden through the plate glass windows of their modern house, the lines of the man-made structure framing nature's work. She has extended this experience to her home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she and her husband created a picture window overlooking their small city garden. After years of living with this view, the idea for a photographic series eventually, in 1999, took hold.

As a student of graphic design at Yale, Pullman studied with the photographer Walker Evans. Though she did not pursue photography at the time, Evans' example remained deeply ingrained in her visual consciousness. Evans' assiduous avoidance of the great in favor of the ordinary, the everyday, the humble, and the overlooked, was his way of penetrating the heart of American culture in his time. "I lean toward the enchantment, the visual power, of the aesthetically rejected object," he once said. His rigorously straight approach to photography allowed the subject to speak for itself, for the flaws and the disarray to show, assuring us that real life passed here. Pullman absorbed these lessons as well as his subtle graphic sense — his meticulous framing of a subject as a whole as well as his penetration of its inner structure, drawing the eye here and there.

Each frame of a Pullman polyptych is an image in its own right, but together they form a panoramic experience. First she sizes up the breadth of her composition; then she plans how the whole can be most effectively broken down into panels. With her Fujica 6x9 cm medium format camera fitted with a 65mm wide angle lens closed down to the smallest possible aperture, she brings everything, near and far, into focus. Pullman unfolds, unravels the long, linear spaces of the greenhouse, directing the eye in and out and around corners, and leading to vanishing points with the elements at hand — a hose snaking its way along the floor; a vent towering above, or in the distance, a door ajar:

In showing the architecture of the greenhouse in all its functional beauty, Pullman allows each one to speak for itself: the sultry home of the succulents baking in the late afternoon sun, the meticulous order of orchid propagation, armies of seedlings marching to infinity, or a friendly potting shed, welcoming to curious chickens.

Pullman regards these secular structures as "temples of light." Whether the light filters through glass or plastic, in full sunshine or cloudy haze, in her hands the greenhouse expresses the mystical cycle of life. Some suggest, as she says, "that moment in January or February when you're not sure things are going to regenerate," others that last gasp of summer when the overgrowth in the yard outside crowds through the door. Whatever the time of year, these are the sacred places where seeds are brought to life before they are moved out into the larger world to take their place in someone's idea of a garden.

Belinda Rathbone



*Tropical House, Wellesley College Greenhouses, Wellesley, Massachusetts, January 2000*



*Urns, Private Estate Greenhouse, Wellesley, Massachusetts, October 2000*

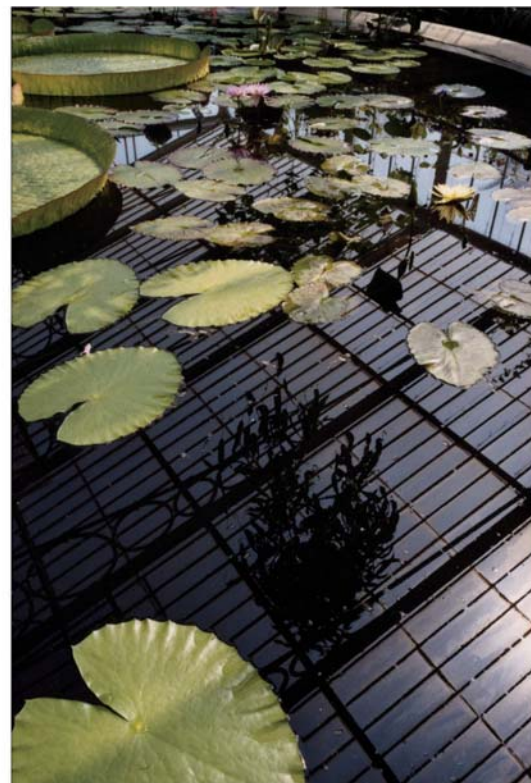


*Ladder, Private Estate Greenhouse, Wellesley, Massachusetts, May 2007*





*Nasturtiums, Private Estate Greenhouse, Wellesley, Massachusetts, April 2007*



*Waterlily House, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, London, May 2004*



*Reynolda House Greenhouse, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 2007*



*Commercial Greenhouse Exterior, Carpinteria, California, February 2006*



*Open Door, Commercial Greenhouse Shed, Lincolnville, Maine, September 2007*



*Lights, Experimental Greenhouse, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, March 2005*

#### EDUCATION

- 1964 BA, Smith College, Northampton, MA
- 1966 BFA, MFA in Graphic Design, Yale University, New Haven, CT  
Maine Photographic Workshops  
Harvard University Extension  
The Art Institute of Boston  
School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

#### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 Victoria Munroe Fine Art, Boston, MA  
The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY
- 2007 *Greenhouse Neighbors*, Carney Gallery, Regis College, Weston, MA
- 2006 *Green Places, Green Spaces*, Ethel H. Blum Gallery, College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, ME
- 2004 *Green | house | Divided*, Paul Dietrich Gallery, Cambridge Seven Associates, Inc. Cambridge, MA

#### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 Members' Show, Danforth Museum of Art, Framingham, MA  
CA2UK, Summer Exhibition, Jane Deering Gallery, Gloucester, MA
- 2007 Members' Show, juried first prize winner, Danforth Museum of Art, Framingham, MA
- 2006 *The Garden on Paper*, The Drawing Room, East Hampton, NY  
*Summer Frieze*, Jane Deering Gallery, Gloucester and Boston, MA  
Silver Eye Center for Photography, Pittsburg, PA, juried on-line exhibition  
Members' Show, first-prize, Danforth Museum of Art, Framingham, MA,  
*Wellesley Greenhouse Panoramas*, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA
- 2005 *Photographers 7*, Jane Deering Gallery, Gloucester and Boston, MA  
New England Photographers 2005, Danforth Museum of Art, Framingham, MA
- 2004 *Works on Paper 2004*, Purdy Hicks Gallery, London, England
- 2002 *Between Solace and Awe: Beyond the Landscape*, Starr Gallery, Newton, MA  
Members' Show, juror's award, Photographic Resource Center, Boston, MA
- 2001 *Manifest 2001*, Copley Society, Boston, MA



© Victoria Munroe Fine Art and Esther Pullman

Esther Pullman uses a Fujica 6 x 9, medium format camera to shoot each individual photograph which makes up these panoramic views. The negatives are printed on archival paper either in a darkroom or digitally in small editions between two and five. Each panel of the panoramic view is printed and framed separately. Editions are available in three sizes: 24 x 16, 30 x 20, and 39 x 26 inches. Some editions are individual images in the same sizes.

Production: Elizabeth Reluga and Jennifer Barrows

Design: Canfeld Design

Printing: Kirkwood Printing

*Above: Jardin des Plantes, Paris, France, 2000*

*Front cover: Rain, Entrance Vestibule, Reynolda Greenhouse, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 2007*

*Back cover: Beverston Castle Greenhouse, Tetbury, England, June 2004*



**VICTORIA MUNROE FINE ART**

179 Newbury Street Boston MA 02116  
Tel 617 523.0661 Fax 617 523.1354  
[info@victoriamunroefineart.com](mailto:info@victoriamunroefineart.com)  
[www.victoriamunroefineart.com](http://www.victoriamunroefineart.com)