

HUW DAVIES GALLERY 13–30 March 2008

Dumbarton Oaks

Dumbarton Oaks is Susan Stayer's first solo exhibition in the HUW DAVIES GALLERY at PhotoAccess. Originating in the gardens and grounds of Dumbarton Oaks, a renowned centre for scholarship in Washington, DC, it was first shown (as *Garden Encounters*) at E3 Gallery in New York in late 2005.

The quiet, carefully composed images in *Dumbarton Oaks* suggest a setting conducive to creativity and learning, like the settings for comparable Australian centres—including Bundanon on the Shoalhaven River and the Varuna Writers' Centre in the Blue Mountains, both in New South Wales. Places like these grow in importance as contemplative, supportive environments for creative work become more rare. Stayer says:

The gardens are peaceful and inviting. They encourage further exploration and are quick to yield wonderful surprises. The photographs here represent a small sample of what I've discovered over the course of many visits to Dumbarton Oaks.

Stayer identifies with the Paris images of French photographer Eugène Atget, images revealing she says, a '... unique vision and mysterious beauty'. But history tells us Atget had no artistic interest in the images he made. Rejecting the title of artist:

He had no time for Man Ray [a neighbour in Montparnasse in the 1920s] or the Surrealists and responded to their interest in his images by saying, 'These are simple documents I make.' And yet today these documents are sought after for their clear and unique vision, for their mysterious beauty, for their evidence of a personal passion ...' (Maria Connolly, *Eugène Atget and Haunted Paris: Trees, Parks and Architecture* @ www.iphotocentral.com)

If Atget's images have status as artworks regardless of his intention, Susan Stayer's images are successful because she begins with an artist's point of view. In these images and her other work Stayer demonstrates well developed visual instincts and a constant search for memorable, soulful images. Harold Cazneaux, in his studies of the garden at Ambleside, his family home in Sydney, and Olive Cotton are amongst the best known Australian artist photographers to have had parallel interests.

With Kerry Baylor, Robert Burne, Kathleen Fisher, Miguel Gallagher, Lorna Sim and Ed Whalan, Susan Stayer is a member of the 'old spool Betties', a group of photographers who aim to encourage each other by creating and commenting on images based on a weekly theme. Examples of their work and musings can be found at www.oldspoolbetties.blogspot.com

Susan Stayer's images created immediate interest when she participated in *Access all areas 2007: The PhotoAccess Member's Show*. Her work continues to impress. *Dumbarton Oaks* is a serious, memorable exhibition and PhotoAccess is delighted to present it in the HUW DAVIES GALLERY at the Manuka Arts Centre.

David Chalker

Susan Stayer



Gallery



Pan

Supported by the ACT and Commonwealth Governments



Artist's statement

I've always been drawn to quiet, out-of-the-way places, which is one of the reasons I enjoy photographing the gardens at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, DC. The other reason is that it's easy to make photos there. With all the restrictions on photography in the city of Washington, wandering around with a camera at Dumbarton Oaks is a truly pleasant experience.

Dumbarton Oaks is a 19th century Federal-style mansion with famous gardens in the Georgetown neighbourhood of Washington, DC. The mansion was built in 1800. It was purchased in 1920 by Robert Woods Bliss (1875–1962), a long-time member of the US Foreign Service, and his wife Mildred Barnes Bliss (1875–1969), a prominent art collector.

When the Blisses purchased the hillside property, it included cow paths and farm buildings. It currently houses the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, a centre for scholarship in Byzantine studies, Pre-Columbian studies, and the history of landscape architecture.

There are about 10 acres (four hectares) of gardens on the grounds of Dumbarton Oaks, designed from 1922–1947 by noted landscape architect Beatrix Farrand in collaboration with Mrs Bliss. Now the property includes small, formal gardens; a Roman-style amphitheatre; and a Lovers' Lane.

The gardens are peaceful and inviting. They encourage further exploration and are quick to yield wonderful surprises. The photographs here represent a small sample of what I've discovered over the course of many visits to Dumbarton Oaks.

I like getting under, behind, and beyond the surface of the gardens, revealing architectural details that are often hidden by trees, flowers, and vines. I'm drawn to these details, and to the architectural elements that seem to pop up out of nowhere as you turn the corner. I seek out and try to uncover the bits and pieces of the gardens that sometimes go unobserved by the casual visitor. Time stands still there. These images are my attempt at capturing the timelessness of the place.

I started working on this series shortly before I discovered the photography of Eugène Atget. When I saw his photos for the first time I was taken by their unique vision and mysterious beauty. Atget's garden photos in particular connected with me. I felt like we shared a way of seeing. Discovering a photographer who didn't portray the usual Paris imagery like the Eiffel Tower or the café scene was exciting. Atget recorded the existence of a Paris under the surface. To me his photographs are timeless. Atget loved his subject and felt passionate about photographing it. That's exactly how I feel about the gardens at Dumbarton Oaks.

Susan Stayer

March 2008



Balustrade



Cherub Fountain

Curriculum Vitae

Solo Exhibitions

- 2008 *Dumbarton Oaks*, HUW DAVIES GALLERY, Manuka
2006 *Pet Portraits*, PetMAC, Arlington, VA
2005 *Garden Encounters: Photographs by Susan Stayer*, E3 Gallery, New York, NY

Group Exhibitions

- 2007 *Access all areas 2007: The PhotoAccess Member's Show*, HUW DAVIES GALLERY, Manuka
2006 Homeward Trails Art Auction, Arlington, VA
2005 *ARTView 2005*, City Museum of Washington, DC, Margaret Bodell juror



Door



Fountain



Ivy Steps



Urn



Tree and Path



Tree

List of works

Artist's proofs from an edition of 5; \$230 each (unframed)
Type C prints on photo paper from B + W hand prints by the artist

1	<i>Balustrade</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
2	<i>Cherub Fountain</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
3	<i>Door</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
4	<i>Fountain</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
5	<i>Gallery</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
6	<i>Pan</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
7	<i>Ivy Steps</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
8	<i>Urn</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
9	<i>Tree</i>	306 x 203 mm (12 x 8 inches)
10	<i>Tree and Path</i>	203 x 306 mm (8 x 12 inches)

HUW DAVIES GALLERY @ PhotoAccess

Corner Manuka Circle and NSW Crescent, Griffith ACT tel. 02 6295 7810

www.photoaccess.org.au