

## **Transformations:**

### **REVIEW OF AN EXHIBIT OF ANTONIA MACEDO**

*Shutter Release*, October 2003

Summer storms in New England are typically illustrated by driving rain on dark, wind-lashed coasts, as in artwork in inns and pubs down east in Maine. Is it really that way? Not usually, as I recall from my New England childhood. Most rainstorms were not nearly that angry, not so dark, and featured extended plays of sunburst as the clouds broke up and dissipated. Such a mood is difficult to portray emotively without appearing contrived, which may factor in its rarity in New England imagery.

It was therefore most refreshing to view “Line Squall Reflected, Maine” in Antonia Macedo’s ongoing exhibition at the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In her inimitable style of photography adding a colorful impressionist palette to life, Antonia begins the image from the left with the darkness of storm that we expect. Yet the theme is sun having broken through. The beauty is the moment the light has already substantially emerged and is overtaking the darkness. The delicacy of transformation is expertly illustrated—not an overstated revelation nor a subtle glimmer—but a portrait of balanced, emergent light seasoned by the remnants of storm. It’s a delicate, intriguing and romantic seascape absent clichéd melodrama. Antonia typically illustrates essence and change through solid, warming colors dominating more sublime shades, set along clean lines as if to ease and in certain settings, reassure.

Many of Antonia’s images begin with droll, everyday scenes involving buildings and streetscapes, some in a static or deteriorated state, others under repair or construction. The subjects emerge with their character enlivened. In her modest way, Antonia claims no special technique. Somehow—it is left to the observing photographer to consider how—her scenes come emboldened with strong, clear bands of light, often of reddish hue though any number of shades may be applied, in the style of impressionist painting. Her works are not digitally enhanced in any way.

Among my favorites at Antonia’s show is “Work in Progress, Wellington.” A plain building is depicted in a strong red with scaffolding in the background, similar to the Social Realist style of the 1930s. It’s an image you would expect in a mural at the New School for Social Research in New York. (Antonia, you should consider offering your images mural-size!)

To me the most powerful photograph on exhibit is “Beirut,” illustrating a shell of a building reminiscent of the Roman coliseum, in deep red, orange and yellow. The intensity makes a strong immediate impression, while the question “What happened here?” comes to mind. Enlarged to 26x32”, the effect is stunning.

Three totally abstract works are included in Antonia’s show, “Paintscapes” and “Slanted Medley.” These designs are of colored arrays absent real objects—interestingly done as photographs yet by virtue of their sheer abstraction, not my cigar. But that’s me.

A question arises when perusing Antonia’s works: Why are so many of the images set in New Zealand? Because Antonia’s outstanding efforts as the prime mover of the Inspection Panel over the past 7 years meant that her quality time for photography was often limited to home leaves. So it is all the more impressive that Antonia’s creative style has flowered and come into demand even as she devoted all-out effort to setting up and managing a key program that helps assure the viability of project lending as it affects impoverished people most directly. Now, at her retirement, we congratulate and wish her well and all success at her second career, photography.

No sooner had Antonia’s early summer show at the New Zealand Embassy begun when she was invited to set up her current exhibit at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, her fourth display in the past two years. The presentation is accommodated in a gallery strongly influenced in its design by the firm of I.M. Pei, and is in itself quite impressive. Antonia’s next show, which was being readied at end-August, will be at Mr. Henry’s on Capitol Hill.

Blessed is the photographer who has developed a style all her own, is in increasing demand, and has the talent and wherewithal to further pursue and develop her creative potential.

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Antonia Macedo

American Association for the Advancement of Science  
1200 New York Ave., NW (enter on 12<sup>th</sup> St.)  
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