

Sally Gall at Julie Saul

This condensed survey of work by Sally Gall, ranging from 1978 to 2005, was a potent reminder that photographs don't have to be big to cover a lot of ground. Almost all in black and white, and none bigger than 38 by 37½ inches (most are considerably smaller), these quiet, precise landscapes and waterscapes are also refreshing proof that subtle forms of manipulation were not invented by Andreas Gursky. In the best of Gall's images, ordinary places and things are made to seem extraordinary simply by virtue of slight alterations of light and clarity of line. The small craft in *Canoe* (1990) looms huge against the artificially pale and featureless water that laps against it, the canoe's gracefully curving sides and wooden ribs helping to make its presence seem almost human. Similarly vivid, and confounding in terms of scale, are the two small bodies of water—one seems hardly bigger than a puddle—that gleam with unnatural brightness in the dark landscape of *Harris* (1992). *Willard Pond #2* (1990), which consists of little more than a milky body of water seen close up, features a submerged boulder of ineffably compounded bulk and weightlessness; Atlantis comes to mind.

Sometimes the disjunctions of scale are simpler (hence a little less engrossing), as in *Evidence of Wind* (1997), which captures colossal, baroque clouds heaped high above a large body of water, where a tiny, crisply outlined sailboat seems to rest motionless in the distance. Equally dramatic, and more satisfyingly compli-

cated, is the spatial puzzle of *Heaven* (2001), shot from the bottom of a wide natural cistern, its opening to the sky forming a vegetation-trimmed circle of light. In several images here, the drama, always hushed, comes from the presence of swimmers in turbid lakes and seas. The young girl in *Andrea* (1989) perches demurely on an underwater rock; her pale weightless legs float below the gray water's surface, looking as imaginary as a mermaid's tail. *Swimmers #1* (1978), in which a bathing-capped head emerges from the dark rippling water like a slightly less benign sea creature, inevitably evokes Harry Callahan's famous photographs of his wife Eleanor, similarly afloat and dreamy.

Other photographs make historical references that are surely deliberate, as in a series of early images of formal gardens, their inky blacks and blurred edges straight out of Atget's Versailles. The widely spaced row of trees and the gently curving stream which reflects them in *Montessor* (1988) create a sedate rural landscape that seems lifted directly from Monet. It makes an instructive comparison with Vik Muniz's version of Monet's *Water Lilies*, on view at the same time at Brent Sikkema. In Muniz's enormous color photograph, the Impressionist's dabs are fashioned from cutout circles of photo-reproduced color. Muniz's visually and conceptually dazzling image is meant to dissolve on close inspection, while Gall draws you in and holds you there. The experience is the more pleasurable for being increasingly rare.

—Nancy Princenthal



Sally Gall: *Heaven*, 2001, gelatin silver print, 28 by 35 ½ inches; at Julie Saul.