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Fact File

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Archival pigment prints are available at 13 x 19 inches for \$650 and 17 x 22 inches for \$750.

The author of *An Unfinished Woman*, Lillian Hellman, wrote: "If you believe, as the Greeks did, that man is at the mercy of the gods, then you write tragedy ... if you believe that man can solve his own problems and is at nobody's mercy, then you will probably write melodrama."

The protagonists depicted in Catharine Carter's photomontages oscillate somewhere between fated and capable. She has conjured a sentimental world where subjects negotiate stage-like sets, or metamorphose into organic or animal forms. It is a place rendered unreal, yet grounded in abundant signifiers — reflective pools, fecund arbors, aged hallways and forlorn landscapes. Image titles, such as "Constrain" and "She's Come Undone," provide oblique clues to the narratives Carter aims to construct: that impediments to personal liberation are evident, yet can be transformed if we are receptive to differing realities. There is a childlike wish fulfillment component at work in Carter's images that all could be well, tempered by a recognition that potentials are as often foreclosed.

The arts are a place where our isolated, subjective selves are given free play. They communicate our anxieties, dreams and ardent hopes, illustrating journeys through the complicated realm of experience. Throughout this process we have developed myths, and Carter's work is replete with this simultaneously literal and opaque type of discourse. In "Enter" (on view on her website), a nude man is bidden into a fissure by a similarly nude female. One doesn't need an accreditation in Jungian archetypes to understand the psychosexual constructs employed here. Such themes haven't permeated our collective unconsciousness since Sophocles without justification.

Broad gestures are frequently part of Carter's highly personal expressions, yet their meanings are elusive. No less subtle is "Shed," in which a sylph-like woman rests in a garden. The flagstone wall that the figure nestles appears to have been, or is becoming a serpent. In conforming to the animal's contours, each figure attains some characteristic of the other. Dualities such as rigid and pliant,

animate and inanimate circulate, yet are left for viewers to resolve.

Carter encourages such engagements with her work, stating that her photographs offer "a more literal interpretation of particular themes or metaphors that arise within me, with hopes that the viewer finds some piece of that metaphor that speaks to their own experience."

As well as working in photomontage, Carter is a painter, though she uses the two mediums to accomplish different ends. For her, "painting is more abstract, expressing deep emotions, but not requiring the viewer to define their response with intellectual concepts."

Photography, as it deals with the apprehensible, invites a more rigorous response. But as our relation to the medium has grown more complex, so too has the definition of what constitutes a photograph. There is a tension in the uses of photography today between the ostensibly real and the extensively mediated. Carter falls heavily into the latter camp whereby what might have started as a photographic image is enhanced with layers. Her work is distressed and patinated, conveying significant age and a sense of the picture as a relic, which in some ways it is.

Pictorialist photographers at the turn of the 19th century used similar means to legitimize the medium by making its results seem more "painterly." The religious iconography Carter employs, such as wings, stained glass and cemeterial art, is further reminiscent of this genre, and lends the works a veneer of the transcendental. In our era of digital cameras artists like Carter strain to escape that technology's clinical means of representation. They prefer to transact in allegory, raising questions as opposed to presenting "truths."

In times wherein our agency is so constrained, where our ability to effect change in our lives and those around us is so thoroughly hindered, to say that the world needs less of this inclination would be churlish.

—Tim White



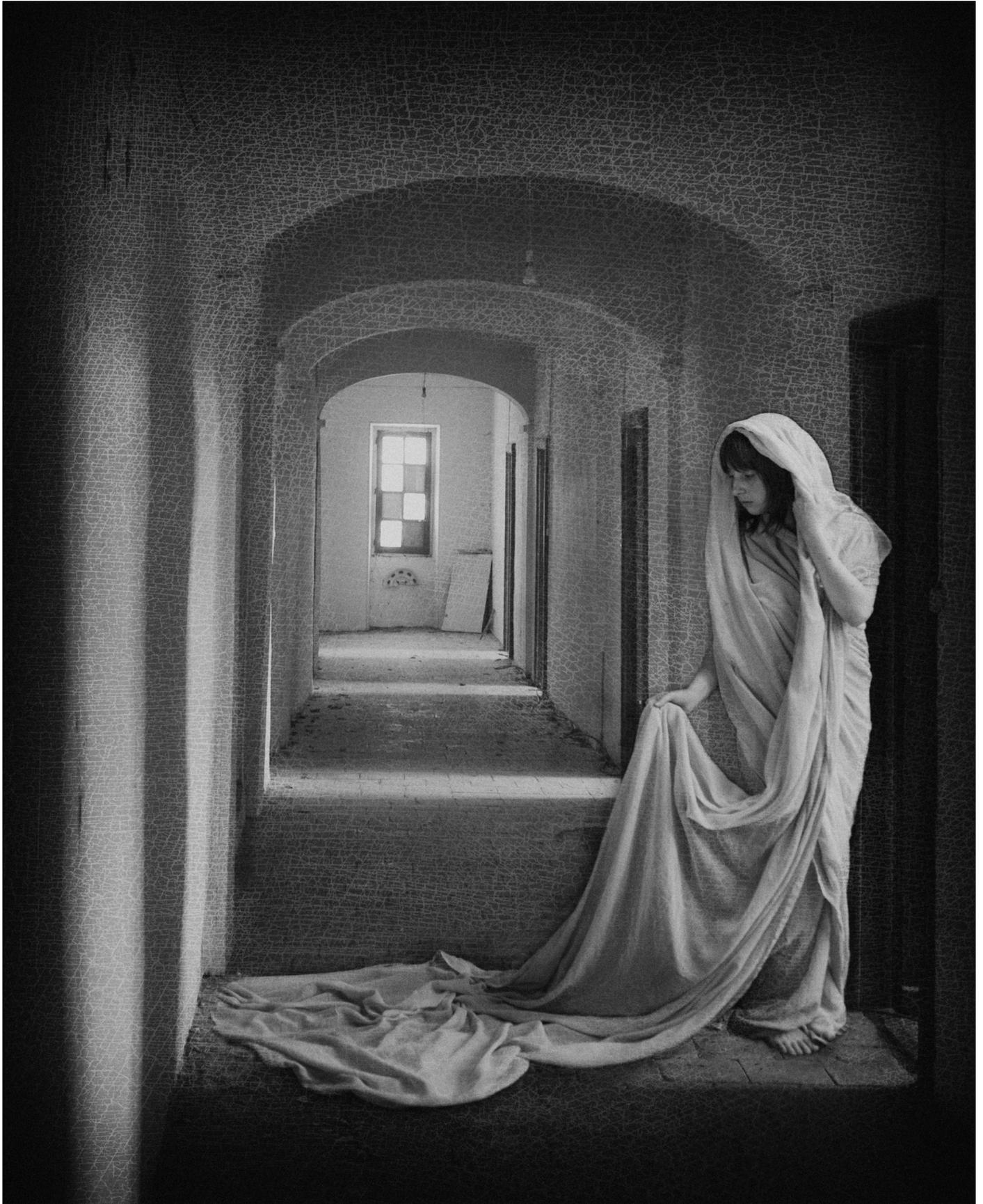
Stardust



Shed



Beyond



She's Come Undone