

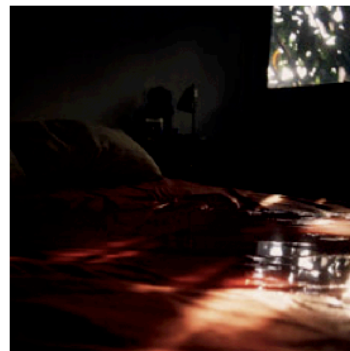
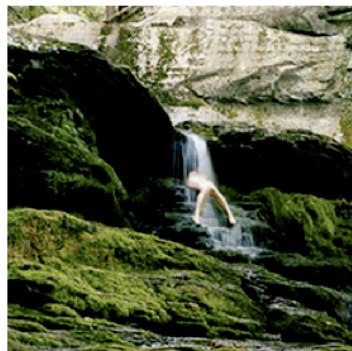


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## TRACES

AYALA GAZIT CORINNE MAY BOTZ MEGAN CUMP PAOLA DAVILA

A curated selection of artworks and essay by Tema Stauffer

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The four artists presented in this issue engage in photography's dialogue with mortality and memory, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility. Through individual methods of photographing physical environments, each artist blurs the distinction between what exists and what is imagined or felt. Their relationships to the external world reflect personal investigations into themes of death, dreams, desire, attachment, and transformation. In some works, they look for evidence left behind even where it is not visible on the surface, and in others, they transfigure spaces to express internal realities.

During her early adolescence in Israel, Ayala Gazit learned from her father that she had a half-brother named James who lived in Western Australia with his mother and her children by another father. Six months later, James took his own life at 20-years-old. Driven by a desire to know James through the spaces he had occupied, Gazit traveled to Australia thirteen years after he passed away to search for traces of her brother's existence in this barren terrain where fierce winds reinforce a feeling of isolation and eerie discordance. Her series of photographs, *Was it a dream*, convey the mystery and sorrow surrounding his death by focusing on trees, details of rooms, resonant natural light, and deep shadows. Also by combining portraits that she made of living family members with letters exchanged between them, as well as found photographs of James himself, she explores the layers of a complex story surrounding the enormous tragedy of her family's loss. Together, these pictures and words communicate a haunting sense of absence and a quest for answers to questions that can never be fully answered.

Inspired by late 19th century spirit photographs and Victorian ghost stories written by women, Corinne May Botz collected oral stories and photographed over eighty locations where ghosts were reported throughout the United States. Over the course of nearly a decade, Botz investigated attics, bedrooms, bathrooms, hallways, windows, doors, and staircases in private residences as well as taverns, inns, army barracks, theatres, and museums. The images she made at these sites suggest the notion that the imprint of an event, real or imagined, imbues each place with a metaphorical hauntedness. The photographs reveal psychically charged visual clues about the history of these interiors and their inhabitants, or in some cases, allow the power of empty space and what is not visible or explicit to create mystery and ambiguity. *Haunted Houses* essentially speaks to the personal and subjective experience of perception of place particularly as it relates to narratives of memory, loss, and mourning. As Botz writes in the introduction to her book, "Houses are real and they are

not real; they are both a physical space and a mental space full of dreams and desires."

The relationship between the external world and the human psyche similarly informs landscape photographs made by Megan Cump. She, too, cites spirit photography as an important influence on her work. *Feral* explores personal mythology as the artist infuses herself into a sublime wilderness. Traces of her body appear in primordial landscapes, transforming them into mythic and paranormal scenes. Cump retreats into water or fog or dark shadows like an apparition, as animal as she is human. A fire burns in a river, the blood of a human heart stains a frozen waterfall. In *Phantoms Limbs*, Cump references 19th century paintings by French Realist Gustave Courbet. Reminiscent of the nude figure in his erotically charged *L'Origine du monde*, the lower region of her body is the focal point of the image — her legs spread under the rush of water — while the surrounding rocks and trees evoke Courbet's reverent depictions of caves and grottos in other works.

Paola Davila's photographic studies, *Interior Seasons*, are surreal and painterly meditations on water as a metaphor for human existence and the passage of time. The recurring motifs of a pillow and a puddle in each scene imply states of being and dreaming; lush color and texture dramatize the visceral beauty of these symbolic beds in natural settings. Davila photographs an actual bedroom, no less dreamlike — a stream of sunlight cast across a pool of fluid soaking dark red sheets. The image is quietly violent, deeply sexual. Elegant folds of the sheets undulate in light and shadow. The glistening liquid is the aftermath of a force and a flow — the revelation of what exists inside of us.

Tema Stauffer is a photographer and writer based in Brooklyn and a curator for CultureHall. She graduated from Oberlin College in 1995 and received a MFA in Photography from the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1998. Her work has been exhibited at [Jen Bekman Gallery](#) and [Daniel Cooney Fine Art Gallery](#) in New York, as well as galleries and institutions nationally and internationally. She currently teaches at the School of the International Center of Photography, and has taught art courses at William Paterson University and a photography workshop at [Toxico Cultura](#) in Mexico City. She also writes a blog about photography, [PalmAire](#), and contributes to the [Mana Art Center's Log](#). In 2010, she was awarded an [AOL 25 for 25 Grant](#) for innovation in the arts.