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Art in America

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Annalies Strba at Jason McCoy

The Swiss artist Annalies Strba began taking photographs of her children in the '70s, when they were small, and although the images were not all conventional, she at first didn't think of them as art. A comparison to Sally Mann might seem apt, but Strba's early black-and-white works have a disconcerting sense of happenstance and disorder—viewers might more likely think of Helen Levitt's street photos or the English artist Richard Billingham's revealing shots of his lower-class family.

Strba is little known in the U.S., although she has exhibited widely in Europe and is the subject of several books. Since 1997 she has shot only videos, and the large images she shows are video stills. Her children are now adults with children of their own; she's still making "family" images but also using her daughters (no longer her husband or son) more distantly, as models, sometimes nude.

This presentation of recent work revealed the continuity of her interests in figures and her secondary attraction to landscape and architecture. But the large color

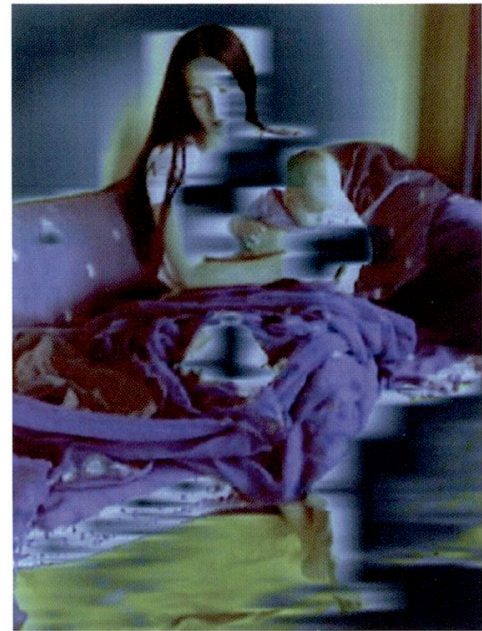
ago or sci-fi movie effects of today.

A grid of small images in the entrance gallery showed the range—faces, figures, flowers—in overall colors ranging from greens to oranges, rain-forested or tropically hot. In an exceptionally clear image shown in the main gallery, a small

girl leans against a tree in a softly light-infused forest of tall trees. Elsewhere a woman reclines in a nondescript space—the shape of the figure is the focus—and in another image a woman holds an infant in her lap as she sits on a sofa in a dark but contemporary interior, her torso smeared with darkness that would seem to be a cast shadow, except that it does not color the infant.

Two contrasting videos were shown on wall-mounted flat-screen monitors. One was a close-up of a dark-haired woman sleeping. Her face is nearly motionless; it's difficult to tell if she's actually breathing as she lies radiantly white-skinned in a glistening, slightly soft focus. The second video is a colorized mon-

Annalies Strba: *Nyima 307*, 2006, inkjet print on canvas, 65 by 43 1/4 inches; at Jason McCoy. (Review on p. 129.)



tage of Venetian canals: distorting waves of unnatural saturated hues plus slow scanning of the low-rise skylines make it dreamy and hot. In a separate, darkened space, a video projected at wall scale involved motion, sometimes avid, without overall narrative. Long sequences showed children making their way through tall grasses, downhill toward a fruit tree, or a dark-haired woman, wearing a red dress but sometimes topless, playing at posing on a simple chair in a largely empty room.

Strba is not casual about her imagery, but far more concerned with mood than reportage. She seems enamored of color, swimming in it, not so much picturing her family as allowing them to serve as elements in her engrossing tableaux. —Janet Koplos