

# Susan Hobbs

## Melanie Schiff

### Biography

1973	Born in Chicago, Illinois
1999	BFA, New York University - Tisch School of the Arts, New York
2002	MFA, University of Illinois, Chicago

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

2022	<i>Convict Lake</i> , Night Gallery, Los Angeles
2021	<i>Blind Spots</i> , PATRON Gallery, Chicago
2018	<i>Glass Sabbath</i> , Night Gallery, Los Angeles <i>Lay Lie Lay</i> , PATRON Gallery, Chicago
2016	<i>Fair is Foul, and Foul is Fair</i> , Kate Werble Gallery, New York
2015	<i>Pains</i> , LAXART, Hollywood
2014	<i>Run, Falls</i> , Kate Werble Gallery, New York
2013	<i>The stars are not wanted now</i> , CAM Raleigh, Raleigh
2012	<i>Sun Land</i> , Kavi Grupta CHICAGO, Chicago
2010	<i>Spider</i> , Kavi Grupta, BERLIN, Berlin
2009	<i>Stones</i> , Santa Barabara Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barabara <i>The Mirror</i> , Kavi Grupta CHICAGO, Chicago
2007	<i>Water Birth</i> , Uschi Kolb, Galerie Haus Schneider, Germany
2006	<i>Underwater Photographer</i> , Kavi Grupta CHICAGO, Chicago
2004	<i>New Photographs</i> , Kavi Grupta, CHICAGO, Chicago

### Selected Group Exhibitions

2024	<i>The Swimmer</i> , Flag Art Foundation, New York
2022	<i>Photographic Pictures</i> , Anton Kern Gallery, New York <i>Shrubs</i> , Night Gallery, Los Angeles <i>Image Gardeners</i> , McEvoy Arts, San Francisco
2021	<i>A glitter of seas</i> , Dream Song, Minneapolis
2020	<i>An Infinite and Omnivorous Sky</i> , University Galleries, Illinois State University, Normal <i>Majeure Force</i> , Night Gallery, Los Angeles
2019	<i>Smoke &amp; Mirrors</i> , AF Projects, Los Angeles <i>Handless Operative</i> , Casemore Kirkeby, San Francisco
2018	<i>West By Midwest</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago <i>Pussy, King of the Pirates</i> , Maccarone Gallery, Los Angeles <i>Vanitas</i> , Kate Werble Gallery, New York <i>Picture Fiction</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
2017	<i>Women With Camera</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
2016	<i>Like a Rolling Stone</i> , Charles H. Scott Gallery, Vancouver
2015	<i>Mine. Yours. Ours.</i> , Woodstock Center for Photography, Woodstock <i>BAD BOYS BAIL BONDS ADOPT A HIGHWAY</i> , Team Gallery, New York
2014	<i>DuckRabbit</i> , Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles
2013	<i>Lens Drawings</i> , Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris
2011	<i>Mouthing (The Sentient Limb)</i> , Hyde Park Arts Center, Chicago

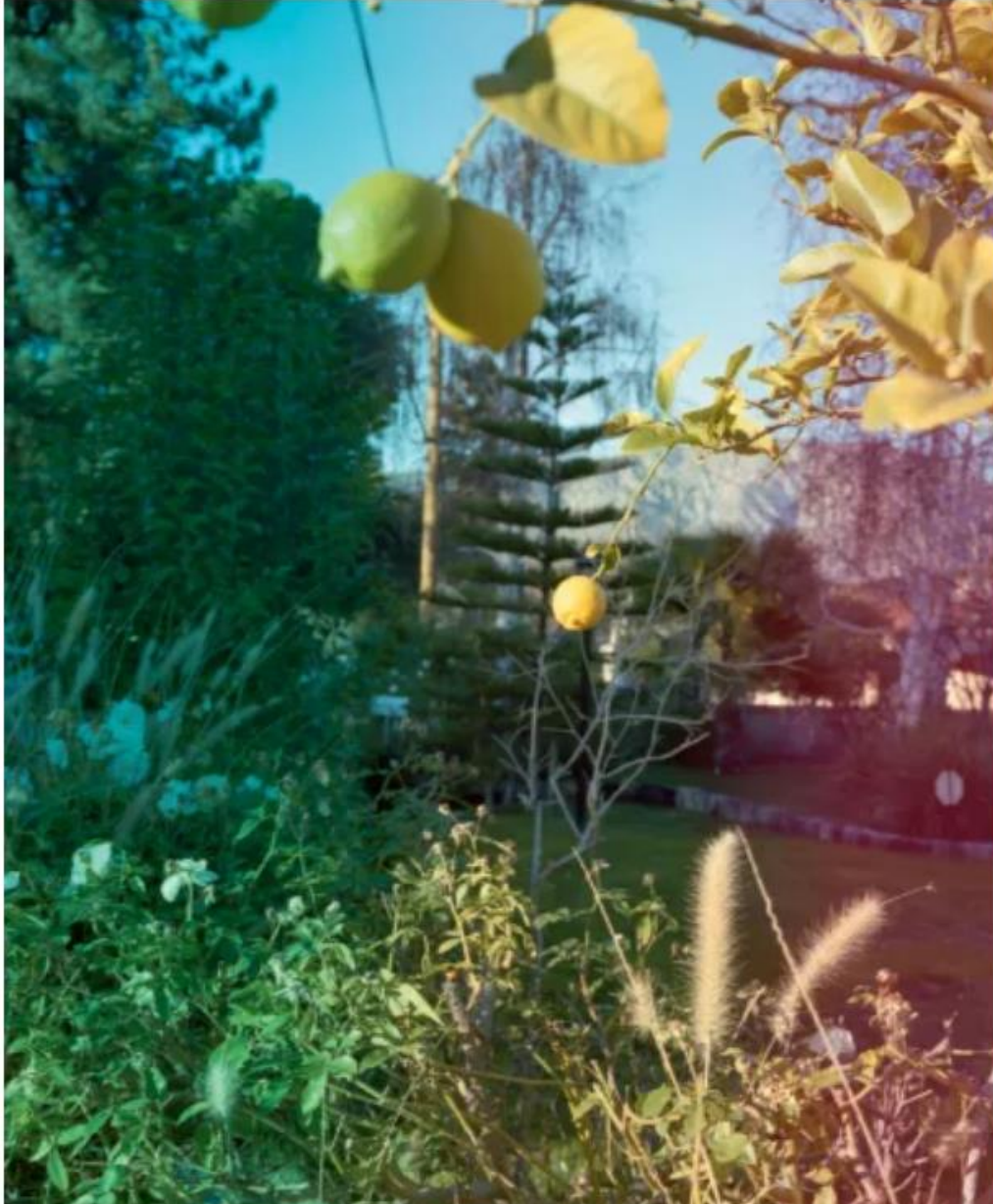
2010	<i>Kurt</i> , Seattle Art Museum, Seattle
2009	<i>Between Spaces</i> , MoMA PS1, Long Island City <i>Location</i> , Danziger Projects, New York
2008	Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York <i>Foreclosed</i> , The Print Center, Philadelphia <i>Unknown Pleasures</i> , Aspen Art Museum, Aspen “ <i>All my favourite singers couldn't sing...</i> ”, Workplace Gallery, Gateshead
2007	<i>Spring Break 2007</i> , Roots & Culture Contemporary Art Center, Chicago <i>Out the Blue</i> , Proof Gallery, Boston
2006	<i>Volta</i> , Kavi Gupta CHICAGO, Basel
2005	<i>Into the Woods</i> , McCormick Gallery, Chicago
2001	<i>Revolutions Per Minute</i> , Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago

## Collections

Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Dallas Museum Of Art, Dallas; DePaul Art Museum, Chicago; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City; Miami MOCA, Miami; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; VERBUND Collection, Vienna; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

## Selected Bibliography

Abeling, Eva. *Melanie Schiff | Exploring Emotions*. Metal Magazine, 21 November 2017;  
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 Eler, Alica. *Chat Room: Melanie Schiff*. Chicago Sun-Times, Feb 2008;  
 Foumberg, Jason. *Melanie Schiff: Lay Lie Lay*. *Patron Gallery, Chicago*. Photograph Magazine, 16 July 2018;  
 Greenberg, Blue. *Art of the moment at CAM gallery*. The Herald Sun, June 2013;  
 Herbert, Martin. *What Would Neil Young Do?*. Modern Painters, March 2009;  
 McMillian, Kyle. *Melanie Schiff 'Sun Land'*. Art in America, February 2013;  
 Neil, Jonathan T.D. *Future Greats*. Art Review, March 2009;  
 Picard, Caroline. *Light and Desire: An Interview with Melanie Schiff*. Art21, 4 January 2011;  
 Rose, Sara. *A Crowded Showcase for Everything and Anything*. The Boston Globe, 6 March 2008;  
 Schleussner, Laura. *Melanie Schiff: Spider*. Flash Art International, January - February 2011;  
 Scholis, Brian. *Melanie Schiff, Kavi Gupta Gallery*. ArtForum, November 2012;  
 Shad, Ed. *Interview with Melanie Schiff*. ArtSlant. February 2009;  
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 Workneh, Sarah. *Interview: Melanie Schiff*. Kaleidoscope, 2016;  
 Yood, James. *Melanie Schiff Sun Land at Kavi Gupta*. Art Ltd., January 2013;



## Melanie Schiff

By *Kyle MacMillan*

February 2, 2013

Given the tsunami of images that flood us daily, it seems more difficult than ever for photographers to develop a point of view that is fresh and startling enough to stand out. Yet Melanie Schiff, a Chicago native who moved to California in 2008, has managed to do just that—not in any kind of revolutionary fashion but in a quietly mysterious, subtly subversive way. She is riding a wave of attention that gained momentum after her inclusion in the 2008 Whitney Biennial, and it has not yet crested.

A dozen of Schiff's 2012 images—all inkjet prints from 120mm film—were featured in her third solo exhibition at the gallery. Differences from some of her earlier work were immediately visible, none more obvious than the change of setting. Most of these land- and streetscapes (all without people, unlike many of her previous works) were taken in or near her home in Sunland, a community in the far northeast corner of Los Angeles. Nowhere is this L.A. milieu more vivid than in *Towers*, a disorienting, upswept image shot at the base of a tall hedgerow. Jutting up behind is a clump of cypress trees that suggest the Watts Towers, likely the source of the work's title. They are set against and slightly shrouded by the ghostly, smog-filled sky so common in this city.

To help shape her slightly off-beat aesthetic, Schiff seeks out unlikely, unexpected subject matter, giving us glimpses of little worlds most of us wouldn't even know exist in L.A. The compelling *Clay Birds*, for example, depicts a shooting range, with shell casings littering the foreground and the fragments of the clay targets giving the hillside in the distance a strange, alluring reddish hue. At the same time, Schiff puts her distinctive stamp on some familiar approaches that other photographers of the last several years have used to break with tradition. These include nuanced manipulations and even the creation of what in the past might have been deemed a “bad” photograph. In *Lemon Tree*, she capitalizes on a light leak in the camera to create saturated, translucent streaks of color that gently stain this image of dense backyard flora, while *Pale Queen* is an off-level, deliberately washed-out image of spindly roses that are hardly photogenic in any conventional sense.

Despite the strength of many of the individual images, the show had its weaknesses, starting with the intermingling of mostly color images with a few scattered black-and-white photos. Not only did this result in some jarring juxtapositions, it also made Schiff's choices feel arbitrary. In addition, three photographs of houses and structures in parks suggest a different direction in her work, perhaps toward installation art, but not enough to get a full sense of that turn. The uneasy mix of these photographs with the atmospheric landscapes undermined the coherence of the show. Those concerns aside, it's hard to deny the oddly compelling originality of Schiff's photographic vision.

Photo: Melanie Schiff: *Lemon Tree*, 2012, inkjet on paper, 36 by 28¾ inches; **Kavi Gupta**



# Melanie Schiff at Night Gallery

October 10, 2018  
Text by Jessica Simmons-Reid



Melanie Schiff, *Baguette* (2018). Pigmented Inkjet Print Mounted to Dibond, Natural Walnut Frame, 40 x 50 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Night Gallery. Photo: Nik Massey.

The two discrete images that bookend *Glass Sabbath*, Melanie Schiff's compact yet poetically profuse exhibition of photographs at Night Gallery, together succinctly convey the overarching conceptual temperament of this body of work. Beginning with *Waxing* (all works 2018), an intimately cropped image of a woman expressing

droplets of milk from her lactating breast, the exhibition spills out like a small sentence along the walls of a single room. It concludes with *Baguette*, a sumptuous still-life of a perfectly crusty loaf reclining across folds of velvet, recalling a nude in repose. Schiff's two images both sensuously present corporeal forms that bestow physical sustenance, demonstrating a photographic sensibility that melds the subjecthood of both bodies and objects—one as surrogate for the other. This surrogacy also extends to perception: as bodies and objects collapse, so does the space between material tactility and pictorial representation. As such, her photographs propose sight as a haptically intimate act akin to direct physical touch.

Similar material gestures variously echo within the accompanying photographs: beads of melted wax in *Two Candles, Black* recall the slow drip of breastmilk in both *Waxing* and *Waning*; in *Boule*, another bread loaf gathered in velvet visibly references a crowning infant in a viscerally abstract image of childbirth. Installed below eye level, the photograph directly entwines the viewer's gaze with the physical presence of her own body, magnifying the oblique relationship between the two, and heightening the connection between sight and touch. And like the body, Schiff's objects drip, crack, and buckle—a display of mortal tangibility vulnerable to the inevitable physical metamorphoses wrought by the passage of time.



Melanie Schiff, *Glass Sabbath* (2018) (installation view). Image courtesy of the artist and Night Gallery.  
Photo: Jeff McLane.

***Glass Sabbath's*** perceptual thematics coalesce in ***Red Door***, which initially lacks the elusory aesthetic draw of its counterparts. A red door bears the marks and fingerprints of past human touch; an additional mark appears when the camera's flash imprints a reflective orb on its surface. Here Schiff directly implicates the viewer in the transformation of the subject, metamorphosing the visual plane into a haptic one, and narrowing—if only momentarily—the threshold between the concrete and the photographic. *Melanie Schiff: Glass Sabbath* runs from September 8–October 6, 2018 at Night Gallery (2276 E 16th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90021).



Melanie Schiff, ***Waxing*** (2018). Pigmented Inkjet Print Mounted to Dibond, Natural Walnut Frame with Color Gel Face Mount, 17 x 23 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Night Gallery. Photo: Nik Massey.



Melanie Schiff, *Two Candles, Black* (2018). Silver Gelatin Print Mounted to Museum Board, Natural Walnut Frame 20 x 25 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Night Gallery. Photo: Nik Massey.

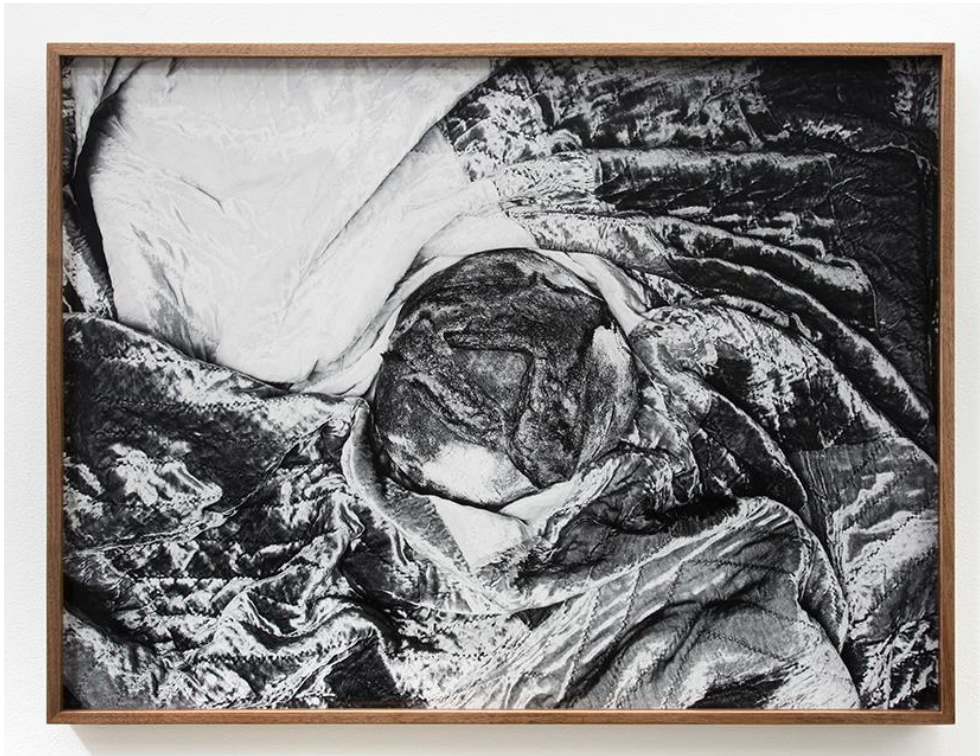


Melanie Schiff, *Red Door* (2018). C-Print Mounted to Dibond, Natural Walnut Frame, 20.75 x 24.75 x 1.5 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Night Gallery. Photo: Nik Massey.





Melanie Schiff, **Candle** (2018). Pigmented Inkjet Print Mounted to Dibond, Natural Walnut Frame, 20 x 25 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Night Gallery. Photo: Nik Massey.



Melanie Schiff, **Boule** (2018). Pigmented Inkjet Print Mounted to Dibond, Natural Walnut Frame, 30.75 x 40.75 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and Night Gallery. Photo: Nik Massey.

REVIEWS

## Melanie Schiff: Lay Lie Lay, Patron Gallery, Chicago

BY JASON FOUNBERG, JULY 16, 2018

Minimalist nudes and quiet still lifes comprised Melanie Schiff's first solo exhibition at [Patron Gallery](#), titled *Lay Lie Lay*. Since the early 2000s Schiff has consistently sought a feeling of stoned euphoria in her portraits, landscapes, and light studies. This exhibition extended her quest for beautiful stillness into the experience of motherhood, with unsparing examinations of her own maternal body in *Lay*, 2018, and *Lie*, 2018, and the crisp silver-gelatin print of a baby's blanket in *Ruby Verso*, 2018, the fetish object of a child's comfort second only to the breast.

Schiff's nudes could be the offspring of Edgar Degas's shapely studies of bathers and Francesca Woodman's nude self-portraits in which she posed with circular props. More distinctly, Schiff is grappling with depictions of her own body after giving birth to two children. Throughout art history, the fertile body has too often been depicted in its adolescence. Here, Schiff conquers a contemporary depiction of womanhood by showing her own body and baring her own deflated breasts after nursing.

Centered in the spare exhibition of just 13 prints were two images of circular glass tabletops, peering out like eyes or breasts (*Glass Circle, I*, and *Glass Circle, II*, both 2018). Schiff often courts this kind of near-abstraction to tie her portraits to a symbolic narrative, a miniature universe comprised of the self and the family, of which we are given glimpses of intimate moments, including a close-up color photograph of a closed red door; behind it is her husband's studio. Schiff shoots on film, achieving a moody, grainy pictorialism by pushing the speed during the processing phase. The result is a peaceful calm and a shade of human happiness.

# *Light and Desire: An Interview with Melanie Schiff*

By Caroline Picard | Jan 4, 2011



Melanie Schiff, "Self-Portrait After John's Party," 2008, Digital C print

While always being aware of her work, Melanie Schiff snapped into focus shortly after I first heard about Ox-bow, the School of the Art Institute's residency program in Saugatuck, Michigan. Friends came back from a summer there looking a little wild. Melanie's work—color-rich photographs of youths blending into trees, whiskey bottles glinting like a candle in a bath of morning sun—offers a portrait, not just of Ox-bow, but of a feral, post-adolescent youth. It would be inaccurate to distill her prolific energy into one characterization; her work is lush, well-composed and ever-sensitive to silky light. Those aesthetic concerns transcend specific subjects. In addition to empty skate-park landscapes and attic rooms, she has made self-portraits with bong hits, another with raspberry-nipples, another involves spewing water in the sun (always reminds me of Tony Tasset),



or the one above, where she reclines in a sea of empty bottles glinting like a deteriorated Jeff Wall interior: these gestures position her-self-as-artist, approximately tied to a flanking landscape of, often exclusive, culture. Whether holding the Neil Young album before her head, or photographing a motel room once occupied by Kurt Cobain, her presence adds an idiosyncratic awareness to these cultural referents. In an effort to explore that affect, I asked her a series of questions, primarily about the camera and its gaze. This is one interview in a series of many that explores the self on either side of the camera, while thinking through the respective position of the artist.



Melanie Schiff, "Emergency," 2006, Digital C print,  
28" x 20"

**Caroline Picard:** *What happens to your perspective when you look through the camera?*

**Melanie Schiff:** I think a lot of it is just practice. When I look through a camera, everything exists on a plane; now start to try and organize the visual space, which is a lot easier said than done. It can be fairly frustrating — many times things don't translate right away and it takes a lot of problem solving. I think there are perspectives that I find pleasurable that I also feel have a universal appeal. Art history is an archive of compositions, and you end up referencing them consciously or not. I feel like when I'm trying to compose a photograph,



that there's almost a sweet spot in the frame, and it's just about trying to figure out where that is.

*CP: Is the camera lens a consistent frame of reference/filter for you?*

**MS:** Yes, but at the same time, the camera still surprises me. While I think I can understand how something will look photographed now, better than let's say ten years ago, there's still a sense of wonder when I get my film back. Things fail that I thought would work, and I'm surprised by what images I find compelling.

*CP: Does looking through the camera change your experience of yourself?*

**MS:** I'm not sure if it changes my experience of myself, or if I'm someone specifically drawn to camera-based photography because of the person I am. I feel like photography is somewhat of an outsider's pursuit, even photographers whose main goal is to seem as though they are part of the situation are many times the observer more than the participant. Photography allows you to look without distractions. That kind of experience can be meditative and calming under the best circumstances, which may not always be the case, but worth trying for.



Melanie Schiff, "Anna I & Anna II," 2008, Digital C print,  
50" x 40" (2)

*CP: What is the difference, in your mind, between a self-portrait and a portrait?*

**MS:** That's a hard one, because I think many things that are labeled a self-portrait or portraits are neither. Meaning that just because one photographs a person or oneself does not mean that the image is reflective of that individual. When I use myself in a photograph, I think of myself as a symbol for artist/maker/woman; in many ways it's the most reductive way to include a human figure. When I started taking photographs of other people, mostly young woman, it was because I really wanted to be a photographer again. I missed being on the other side of the camera, I'm not sure my black and white photographs of young women would fulfill my criteria of a portrait. I think the subjects straddle between being models and individuals.

*CP: Can you talk a little about your ability and interest in quoting music icons into your work? I was thinking of that image of you in the woods with the Neil Young album cover, or the swimming pool image with the Joni Mitchell album....I guess I'm interested in how you incorporate yourself into these different histories, somehow?*



Melanie Schiff, "Cannon Falls (Cobain Room)," 2007, Digital C Print, 40" x 100"

**MS:** I haven't used that iconography in my work for the last few years. While lately they've taken on different forms, the more I think about it the more I believe that I still have many of the same concerns. The album covers are about a wanting and desire; I have such an attachment to certain albums and objects that I've felt a need to insert myself into their history. I think all of my references have to do with a love of the subject matter, whatever it may be.

*CP: A couple years ago or so, you moved from Chicago to California. Do you feel like the change in environment has influenced your work?*

**MS:** The biggest change for me moving from Chicago to California is the quality of light. Light in Southern California can be harsh, strong, cutting, and even on gray days, there's a sharpness that feels different than light in the Midwest. It's still taking me awhile to get used to — initially the sunlight seemed so bothersome that I would only shoot early in the morning. I really like the Los Angeles winters, which I suppose come as no surprise having moved here from Chicago. But what I really like is in the winter when it rains and how it seems the city is not really prepared for how much overgrowth occurs. There's this terrible smell that took me awhile to figure out, but I realized it is the smell of plants rotting, which also becomes pleasant somehow, because it makes me feel like I live in a wild place, where nothing can be totally controlled.

*CP: Do you feel like you have a relationship to an audience?*

**MS:** Certain places interest me because of their history, even if it's a fictional history, specifically places that have a creative (for lack of a better word) history. It may be somehow connected to being a photographer, there's always a desire of looking from the outside in, being a privileged observer. I like to think that there's the same spiritual draw for me and maybe others; to places where artists make work, where songs are written, where trees grow, as there would be to temples and churches for others. Some places have a uniqueness that only exists in moments, which is yet another capability of the camera, to take that moment, or sometimes make that moment, so that it can last forever.

*CP: I was wondering if you could talk a little about your newer projects—I was thinking about your skate park images, though perhaps they're not new....*



Melanie Schiff, "Hell Room," 2009, Digital C Print, 30.5" x 34"

**MS:** Actually the skate park piece was made in Chicago, it was kinda prelude to my move, and while I haven't done pieces with figures in them since moving here, I did shoot a good lot of the mirror and mastodon body of work at this secret skate pipe at the base of Mt. Baldy out where I teach. I love how the place had a strange sense of both past and future — I wanted that work to have a real science fiction feel to it...a bit like Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. Looking back, maybe that had do with my feelings regarding the move — California is so different from the Midwest. I think I'm still looking at through a stranger's eyes.



Melanie Schiff, "Halley's Comet," 2010, Digital C-print,  
40" x 33"