



Curator Phillip Prodger talks about life inside the museum

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Alia Malley in Southland

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I visited landscape photographer **Alia Malley** in Los Angeles. She has a beautiful studio behind her equally beautiful house, airy and full of light. She had pinned up a number of prints from her **Southland series** for me to see, which feature overlooked scraps of nature seen around the greater Los Angeles area. (She remarked, at one point, on how **Robert Adams** has found similar poignancy in his photographs of land on the fringes of developed areas). This is a body of work Alia exhibited at **Sam Lee Gallery** in Chinatown last year, which got a lot of buzz, but which I missed. Alia finds the places she photographs by car, and rarely uses maps, because she says that's how most people experience the city. The results make me think of Dutch Old Master landscape painting – Ruisdael, Hobbema, etc. and British Romanticism – Constable and Gainsborough in particular. Suffused with golden light, they do look strangely like paintings and this is part of their appeal. I also enjoy the fact that they are so counter-counterculture – nothing could be more out of fashion at the moment than photographing Los Angeles with emotion and expressiveness. I'm always excited when artists strike out against dominant trends.

We talked a little about what it is like to be a female landscape photographer. Alia feels the reason there aren't more like her is because it can be a little dangerous for women to be alone in nature, especially around urban areas, where they are especially vulnerable to being attacked or harassed. She recounted several harrowing stories of people accosting her as she photographed, including a homeless woman who defended her territory surrounded by feral cats, and a near escape with a threatening man that caused her to loop an extra mile out of her way to get back to her car. Lately she has been photographing Mexican men horse riding in the neighborhood of **Lakeview Terrace** – weekend warriors who ride around like cowboys with elaborately painted saddles. It's a touching theme – escaping into a cowboy fantasy world as a leisure pursuit, part-time, on weekends and holidays.