

## Sally Gall, *Subterranea*

"Landscape does not name itself."

—Simon Schama

Sally Gall's new book, *Subterranea*, is a series of photographs of cave openings, grottoes and tunnels. In contradistinction to traditions of American landscape photography, which emphasize the grandiose and the public (Niagara Falls, Yosemite, Yellowstone), Gall presents landscape as no less marvelous but on an intimate scale. Her photographs are distinguished by an atmospheric interplay between light and dark that revels in an aestheticism of privacy, of turning away from the outer world.

Gall's images are manipulated in the printing: judicious diffusions minimize detail and invoke instead a pictorialist dream world. The scenes in *Subterranea* are found where daylight intersects with openings in the earth's crust. This "going underground" reiterates the privileging of the subjective to which the surface of the prints allude. The phenomenological world of elemental nature is there, blunt in its indifference, yet alluring. Nooks and crannies offer escape as well as concealment. Below ground, a coherent sense of scale disappears. The images oscillate between the darkness of the earth's core and the illumination of the sun. Amid the hard rock underneath, among roots and pools of water, there are occasional figures, vague and featureless, floating in the water, suspended in an infinity of stone and solitude.

The lore of caves, of the underground, has remarkable diversity, whether it be Persephone, Plato, *Alice in Wonderland* or the Taliban, as do the extensive tourist attrac-



Sally Gall, *Oasis*, 1999, black-and-white photograph.

tions attendant on such geological phenomena. The images in *Subterranea*, however, with their acute consciousness of their existence as mediated images, construct no narrative

other than the experiential one of elements: air, stone, water, light.

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*Subterranea* is just out from Umbrage Editions.