

BARBARA ASTMAN: PERSONAL/PERSONA A 20-YEAR SURVEY

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personal persona

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CURATOR: LIZ WYLIE  
ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON



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## Introduction

The gathering together of twenty years of Barbara Astman's art production, both for exhibition and for reproduction and discussion in this catalogue, provides the opportunity to evaluate that body, to attempt to examine and ponder it, not only in its own context, but also in the various contexts of its creation and reception.

The structure and format of this catalogue are intended to parallel the artist's practice, which has been generally to create work in discrete series, each one quite distinct from another. Rather than presenting the catalogue text as one seamless whole then, it has been conceived as units or blocks, each one tied to specific groups of work. And rather than relying on the single, "authoritative" voice of the exhibition's curator, the catalogue text is interpolated with, at times wholly consisting of, quotations from the artist's statements over the years and excerpts from relevant texts by other authors on Astman's work. By these means, it is hoped to evoke some flavour and indication of the artist's own ideas as well as the critical reception of her work at any given period. Interspersed with these components are contemporary elucidating and/or connecting passages by the curator, making for a potential multi-dimensional reading of the artist's work.

As well as paralleling the structure of Astman's artistic practice, this essay format can also be seen as a metaphor for the experience a woman can have of her own life: that of finding



1. *Strawberry Cherry Queen*, 1973, black-and-white silver print and collage, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm.  
Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.



2. *Untitled*, mid-1970s, black-and-white silver print, 8 × 10 in. 20.3 × 25.4 cm.

herself in different settings and situations as she changes and grows, each new circumstance forming a separate chapter; fallow times, and periods of production and new directions. Certainly, Barbara Astman's practice has tended to reflect, embody and engage with this structure of lived experience, so it is intended that the catalogue format will underline and harmonize with this aspect of her work.

### The Early Work 1974 – 1977

When Barbara Astman graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 1973 at the age of twenty-two she began immediately to exhibit her work professionally. She was included in group shows in Toronto, and in 1973 she had a solo exhibition at Laura Jones' Baldwin Street Gallery of Photography. Astman's early and experimental work with the colour photocopier attracted wide attention and interest. In the mid-seventies, colour photocopier technology was not yet available in Toronto, so the artist made periodic visits to her home town of Rochester, New York, to produce the pieces. Astman was instrumental in establishing the pioneering Visual Arts Ontario's Colour Xerography program (which is still in existence), and she continued to administer it until 1983. Her own idiosyncratic structure in her use of the medium was inspired by Mexican serial, photographic "soap opera" magazines. Relying on a storyboard, narrative format (for example, depicting her friends and acquaintances on imaginary trips), Astman also played off traditional forms of imagery in popular culture, such as the family snapshot and photo album.

Initially, Astman had been studying silversmithing and design at the Rochester Institute of Technology, School for American Craftsmen, hoping to develop a practical outlet for her interest and talent in the visual arts. She eventually found this unsatisfying and socially irrel-



3. *Untitled*, from the “Erotic” series, 1975, black-and-white silver print, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm.  
Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.



4. *Untitled*, 1975-78, black-and-white silver print from “traditional portraits” group, 8 × 10 in.,  
20.3 × 25.4 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.

evant. She toured the Ontario College of Art facilities when she visited Toronto to see the Bauhaus exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1970, and decided to apply. (Now, some twenty-four years later, she is still on faculty at the OCA and has been one of the College's important instructors in alternative processes in photography, drawing and painting.)

Astman first studied sculpture at OCA, not photography, starting with clay and plaster, creating traditional busts and heads. She also did some work in aluminum, making wave forms, which she then placed in beach settings. It was in photo-documenting her sculptural pieces that she stumbled across photography and realized she had found a medium with which she could truly have free rein to explore the areas and issues that excited her. She moved quickly and deftly into black-and-white photography, sewn-and-stuffed photo pieces, created using pre-sensitized photo linen, then her colour photocopy work. With her quasi-documentary style and exploration of new photo-media, Astman inserted herself into the vanguard of so-called "camera art" activity in Canada, along with artists such as Suzy Lake. ("Camera art" was the term used by American artist and writer Les Levine in his catalogue essay for a show by the same name of twenty-four Quebec artists, produced by Optica in Montreal in 1974.)

Astman's art of the mid-1970s was heady, quirky, visually rich, all created in a spirit of inno-

cent celebration. Ubiquitous nudity, funky appliqués, casual non-traditional portraits of friends and lovers embodied a bottom-line daring disregard for the generally unquestioned male hegemony in art schools and within both the market and prevailing ideology of the art world in the 1970s. A feminist approach to art stemming from the women's movement of the 1960s was only in its infancy at this time. (Judy Chicago published *Through the Flower* in 1975; Lucy Lippard, *From the Centre*, in 1976.) Astman's work was among the first that any of us saw that was unabashedly *female*. With the personal, private feeling of entries in diaries or journals, or items pasted into scrapbooks, Astman's images were intimate and appealing, but also amazingly brazen and confident.

The artist's use of the storyboard format in the mid-seventies took the conceptual grid apparatus a step further, playing with the notion of narrative. Works like *Some reasons for getting to know Italy, or, On Tour with Myra* (1977) weren't strident, belligerent, or overtly political, but they were completely her *own* and they seemed to embody a blithe disregard for the intimidating paradigms we faced as art students and emerging artists in those years. They seemed, oddly, to be about self-expression, which is what so many of us were bludgeoned into abandoning at art school in the 1970s in favour of a rigorous conceptualism. It is important at least to attempt to mentally reconstruct how exciting and radical this work was, back in 1974. In Canada at this time, conceptual work was still at the fore, but the notion of the



5. *Untitled*, 1975-78, colour photocopy, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm.

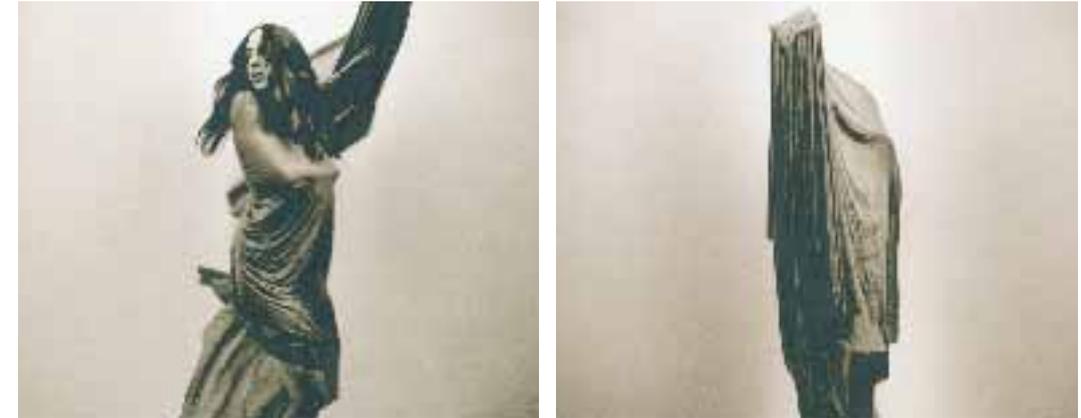


6. *Untitled*, 1975-78, colour photocopy, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm.

supremacy or authority of earth works and much other neo-dada “information” art was dwindling. New Image painting began in Canada in the mid- to late-seventies with artists like Tim Zuck and Eric Fischl working at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax and painters like Shirley Wiitasalo in Toronto. Also in Toronto, the “generation” of abstract painters following in the footsteps of Jack Bush (who died in 1977) began to dominate the upscale, collectible scene. They were to be followed by the so-called Queen Street “generation” of artists including those who organized the 1983 *Chromaliving* exhibition, for example.

To experience Astman’s mid-1970s bodies of work now is to do so through a pronounced veil of nostalgia, both for a time that is gone and for a period of life when one was adult enough to have mature experiences, but young enough to be free from responsibilities. Surely unaware at the time that she was embalming this experience in her work, Astman captured, nevertheless, the richness and poignancy of these years, just on the fly.

In 1976 Astman was taken on by the Sable-Castelli Gallery in Toronto, where she continued to exhibit her work regularly through the 1980s. This exposure and “accreditation” brought her art to the attention of magazine and newspaper reviewers, and, indeed, most of her exhibitions were reviewed both in the local press and in national art magazines. Generally, her



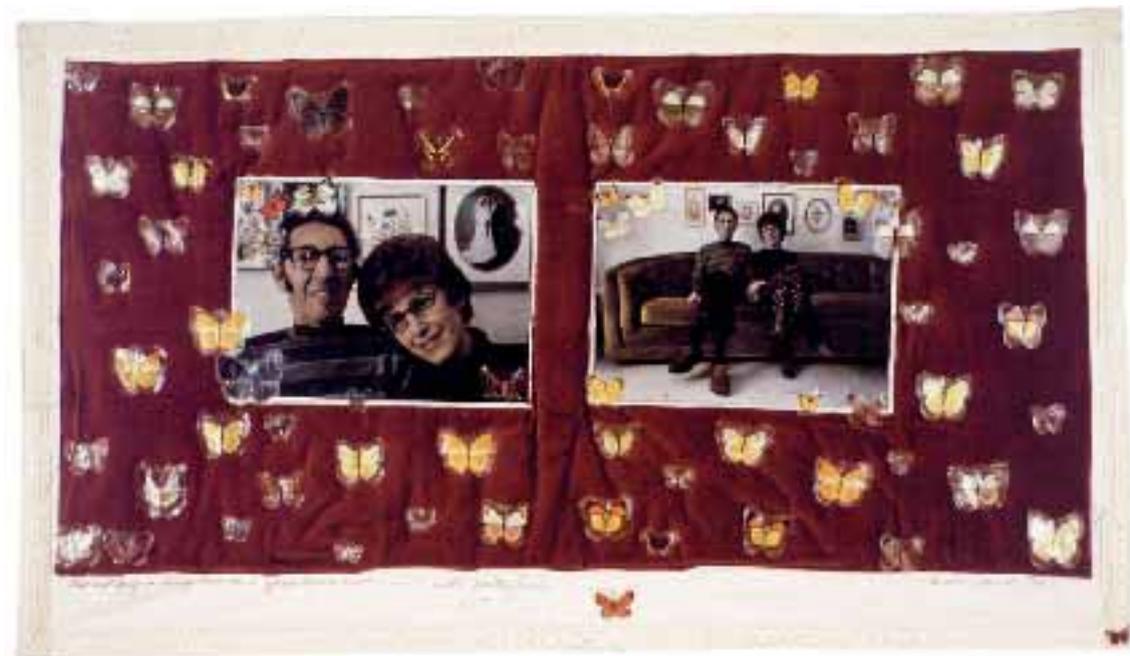
9. *Untitled*, weather balloon drapery group, six black-and-white Kodalith prints, each 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.



7. *Untitled*, 1975-78, colour photocopy (also is a detail of *David Craven and Art History*, exh. no. 15), 8×10 in., 20.3×25.4 cm.



15. *David Craven and Art History*, 1975, colour photocopy, 48×60 in., 121.9×152.4 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.



10. *Bert and George in the living room*, 1973, mixed media, 31 × 52 in., 78.7 × 132 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.

reception was positive, and people began to follow her production. Toronto *Globe and Mail* art critic John Bentley Mays asked eagerly in 1984, “What is Barbara Astman going to think of next?”

In 1975, Lorraine Monk, of the Stills Division of the National Film Board, gave Astman a solo show in their Ottawa exhibition space, and she subsequently made a substantial purchase of the body of work exhibited (now in the collection of the NFB Stills Division’s successor, the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography). This was important accreditation and encouragement also, especially since her work was not about straight photography, but photography moved radically into the realms of sculpture and design.

As well as participating in several group exhibitions of photography, both in Canada and the U.S.A. during the 1970s, in 1976 Astman was included in a group exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario of artists using the colour photocopy medium, organized by curator Karyn Allen. This show was among the first in North America to explore the work of artists using this new medium and sprang from Allen’s interest in artists exploring new technologies.

### **The Visual Narrative Series 1978 – 1979**

Astman began working with the Polaroid camera in 1977, while on vacation, when she had no access to a colour photocopier. She instantly responded to the sensuous, soft surface of the SX-70 prints (as opposed to the grain present in silver-process photography). As well, the richness and painterly quality of the colour was very appealing. And the so-called “instant camera” was immediate, always accessible, unlike the colour photocopy machine, which was highly cumbersome and, of course, not portable. As with her work in the colour photocopy medium, Astman was considered on the edge of exploring this new technology as an artist. She was not consciously chasing for this status, and recalls feeling satisfied with the instant camera mostly because it could work as quickly as her own imagination and thought process. It provided instant feedback and gratification.

Continuing to pursue the storyboard format with the *Visual Narrative Series*, Astman used a group of six images in each work, giving the viewer a sense of progression from one image to another, and thus leading to a narrative reading of the pieces. Astman wanted words to play a more dominant role in her work and introduced text “captions” under each image. Photo/text is now a common format/strategy, practised by many artists, especially those interested in deconstruction and politically feminist art, but this was not so in 1978. Astman

came to the conjunction of photo/text intuitively, intent on exploring her immediate emotional environment – her friends and relationships. She was daringly revealing and seemed to have no qualms about making the private and personal aspects of her life open to public scrutiny and criticism.

Twenty-three untitled pieces make up the *Visual Narrative Series*. They all began with a grid of six Polaroids. Six short sentences were composed by the artist to be arranged under these images. These were then reshot and blown up to either a 30 x 40- or a 48 x 60-inch size. The grid was inspired by the storyboard format of preparation work for films and from the Mexican serial photo-magazines, mentioned earlier. Implying narrative, the grid itself was also a conveniently neutral format, a benign organizing factor for Astman. It removed the emphasis from a single image and spread the reading throughout the sequence of images in each work.

The six-line captions were drafted and revised until they worked back-and-forth with the photographic images, making for an integrated experience. They were intended to work as indicators of an individual’s emotional states and that person’s impact on, and interrelationship with, others living along with them. For example:



16. *Untitled (Visual Narrative Series)*, 1978-79, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.



17. *Untitled (Visual Narrative Series)*, 1978-79, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of Edwin L. Stringer, Q.C., Toronto.

*She was annoyed with herself*

*but for no specific reason*

*She said she felt disturbed*

*but at no one in particular*

*She was told it had something to do with the cycles of the moon*

*she preferred to believe it was hidden resentment*

– text from the untitled *Visual Narrative* piece in the collection of the Winnipeg Art Gallery (not in exhibition)

The *tone* of the writing is descriptive, detached, as is the camera’s relationship to the sitter, yet the content of the supposed “narrative” seems intimate and personal.

*The artist’s search for a pictorial language to communicate her intuitions about this subtle network of relationships [images, words, private emotions] began with her Visual Narrative Series, first exhibited in 1979, which was based on a visual system devised by filmmakers, the storyboard. Astman photographed herself and assorted friends, selected six shots from each session, arranged them in a sequence and composed a narrative to run parallel with the images based on discussions with her subjects, her own ideas about them and her feelings while writing. The results were a striking fusion of self-exposure, voyeurism and portraiture, which could be read as pop sociology, autobiography, or*

*simply, exercises in visual loveliness.*

– Adele Freedman, *Barbara Astman: Red*. Lethbridge, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1981

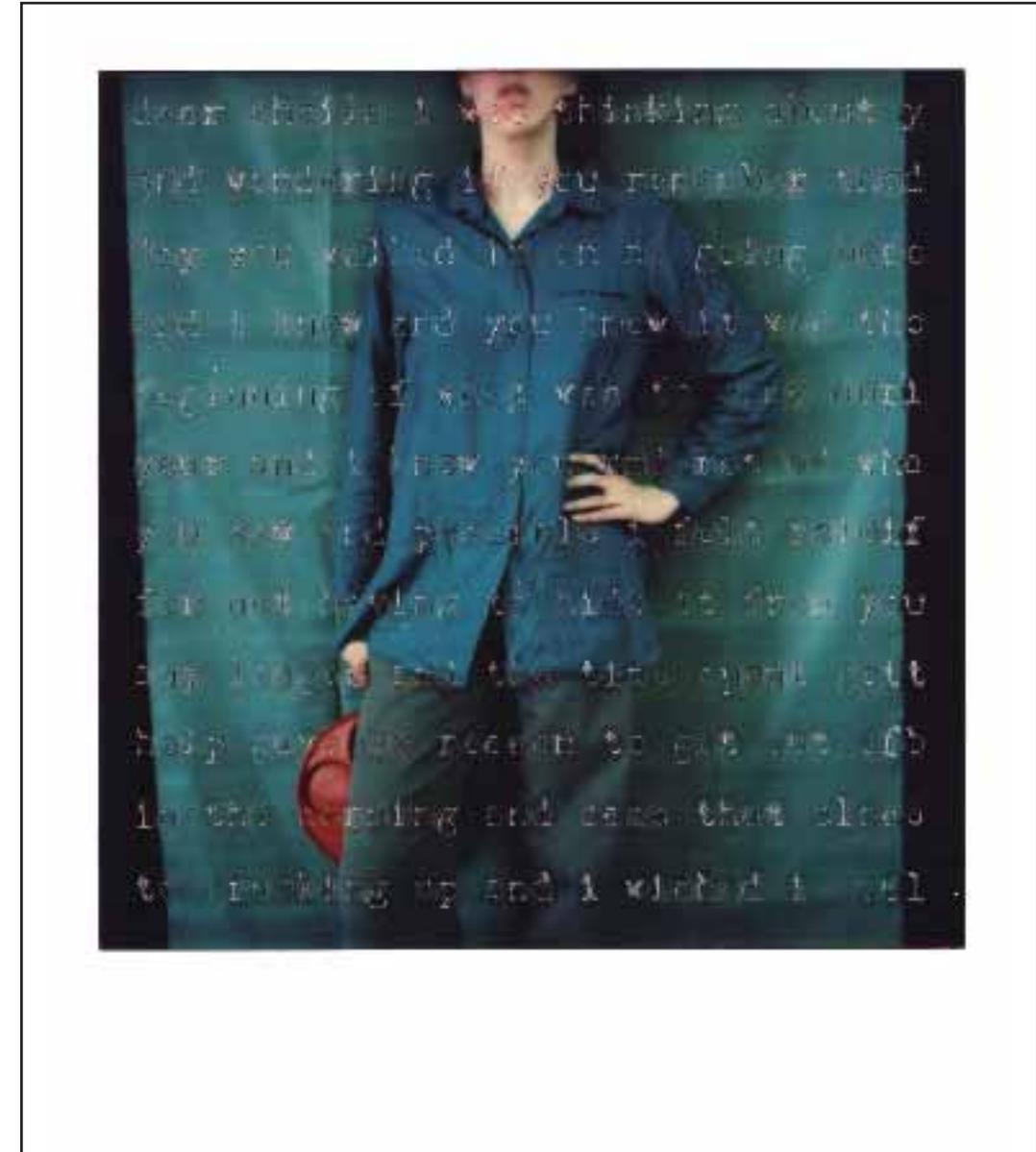
*The Visual Narrative Series came about through a period of investigation and exploration beginning in 1978 ... The storyboard notion still prevails, only now the stories are taking on a greater importance than in the past ... I arrive at the narratives through a number of ways, including discussions with each person while photographing, insights into that person through years of friendship, and my own emotional space at the time of writing ... I have a desire to expose the viewer to my thoughts, my feelings; to extend a notion of intimacy, yet somehow keeping it all at a distance ... I deliberately chose an SX-70 camera for the recording of this series as it allowed me greater intimacy while shooting ... In many instances [the instant production of a picture each time] helped to trigger the direction of the narrative.*

– Barbara Astman, statement in *The Winnipeg Perspective 1979 – Photo/Extended Dimensions*. Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1979, p. 8.

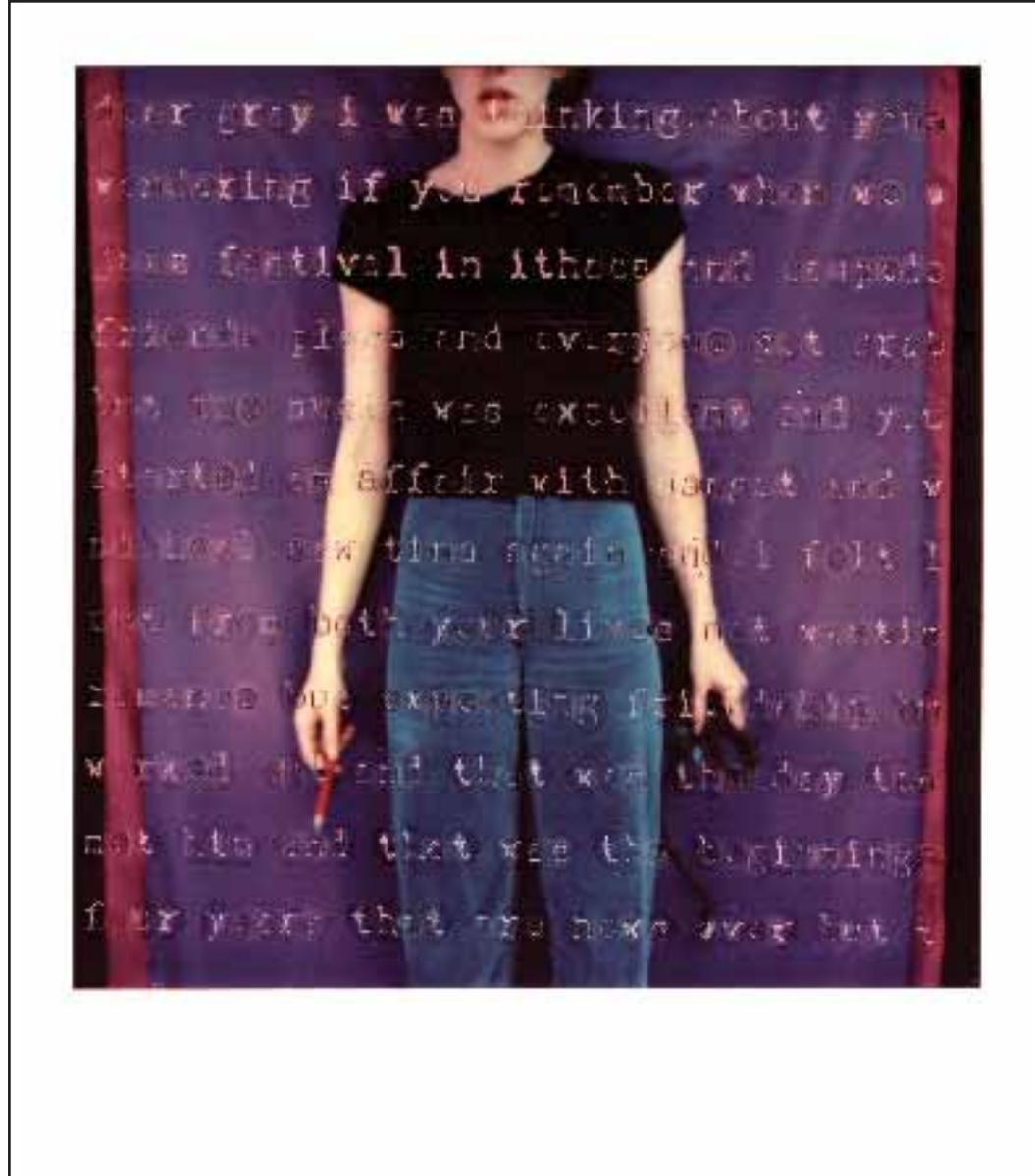
**Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series 1979 – 1980**

In this series of life-sized, colour photo murals, Astman used herself as the model in every piece and typed spontaneous letters to her absent friends directly over her image. Acting as an art director, she selected the colour of both her clothes and the fabric backdrops, and stood so that her image would be cropped below her eyes and above her knees. Assuming a simple, frontal pose, she took her own photographs, using a self-timer. Astman's posed body resembles a fragment of ancient statuary, anonymous within the frame, and creates a shape that fits and fills the square composition. Without the eyes, her figure is not a self-portrait, removing the emphasis on herself as a subject. Instead, her interest was in her memories and thoughts of friends. As soon as the SX-70 photograph came out of the camera, Astman would pop it into an electric typewriter and begin to pound out a spontaneous letter to a friend, triggered solely by remembering each of them. The typewriter keys pushed aside the film emulsion, revealing the white backing underneath. These Polaroids were reshot and blown up to 48 × 60-inch murals for the series, bringing her depicted body to life size.

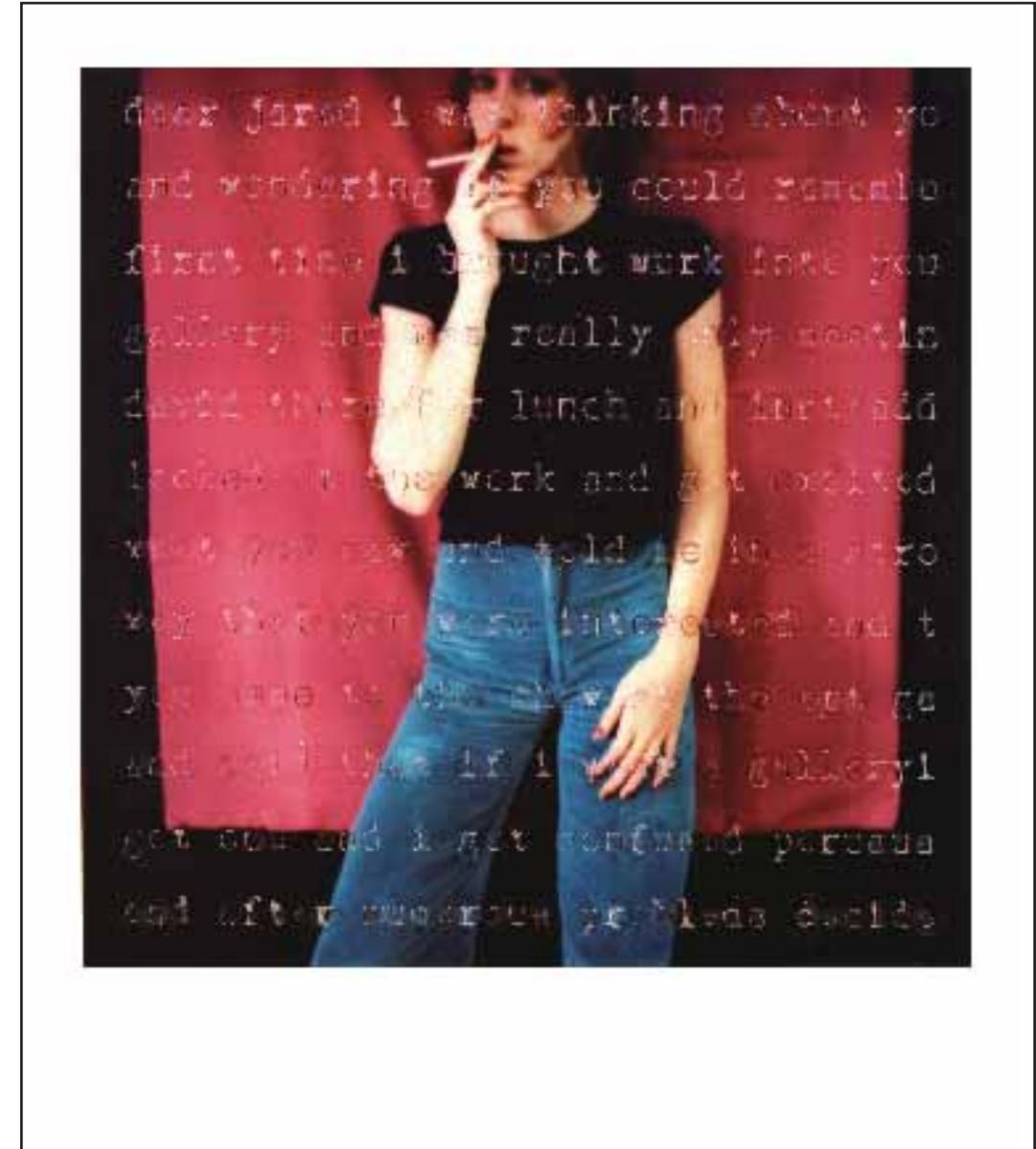
Astman says she feels the words acted as a textured barrier between the viewer and the anonymous woman depicted in the photograph. "They have a physical presence beyond their narrative presence." (statement in 1990/91 AGO *Artists with Their Work* sheet) Certainly, the works have an intriguing ambiguity of emphasis and dynamic spatial tension.



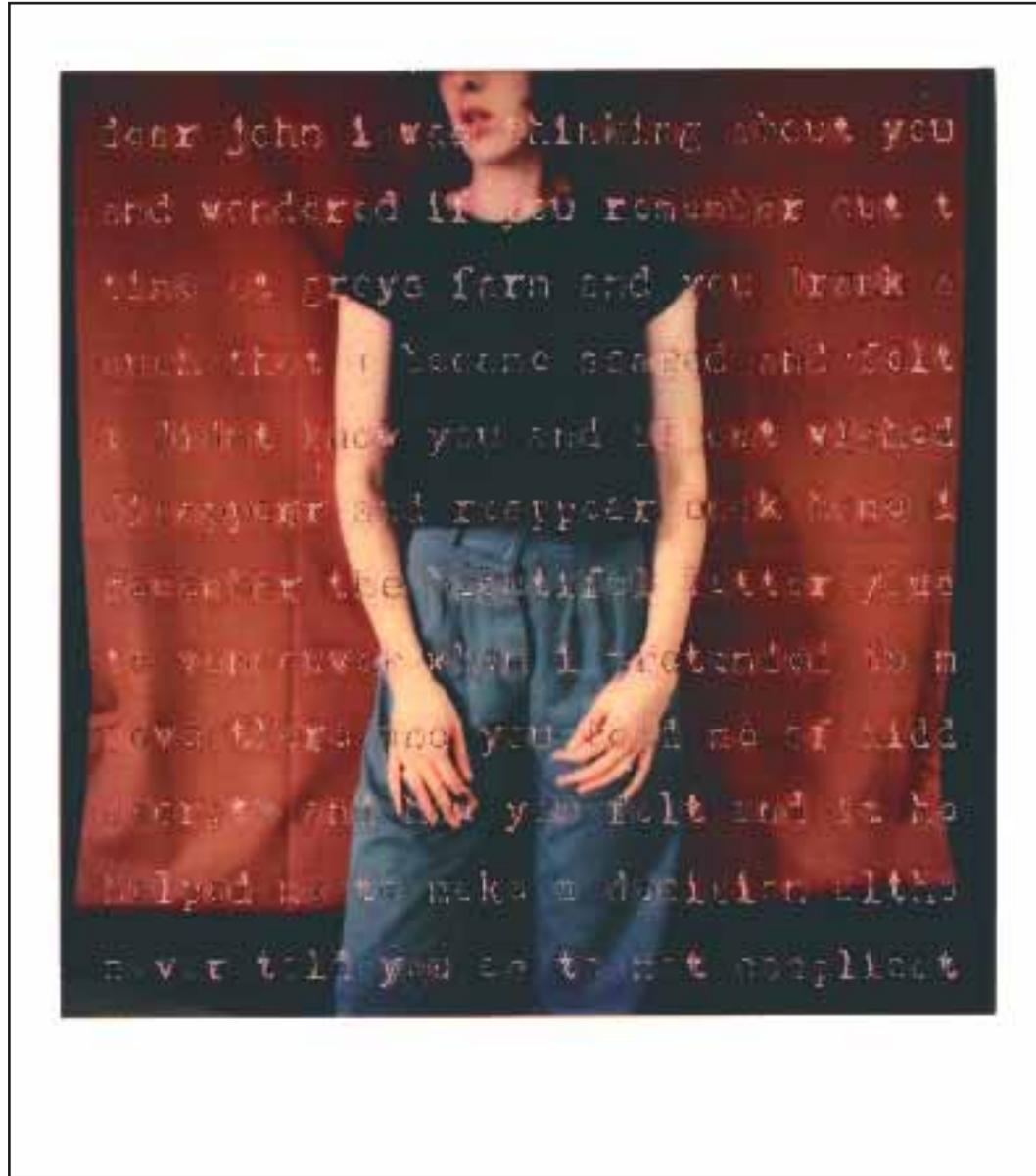
19. *Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series*, 1979-80, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm.  
Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.



21. *Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series*, 1979-80, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm.  
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.



20. *Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series*, 1979-80, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm.  
Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario.



22. *Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series*, 1979-80, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of McMillan Binch, Toronto.

*Whereas in the Visual Narrative Series it was possible to dissociate the images from the text, now the two had become irreversibly fused. The photographs are philosophical paradoxes expressed in visual language. It is impossible to reach the figure without attempting to penetrate the thicket of text; or to decipher the text without being conscious of the figure. The dialectic between nearness and inaccessibility, between present experience and the overlay of memory, is incapable of resolution.*

– Adele Freedman, *Barbara Astman: Red*. Lethbridge: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1981

*Although there is a primary awareness of opulent sensuality, one is purposefully denied an entirely intimate/familiar relationship with the work. The metamorphosis of the image, from precious handheld SX-70 object to life-size proportions, radically alters the viewing context, loading the image with the concomitant implications and associations of a grand scale. One must assume a considerable physical distance for comfortable viewing, and a sense of psychological distance is perhaps heightened by the perceptual fact that life-size appears particularly monumental in the photographic medium, wherein one is unaccustomed to a scale exceeding 16 x 20 inches.*

– Joyann Saunders, in “Foreward,” *Barbara Astman*. London, Ontario: McIntosh Gallery, 1980, n. pag.

### The Red Series 1980 – 1981

*The Red series represented a breakthrough on several levels – symbology, content and form. The use of text has been eliminated from these Ektacolour murals. The artist is posed frontally amidst a carefully balanced composition of objects, each spray-painted red. She is dressed in black, her face cropped beneath the eyes. The background objects seem to float in space, assuming something other than their typical connotations. Astman appears as a kind of prophet in this context. She is also something of a magician, whose image is part of a sensual constructivism suggestive of El Lissitzky or Malevich.*

– Karyn Allen, “red feels like a crime,” *Barbara Astman: Rouge/Red*. Paris: Centre culturel canadien, 1982.

If there is a single, precise meaning to Astman’s *Red* series, it is still elusive over a decade since the production of the work. Was the artist questioning the “reality” of photography? What is the life-sized, alabaster woman with red lips telling us about the red objects and her relationship to them? Without words (since they have been replaced by this new alphabet of red household items) we cannot be *sure* of our individual interpretations. But somehow the *Red* series evoked a strong response from viewers, some feeling the work had feminist overtones, others simply enjoying the associations of the colour red. The *Red* series was memorable, and, perhaps more than with any other body of work the artist has produced, Astman



23. *Untitled*, from the *Red* series, 1981, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario.



24. *Untitled, from the Red series*, 1981, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of David P. Silcox and Linda Intaschi, Toronto.



25. *Untitled, from the Red series*, 1981, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Government of Ontario, Toronto.



26. *Untitled*, from the *Red* series, 1981, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.

became identified with, and undifferentiated from, the pale, ruby-lipped woman holding red implements in these photo-murals.

Less personal, less to do with her lived life and more to do with enigmatic arrangements and iconography, the *Red* series formed a watershed in Astman's career between her early work and her mature art. Since her eyes are cropped, a sense of remove creeps into these works; they cannot be read as portraits *per se*. The artist has begun to distance herself, her daily life, and her relationships from her creative output, but at this point, she is still including herself as the model in, and central subject of, her explorations and her pieces.

– some working notes from 1980, quoted in *Barbara Astman: Rouge/Red*. Paris: Centre

<i>red is craving</i>	<i>red makes me hungry</i>	<i>intensity</i>
<i>fullness of experience</i>	<i>red is impulsive</i>	<i>red means I am sexually potent</i>
<i>revolutionary</i>	<i>red is a struggle</i>	<i>competition</i>
<i>eroticism</i>	<i>force of will</i>	<i>the human spirit</i>
<i>red is the present</i>	<i>physical appetite</i>	<i>over dramatic</i>
<i>sensual pursuit of physical appetite</i>		
culturel canadien, 1982		

## Places 1982

*Astman's art always has expressed personal expressions which were made evident in varying degrees. Much of it involved a dialogue between personal revelation embodied in colour and written language and aesthetic statement, conveyed through composition and other formal devices. The Places series continues this enigmatic and occasionally impenetrable dialogue.*

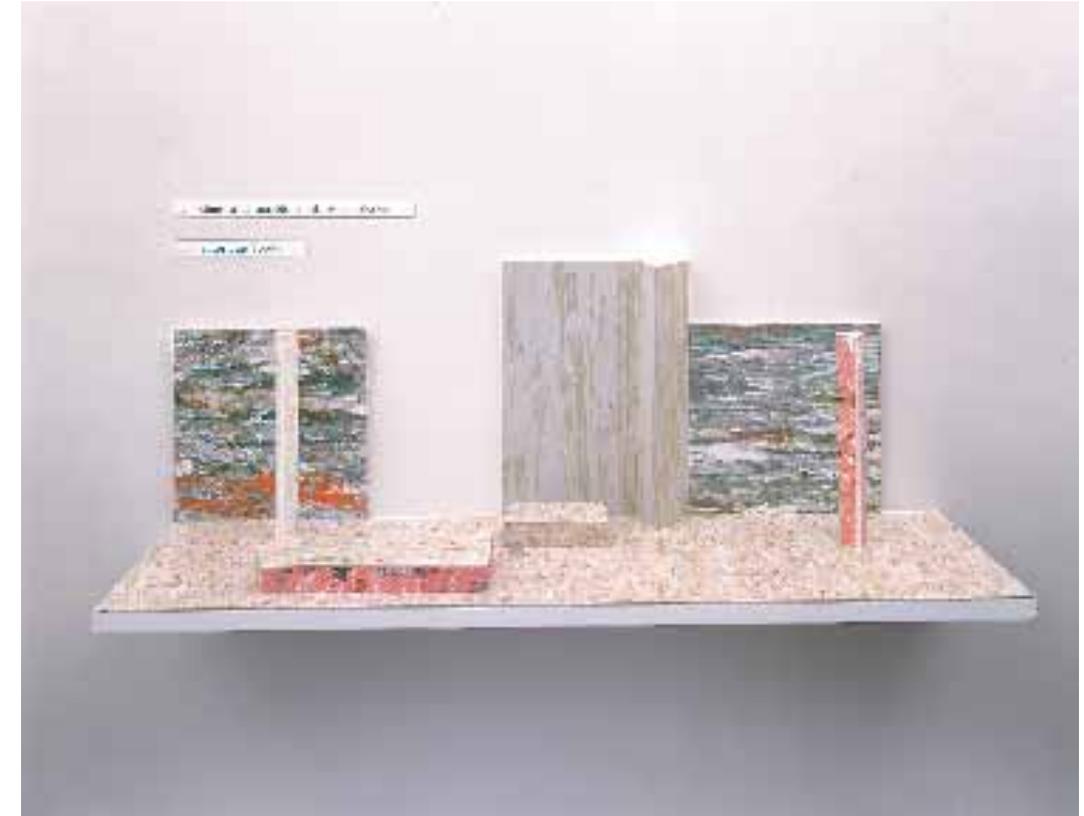
– Karyn Elizabeth Allen, “the spatial hieroglyph,” *Barbara Astman: Places*. Calgary: Nickle Arts Museum, 1983.

In a complete break with her previous two-dimensional, photo-based work over the preceding two decades, Astman began a sculptural series in 1982, which she eventually titled *Places*, since they referred to actual places she had been. Inspired by a trove of 1950s linoleum she discovered in Rochester on a visit to family, these miniature abstract environments are emotional, Proustian scenarios, like maquettes for stage sets, awaiting players. Rather than dealing with her current emotional states and concerns, the sculptures in *Places* were unleashed from Astman's memories. Using her associations and involuntary memories triggered by the intriguing visual qualities of vintage linoleum, Astman created pieces about nostalgia. As Karyn Allen pointed out in her “spatial hieroglyph” essay, they are not literal representations of rooms, but abstract versions of them. In each case, the attendant title

(which, in a gallery or museum setting is on a label and placed in close proximity to the sculpture) is intended by Astman to be an integral part of the piece, underlining the importance of personal memory in each one, since she did not wish them to be mis-read as simply formal arrangements and designs. She hoped that a parallel would be established, between the linoleum's simulation of other materials and the memory's recreation of reality.



27. *Patrio de sicilia*, 1982, linoleum, wood and plexiglass, 9 1/4 x 30 1/2 x 9 in., 23.5 x 77.5 x 22.9 cm.  
Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.



28. *american lobby*, 1982, linoleum, wood and plexiglass, 12 x 36 x 12 in., 30.5 x 91.4 x 30.5 cm. Collection  
of the Art Gallery of Ontario.

## Settings for Situations 1984

*What is Barbara Astman going to think of next? For her 1982 Sable-Castelli show she left behind her well-tailored, tasteful photographic portraits, raided an old linoleum warehouse in Rochester, N.Y., and turned out 18 fine, terse sculptures made of floor covering.*

*For her current exhibit, Astman has once again gone shopping in the Modern Living section of the hardware store, and has come up with stuff even less likely than linoleum to make it into an art gallery: plastic laminate (aka Formica, Arborite, etc.). The results are 10 formal constructions for wall and floor, some of them wonderful, called Settings for Situations.*

– John Bentley Mays, “Astman gives plastic new meaning,” *Globe and Mail*, March 22, 1984, p. E7.

Exploring plastic laminate as a material and utilizing a much larger scale, Astman concentrated less on memory in her next series of sculptures, than on the metaphorical and associative qualities of the staircase. Astman had been deeply affected by a month’s stay in the Italian town of Manarola in 1983, which was on a hill and accessible only by long flights of stone stairs. She began to ruminate about our associations with stairs, both in popular culture and as an archetype, at a subconscious level. Climbing stairs can indicate a move to a higher realm, either of consciousness or experience; and descending can represent a movement into the subconscious. One thinks also of the devotional act of climbing stairs of reli-

gious monuments and temples. In Astman’s *Settings*, the stair elements often seem to give onto stage-like areas, which the artist says she was considering as theatrical sets for the playing out of life’s situations. Her titles for these works are active, nudging the viewer to consider the act of stepping as a metaphor for existential movement and change.



32. *Stepping into the Coolness of Blue*, 1984, plastic laminate, wood, 41 ½ × 71 ½ in., 105.5 × 181.6 cm.  
Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario.



33. *Stepping past some obscure obstacles*, 1984, plastic laminate, wood, 59 × 96 in., 150 × 243.9 cm.  
Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

### Travelogue Series 1985 – 1986

Astman's *Travelogue* works are four-foot-square photo-collages, using either black-and-white or colour photographs, with text and drawing. The pieces form a vague narrative when seen together. They are poetic, elliptical, and about fantasy, anonymity, and desire.

Astman also created a book project using the *Travelogue* images (exhibition no. 34).

She claims the series is based on actual travel (as opposed to that bogus travel of her 1977 *Travel Fantasy* series) and the varying emotional states induced by observation and the participation of "being there." The ersatz photographed textures in these works are from the tiles used in *Places*, which themselves simulate a whole variety of materials and surfaces. Astman felt intrigued by the North-Americanness of the simulated surfaces and materials of the tiles, and this aspect further identifies her in the travelogue, a North American travelling in Europe, the *real* and *original* culture from which hers derived or evolved.

After the two sculptural series, which were usually removed from Astman's every-day life in terms of their visual elements and meaning, *Travelogue* represents something of a return to the intimate and personal on Astman's part. We can relate fairly directly and easily to the woman as traveller, an exploring foreigner in parts unknown, and can vicariously experience her wonder at new cities, hotels, people, and other travel experiences. Any references to

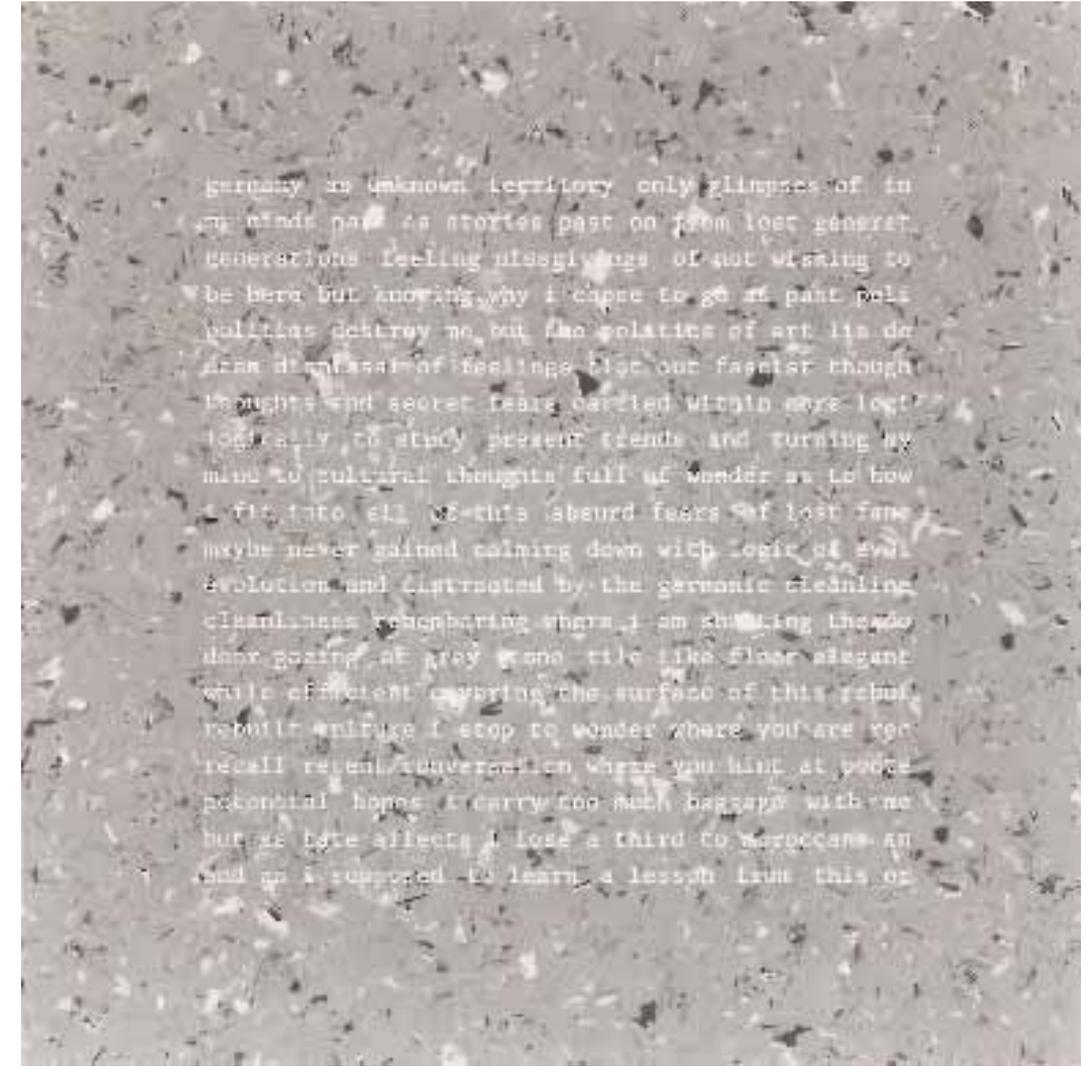
friends or loved ones are oblique, not directly referential. Considering her past private revelations, it might seem odd that Astman turned to considering past experiences and did not deal overtly about her then current experience of becoming a mother. It is as though she wanted to keep the sleeplessness, mess, joy, despair – the overwhelmingness of becoming a parent – private, and keep her art removed from that area of her life. Although perhaps a result of a natural protective urge towards her family and the individual privacy of its members, her work seems markedly removed from feminist art practice in this sense, since rather than making use directly of the domestic, child-rearing experience, she seemed to want to *escape* it in her *Travelogue* works. This was achieved in a way that was at once abstract and metaphorical and that allowed a sense of the creative individual to remain in the work, an aspect of a woman's identity that is often difficult to maintain in the family/motherhood context.

*The tonality of the new series has an "other worldly" sophistication and metaphysical air. They preserve, however, a greater sense of the crudity and casual nature of the polaroid. These aspects of the process of making the image are the source of the images' strangeness. Rather than present an artificially set out view of a stylized set of signs, they present a stylized view of the artificial fragments of reality. They are a juxtaposition of objects connoting the aesthetic and the everyday in a way that like the Red works, suggests a representation of the interior life of the artist.*

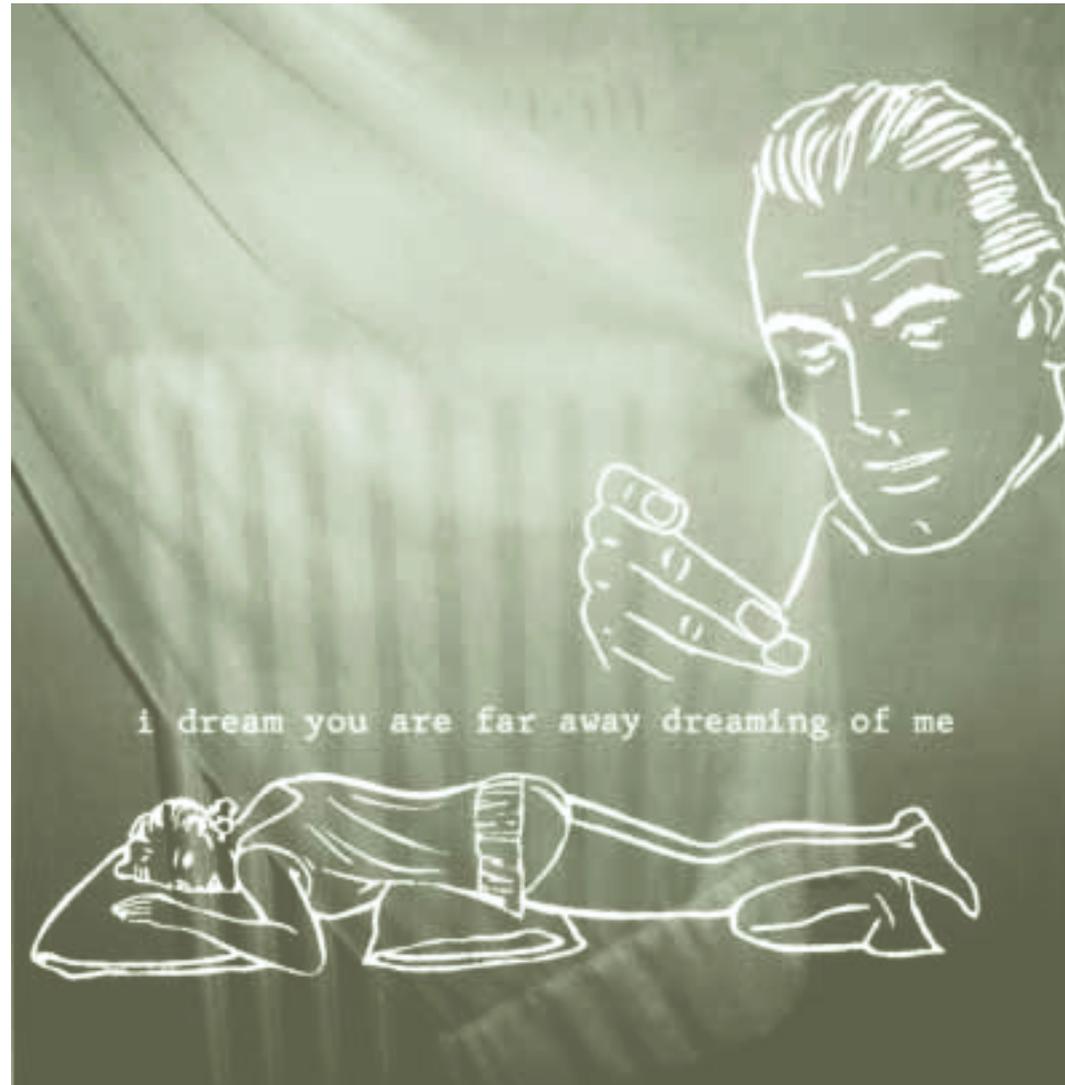
– Michael Tooby, *Visual Facts*. Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1985, p. 14.



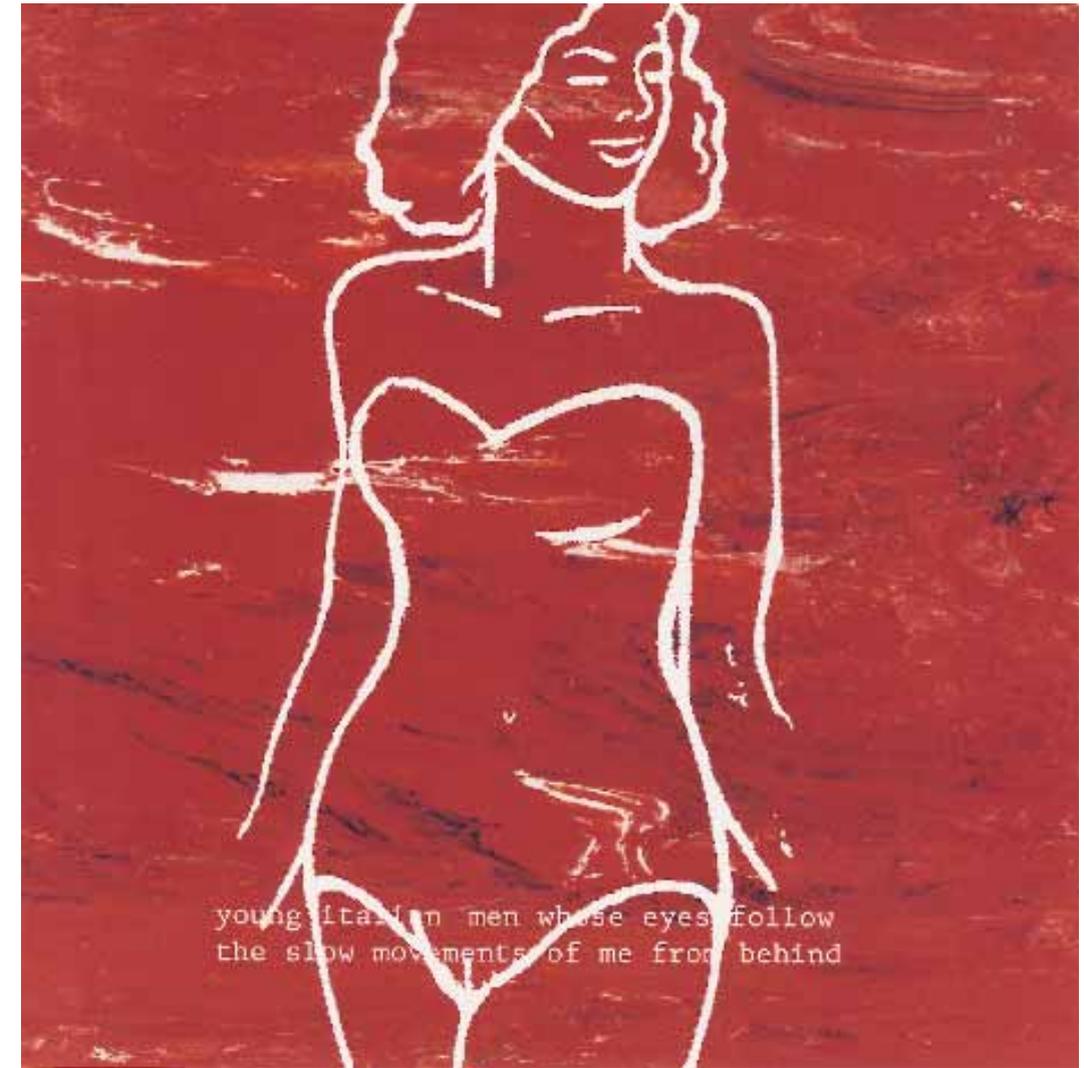
34. Page from *Travelogue*, 1984, book piece, 10 × 8 in., 25.4 × 20.3 cm.



34. Page from *Travelogue*, 1984, book piece, 10 × 8 in., 25.4 × 20.3 cm.



38. *Untitled (Travelogue Series)*, 1985-86, black-and-white silver print, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.



40. *Untitled (Travelogue Series)*, 1985-86, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London.

What has Astman's relationship to *reality* been, especially as a photographer? Tooby's thesis was that the artists in *Visual Facts* were *exploiting* reality in their work. In the case of Barbara Astman, it might be more accurate to consider her as *playing* with reality – she rolls it around in her palm, like a child discovering the qualities of mercury. *Exploiting* sounds too pre-meditated and aggressive in her case. She delights in all the contrasts and paradoxes inherent in exploring *reality*, but, perhaps most of all – in the emotions attendant to life's experiences.

### **The Curtain Series 1988**

*The five pieces in this show each contain three images. The relationships among these combined images form the meaning of each piece. Some are easy to read. In one, a 50s-looking couple in love are flanked by a baby and a dog; two outcomes of a 50s romance that seemed "natural" at the time. Other works are more oblique, like the glamorous woman flanked by twin interior scenes of an antique chair beside a heavy swag curtain.*

– Liz Wylie, "Astman's slick photos unveil myths of romance," *NOW Magazine*, April 14, 1988, p. 49.

*[ The curtain acts as a framing device, evokes sense of mystery ] ... it is that special moment we experience in theatre, opera and the movies, that fascination with the relationship between the curtain rising and the event (image) beginning. The series started out being directed by feelings of longing and grew into an exploration of romance, motherhood and power in relationship to longing.*

– Barbara Astman, *Artists with Their Work* sheet, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1988.



*Untitled, the Curtain Series*, 1988, Ektacolour mural, 31 × 90 in., 78.7 × 228.6 cm.

41. Collection of William and Sherri Appell, Toronto.

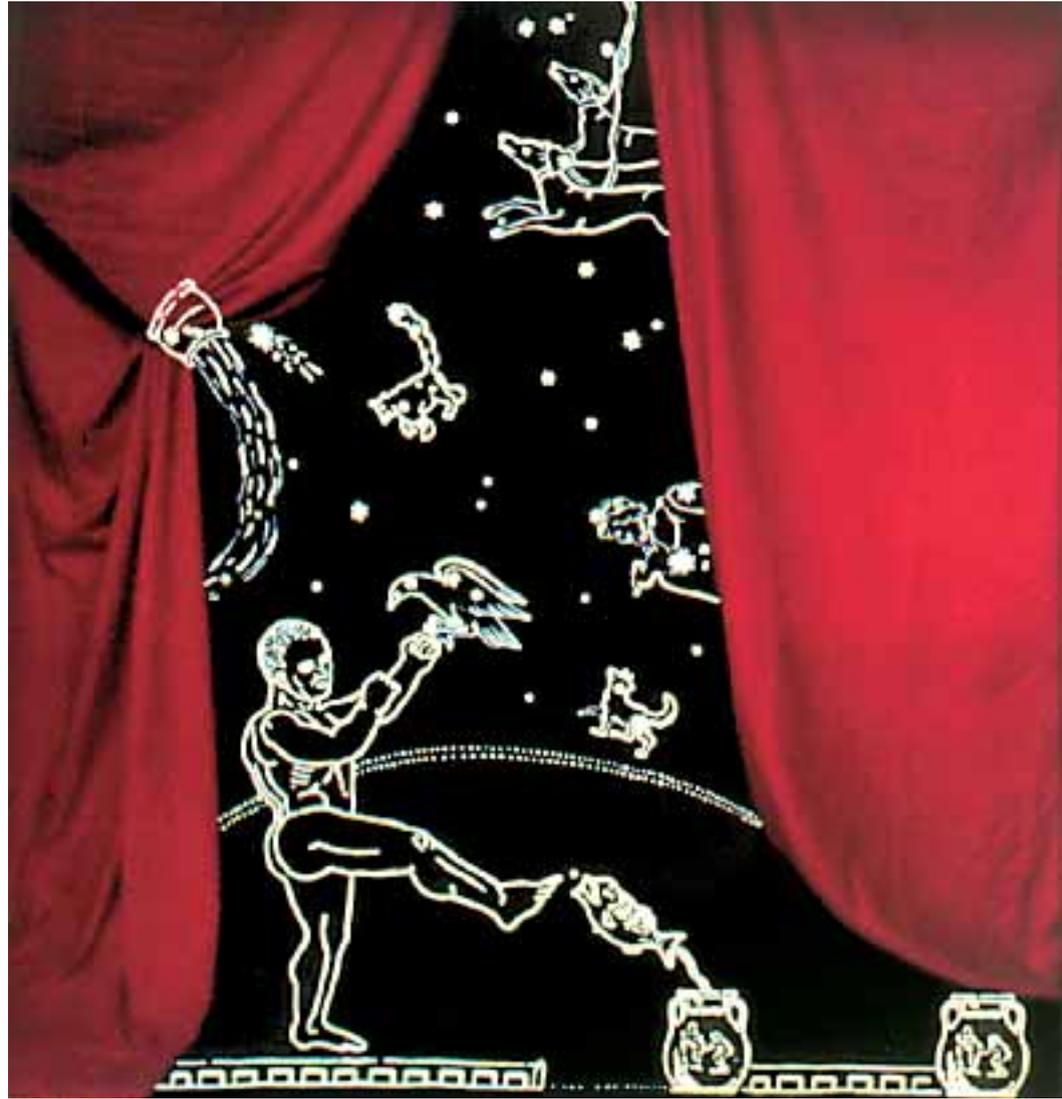
42. Collection of Ron Rosenes, Toronto.

43. Collection of the artist, Toronto.

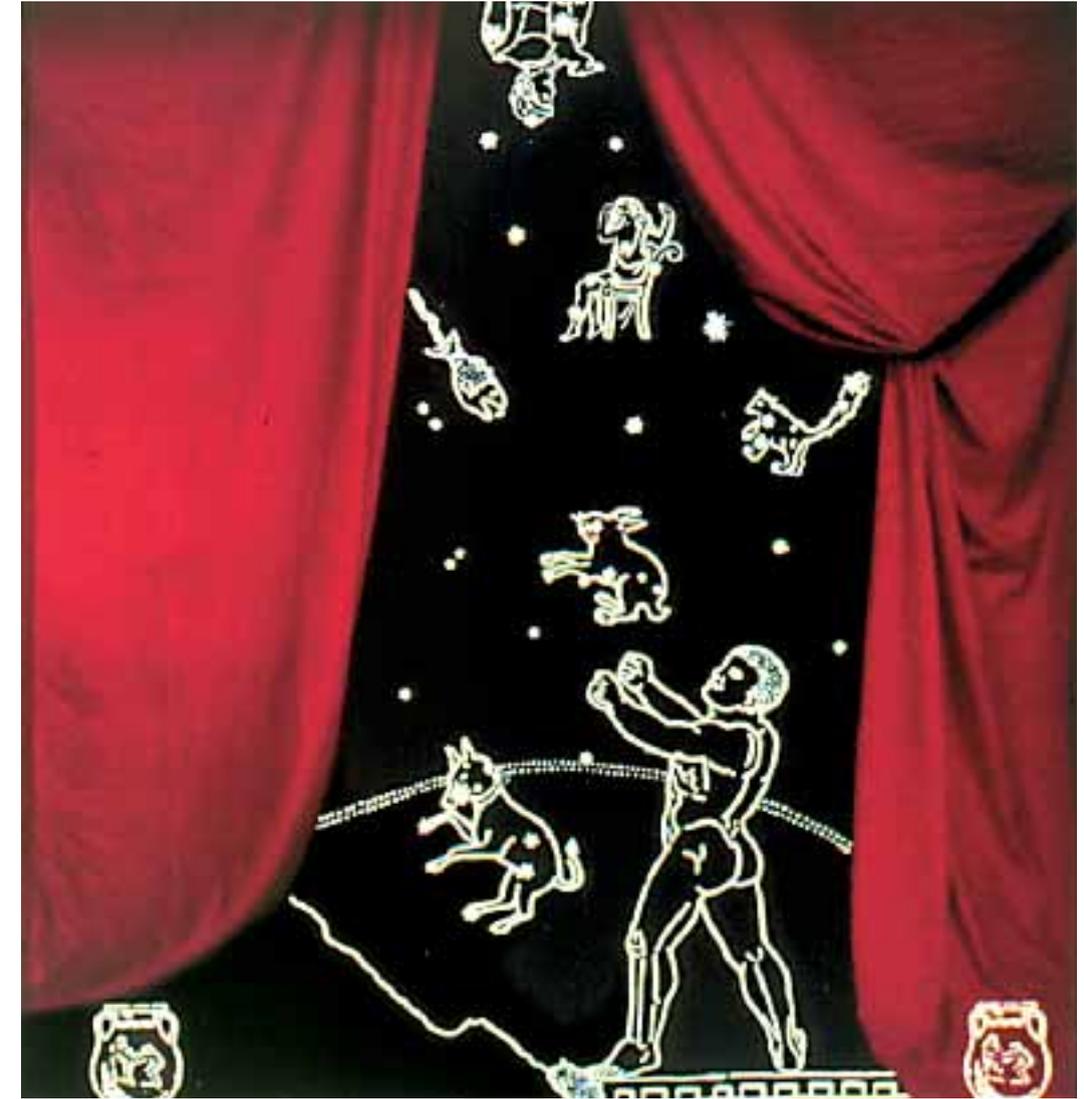
### Commissions/Public Art

Beginning in 1981 with a photographic mural commission for the C.I.L. Building in North York, Astman has produced several commissioned works in public environments. These projects loosely relate to her studio practice, but differ in some fundamental ways from it. With her commissioned works, Astman's background in design comes to the fore, as she harnesses her creativity to address problem solving, confronting the restrictions and possibilities of each site, budget, and the importance of visually communicating her ideas and of convincing committees or juries of her plans.

In 1988 Astman was commissioned to create a billboard design to promote the Winter Olympics in Calgary. Since she was working on the *Curtain Series* in her studio at the time, she decided to incorporate the red, parted-curtain motif in this image. Constellation-like arrangements of white circus figures cavorting on a black background complete the billboard design. When the billboard was backlit at night, the circus figures read even more emphatically as stars in a night sky. Also in connection with the 1988 Winter Olympics, the artist was commissioned to create a piece in the Olympic Speed Skating Oval. Astman designed an abstract ornamental entrance floor in linoleum.



Billboard Commission for 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, 10 × 20 feet, 3.04 × 6.09 metres.



In 1993 her project for The Conservatory Tower building complex at Bay and Hayter streets in downtown Toronto was unveiled – a series of cast concrete paving stones integrated with the regular paving stones around the exterior perimeter of the building. Users of the site find themselves stepping on images of realistic leaves (referring to the five kinds of shrubs and trees planted by the site’s landscape architect), reminding them of their place in the natural world, even when working in an inner city environment.

Throughout the early 1990s Astman has played a long-term role as the visual artist – along with the architect and landscape architect – on the development board of a recreational complex in St-Laurent, Ontario (a suburb of Ottawa). Exploring the notion of “community,” she has created a cognitive map in etched glass for the entrance-way of the centre, a weathered zinc panel with quotations about community for an exterior installation, and two pieces for the centre’s library, containing text about the role of knowledge in a community.

In 1994 Astman was commissioned by Cadillac Fairview to create imagery for fourteen eight-foot-high glass panels separating an indoor retail area from a daycare centre at their downtown Toronto Simcoe Place. In imagining what sorts of shapes and lines would read effectively in etched glass, catching the light and adding drama to the dividers, Astman came up with images of nebulae and galaxies. This work is in progress at the time of publication of this catalogue.



44. Paver stone, commission for The Conservatory Tower, Toronto, 1993, cement, 20 × 20 in., 50.8 × 50.8 cm.

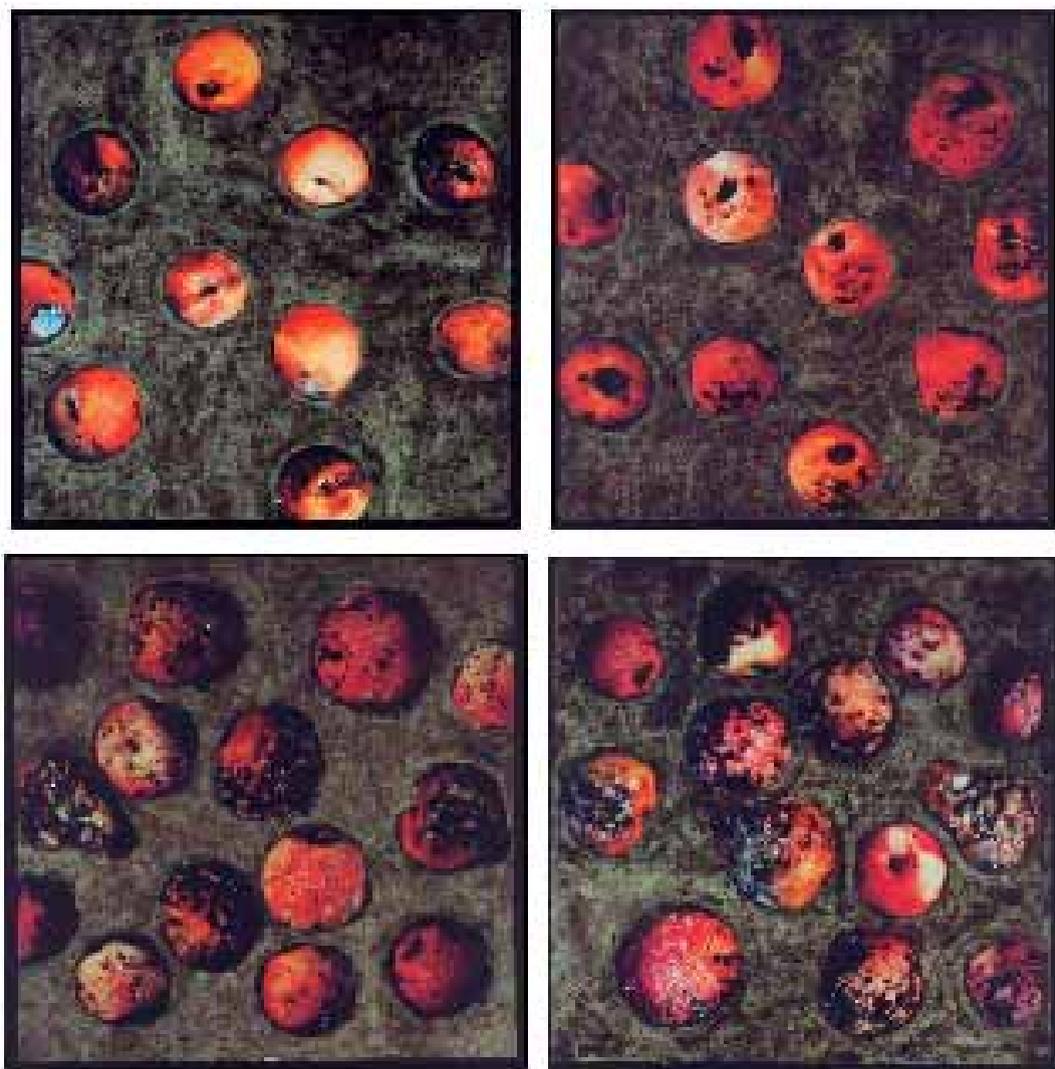
Astman's work in the area of public art has come to the fore as she has developed her skills at creative problem solving and dealing with technical and logistical issues. While forming something of a separate enterprise from her individual studio work, Astman's commission work forms a parallel *oeuvre*, reflecting many of the same concerns and enthusiasms: a delight in sensuous materials and surfaces, the employment of text, the use of photographic imagery, and elegant, carefully designed compositions.

### **The Fruit Series 1990**

*I began by exploring ideas that centred on defining beauty, what is considered desirable, through fabricated images. We are all aware as consumers on one level or another of how beauty and desirability, in humans and objects, is portrayed in western society. I became increasingly fascinated by the reverse of the portrayal, and I began searching out the defects. The resulting photographic images take on an abstraction far more so than any of my previous works and become a metaphor for the beauty of decay.*  
– Barbara Astman, statement, *Artists with Their Work* sheet, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1990-91

One constant factor informing Barbara Astman's work has been her honesty. She has never shied away from dealing with what has been on her mind, with how she has been feeling. In the *Curtain Series* she explored the state of being a married woman and a mother who still experiences outwardly oriented desire, even just unfocussed, intransitive desire. In the *Fruit Series* we are confronted head on with the theme of age and decay. Astman's fruits are over-ripe, rotting, definitely past their prime. Their state and status as the subject in her work makes them read as stand-ins for the figure, the artist, or the self, and for how she is fitting into her world.

To speak of desire, when we have aged, when we are mothers, has been seen until recently as



unbecoming, even obscene. And to see beauty in the alterations that time wreaks, wrinkles and age spots, for example, has been unthinkable. Yet this seems to be Astman's route of enquiry in these works. The brilliant, lurid colour, the appealing sensuousness of the wax coatings, are remarkable and unmistakable, yet also weird and unusual. Viewers feel curiously uncomfortable and uneasy. Is the *Fruit Series* in fact a *memento mori*, nudging us to consider our own mortality?

*Astman took ordinary fruit – apples, peaches and plums – put them in wooden crates filled with dirt, and photographed them twice a week for a year to document the effects of time. She then took oversized enlargements of these unconventional photos and painted over the background with a rich, roughly textured mixture of encaustic (melted wax) and earth.*

*The images are strikingly beautiful. As the fruit ages, the pristine surfaces deepen in colour and soften to ripeness, gradually becoming mottled with lustrous moulds. The deep orange-red spheres of fruit seem to float against the rugged surface.*

*“I was interested in the aesthetics of aging,” says Astman ... “this isn’t a science project, it’s the poetics of decay.”*

– Deirdre Hanna, “Astman’s fruitful metaphor probes the beauty of aging,” *NOW Magazine*, Sept. 6, 1990.

45–48. *Untitled (Fruit Series)*, 1990, mixed media on Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.

**The Rock Series 1991 – 1993**

Subtler and more spiritual than the *Fruit Series*, the *Rock* pictures each contain images of five or six stones which float in an indeterminate space. Sprinkled in the interstices are dried flower petals, seeds, leaves, earth, and weeds. After working in flecks and marks of colour with oil stick, Astman has sealed the surfaces in sensuous layers of encaustic.

It is intriguing that the artist intuitively decided to arrange the organic petals and leaves in amongst the black-and-white, smooth stones. With the juxtaposing of the large, smooth, blank surfaces of the stones against the scattered, delicate plant materials, she invokes an archetypal resolution: that of the static and absolute power of the rocks with the energized chaos represented by the tossed petals and weeds. Not only do the stones act as stand-ins for the bodies present in so much of Astman's earlier work, but they are images of *being*, "invulnerable and irreducible." (Lucy Lippard, *Overlay*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, p. 15)

The notion of a subject and content that are timeless and spiritual is something new in Astman's work. She was consciously aware only of choosing rocks as more neutral objects than the fruits. But, in fact, their seeming muteness has granted her an even more powerful form of speech. To most hunting-and-gathering cultures, including the native North



49–51. *Untitled (Rock Series)*, 1991–93, mixed media on black-and-white silver prints, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.

American populations, rocks were considered the bones of the earth, and, as such, the site of the soul of the earth (just as bones were the site of the soul in humans and animals). Cross-culturally, there are several myths about both gods and humanity descending from rocks and stones. (See Mircea Eliade, transl. Stephen Corvin, *The Forge and the Crucible*. New York: Harper, 1962, pp. 43, 143.)

A greater feeling of distance from her subject on the part of the artist is present in this work, more so than in any of her previous series. There is a sense of contemplation, reflection and thoughtfulness behind the images. The art is still personal, but not narcissistic. A viewer senses that the personal here is only a filter, a vehicle for a more universal meaning.

### **Seeing and Being Seen 1994**

Astman's most recent series of work utilizes images of human eyes, either appropriated or from her own photographs of herself and her children. Arranged in pairs, but often mismatched ones, the eyes have been collaged and shot as Polaroids. These images were scanned and output onto large sheets of frosted mylar, creating works that are elegant, sensual, and haunting. The sense of being watched while we are looking at the work is thought provoking, since it parallels our life experience. Astman was considering how we view others, how they view us, how we view ourselves – at different points in our lives – and decided to explore these eye images as metaphors for this process of seeing and being seen.



52. *Untitled (Seeing and Being Seen)*, 1994, electronic file output onto frosted mylar,  
36 × 72 in., 91.4 × 182.8 cm.



53. *Untitled (Seeing and Being Seen)*, 1994, electronic file output onto frosted mylar,  
36 × 72 in., 91.4 × 182.8 cm.

## The Retrospective View

The retrospective format and context begs certain questions of a viewer/reader, for instance, what is the overall context for this twenty years of artistic production and what is its ultimate meaning? In many ways of Astman's work has more to do with popular culture than the tradition of art history and art making. It has never fit into any specific paradigm – modernist, post-modernist – nor has her work been embraced by a school or group. It cannot be defined or identified by medium. She seems just to have responded to her own creative urges, as they changed over time, and the underlying, central thrust of her work seems to have been to create meaning from her emotional responses to life. Much of her work skirts on the edge of the poetic. It's never really narrative, but sometimes mimics or borrows from the narrative form for effect and tone. Her studio practice or method seems not to have been one embracing chance. She dreams up ideas, then casts around, trying materials and formats, ensuring that it all comes together convincingly. In a sense, in her studio, she is often largely engaged in sheer art *directing*.

It seems to me that the source and wellspring for all her work is her own emotional responses, either current ones, or memories of earlier responses, to her life situations. I see this as archetypally female. She continually gauges her emotions, translates them, and

creates visual forms and metaphors for them. Astman exists as her own centre – her work is not about external issues or other places. And her work, more so than with many artists, seems incomplete without an audience. It would be like a rehearsal otherwise, since the viewer completes the equation, closing the loop of the relationship with their own experience and reading of the work.

– Liz Wylie, Toronto, 1995

## Personal/Persona: List of Works

: Unless otherwise indicated, all works are in the collection of the artist.

### The Early Work 1974-1977

1. *Strawberry Cherry Queen*, 1973, black-and-white silver print and collage, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
2. *Untitled*, mid-1970s, black-and-white silver print, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm.
3. *Untitled*, from the “Erotic” series, 1975, black-and-white silver print, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
4. *Untitled*, 1975-78, black-and-white silver print from “traditional portraits” group, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
5. *Untitled*, 1975-78, colour photocopy, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm.
6. *Untitled*, 1975-78, colour photocopy, 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm.
7. *Untitled*, 1975-78, colour photocopy (also is a detail of *David Craven and Art History*, exh. no. 15), 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm.
8. *RCMP*, 1970s, mixed media plastic work, 6 × 7 ½ in., 15.5 × 19.5 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
9. *Untitled*, weather balloon drapery group, six black-and-white Kodalith prints, each 8 × 10 in., 20.3 × 25.4 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
10. *Bert and George in the living room*, 1973, mixed media, 31 × 52 in., 78.7 × 132 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
11. *Comfort Cases*, 1970s, pillow cases with photography, 31 × 56 in., 78.7 × 142 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
12. *Family Photo Album*, 1973-74, mixed media, 3 ½ × 3 ½ in., 9.3 × 8.5 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
13. *Connie and the Flowering Annuals*, 1975, colour photocopy, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario.
14. *Barbara and Karl in Barbados*, 1975, colour photocopy, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of Karl Schantz and Janice Matheson, Toronto.
15. *David Craven and Art History*, 1975, colour photocopy, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

### The Visual Narrative Series 1978-1979

16. *Untitled (Visual Narrative Series)*, 1978-79, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.
17. *Untitled (Visual Narrative Series)*, 1978-79, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of Edwin L. Stringer, Q.C., Toronto.
18. *Untitled (Visual Narrative Series)*, 1978-79, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.

### Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series 1979-1980

19. *Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series*, 1979-80, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.
20. *Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series*, 1979-80, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario.
21. *Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series*, 1979-80, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa.
22. *Untitled, i was thinking about you ... Series*, 1979-80, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 60 in., 121.9 × 152.4 cm. Collection of McMillan Binch, Toronto.

### The Red Series 1980-1981

23. *Untitled, from the Red series*, 1981, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario.
24. *Untitled, from the Red series*, 1981, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of David P. Silcox and Linda Intaschi, Toronto.
25. *Untitled, from the Red series*, 1981, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Government of Ontario, Toronto.
26. *Untitled, from the Red series*, 1981, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.

### Places 1982

27. *l'atrio de sicilia*, 1982, linoleum, wood and plexiglass, 9 ¼ × 30 ½ × 9 in., 23.5 × 77.5 × 22.9 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.
28. *american lobby*, 1982, linoleum, wood and plexiglass, 12 × 36 × 12 in., 30.5 × 91.4 × 30.5 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario.
29. *lower level living*, 1982, linoleum, wood and plexiglass, 9 ¼ × 48 × 4 in., 23.5 × 121.9 × 10.2 cm. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.
30. *green gardens*, 1982, linoleum, wood and plexiglass, 10 × 48 × 1 ½ in., 26 × 116.8 × 3.8 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

#### **Settings for Situations 1984**

31. *Stepping Past Pleasurable Objects, Waiting for the Cool, Blue You*, 1984, plastic laminate, wood, 35 × 134 × 73 in., 90 × 340 × 185 cm. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.
32. *Stepping into the Coolness of Blue*, 1984, plastic laminate, wood, 41 ½ × 71 ½ in., 105.5 × 181.6 cm. Collection of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario.
33. *Stepping past some obscure obstacles*, 1984, plastic laminate, wood, 59 × 96 in., 150 × 243.9 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton.

#### **Travelogue Series 1985-1986**

34. *Travelogue*, 1984, book piece, 10 × 8 in., 25.4 × 20.3 cm.
35. *Untitled (Travelogue Series)*, 1985-86, black-and-white silver print, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.
36. *Untitled (Travelogue Series)*, 1985-86, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa.
37. *Untitled (Travelogue Series)*, 1985-86, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of Laurentian University Art Gallery, Sudbury, Ontario.
38. *Untitled (Travelogue Series)*, 1985-86, black-and-white silver print, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.
39. *Untitled (Travelogue Series)*, 1985-86, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, Ontario.
40. *Untitled (Travelogue Series)*, 1985-86, Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm. Collection of the McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London.

#### **The Curtain Series 1988**

41. *Untitled, the Curtain Series*, 1988, Ektacolour mural, 31 × 90 in., 78.7 × 228.6 cm. Collection of William and Sherri Appell, Toronto.
42. *Untitled, the Curtain Series*, 1988, Ektacolour mural, 31 × 90 in., 78.7 × 228.6 cm. Collection of Ron Rosenes, Toronto.
43. *Untitled, the Curtain Series*, 1988, Ektacolour mural, 31 × 90 in., 78.7 × 228.6 cm.

#### **Commissions/Public Art**

44. Paver stones, commission for The Conservatory Tower, Toronto, 1993, cement, 20 × 20 in., 50.8 × 50.8 cm.

#### **The Fruit Series 1990**

45. *Untitled (Fruit Series)*, 1990, mixed media on Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.
46. *Untitled (Fruit Series)*, 1990, mixed media on Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.
47. *Untitled (Fruit Series)*, 1990, mixed media on Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.
48. *Untitled (Fruit Series)*, 1990, mixed media on Ektacolour mural, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.

#### **The Rock Series 1991-93**

49. *Untitled (Rock Series)*, 1991-93, mixed media on black-and-white silver print, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.
50. *Untitled (Rock Series)*, 1991-93, mixed media on black-and-white silver print, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.
51. *Untitled (Rock Series)*, 1991-93, mixed media on black-and-white silver print, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.
52. *Untitled (Rock Series)*, 1991-93, mixed media on black-and-white silver print, 48 × 48 in., 121.9 × 121.9 cm.

#### **Seeing and Being Seen 1994**

53. *Untitled (Seeing and Being Seen)*, 1994, electronic file output onto frosted mylar, 36 × 72 in., 91.4 × 182.8 cm.
54. *Untitled (Seeing and Being Seen)*, 1994, electronic file output onto frosted mylar, 36 × 72 in., 91.4 × 182.8 cm.

## Biography

### Education

- 1968 Graduate, Irondequoit High School, Rochester, New York  
1970 Associate Degree, Rochester Institute of Technology, School for American Craftsmen, Rochester, New York  
1973 Graduate, Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Ontario, A.O.C.A.

### Teaching

- 1975-present Technician and Faculty, Ontario College of Art  
1977-1983 Coordinator of Colour Xerox Artists' Program, Visual Arts Ontario, Toronto  
1978-1980 Faculty, York University, North York, Ontario

### Community Involvement

- 1983-1985 Board of Directors, Art Gallery at Harbourfront, Toronto  
1986-1989 appointed Member, City of Toronto Public Art Commission  
1988 member, Curatorial Team: *WaterWorks* Exhibition, Toronto (organized by Visual Arts Ontario)  
1988 Chair: Toronto Arts Awards, Visual Arts Jury  
1989-1992 Board of Directors, Arts Foundation of Greater Toronto

### Solo Exhibitions

- 1973 Baldwin Street Gallery of Photography, Toronto  
1974 Ryerson Photo Gallery, Toronto  
1975 National Film Board of Canada, Ottawa  
1976 S.A.W. Gallery Inc., Ottawa  
1977 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
1979 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
Jean Marie Antoine Gallery, Annapolis, Maryland  
1980 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
Whitewater Gallery, North Bay, Ontario  
Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario  
McIntosh Art Gallery, London, Ontario

Bruce Art Gallery, Canton, New York  
Optica, Montreal

- 1981 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
The Laurentian University Museum and Arts Centre, Sudbury, Ontario  
The Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
The Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta  
The SUB Art Gallery, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta  
The Student Union Gallery, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware  
1982 Centre culturel canadien, Paris, France  
The Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, Ontario  
Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
1983 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
The Nickle Arts Museum, Calgary, Alberta  
1984 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
Concordia Art Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal  
1986 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
Musée du Quebec, Quebec City  
Vu, Centre d'animation et de diffusion de la photographie, Quebec City  
1988 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
1990 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
1992 The Laurentian University Museum and Arts Centre, Sudbury, Ontario  
Thunder Bay Art Gallery, Thunder Bay, Ontario  
Saint-Laurent Art Gallery, St. Lawrence College, Kingston, Ontario  
1993 The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario  
1994 The Gallery/Stratford, Stratford, Ontario  
McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1975 **Erotica**, Lankin Camerawork Gallery, San Francisco, California  
**Chairs**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
**Finger Lakes Exhibition**, Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, New York  
Rochester Institute of Technology, M.F.A. Gallery, Rochester, New York  
**New Photographics '75**, Ellensburg, Washington  
**Photographics '75**, National Film Board of Canada, Ottawa  
**Breadth of Vision**, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York  
**Exposure**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

- 1976 Déja Vue Gallery, Toronto  
**New Photographics/76**, Ellensburg, Washington  
**Women Photograph Men**, Rockefeller Center, New York  
**Figurative Works**, Gallery 696, Rochester, New York  
**Alternatives**, Camerawork Gallery, San Francisco  
**Forum '76**, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts  
**Colour Xerography**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
**100 Years: Evolution of the Ontario College of Art**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
- 1977 Harbourfront Art Gallery, Toronto  
Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
**The Instant Image**, Camerawork Gallery, San Francisco  
Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 1978 **The Canadian Connection**, Neikrug Galleries, New York  
National Film Board of Canada, Ottawa  
**Young Contemporaries '78**, London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario  
**Contemporary Canadian Photographic Portraits**, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta  
**First Canadian Biennial of Prints and Drawings**, Alberta College of Art, Calgary, Alberta
- 1979 **Photo/Extended Dimensions**, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba  
**Alternative Imaging Systems**, Everson Museum, Syracuse, New York  
**20 x 20 Italia/Canada**, Galerie Luca Polazzoli, Milan, Italy  
**Translations; Images with New Forms**, Factory 77, Toronto  
H. F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York  
**Suzy Lake/Barbara Astman: Talking Photos**, Artspace, Peterborough, Ontario  
**Electroworks**, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York  
**SX 70**, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, New York
- 1980 **The Innovative Image**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Art Rental, Toronto  
**The Eye of the Beholder**, Art Gallery at Harbourfront, Toronto  
**Reflecting a Rural Consciousness**, Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris, France  
**Toronto, Part 1**, Alberta College of Art Gallery, Calgary, Alberta
- 1981 29 x 9, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario  
**Realism, Structure, and Illusion**, Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario  
**Xerox Art**, A.C.T. Gallery, Toronto  
The Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
**Reproduction Art**, La Galerie Powerhouse, Montreal  
**Xerographic Art**, Motivation 5, Montreal
- 1982 Sable-Castelli Gallery Ltd., Toronto  
**Monumenta**, YYZ Gallery, Toronto
- 1983 **Photographic Sequences**, Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, Ontario  
**Women in Focus**, Vancouver, B.C.  
**Recent Acquisitions**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
**Toronto: Women Artists: Three Decades**, Gallery Quan, Toronto  
**Chromaliving**, The Colonnade, Toronto  
**The Hand Holding the Brush**, London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario (travelling)
- 1984 **Edge and Image**, Concordia Art Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal  
**Immediate Art**, Burlington Cultural Centre, Burlington, Ontario  
**Art by Design**, Canada House, London, England (travelling)  
**Responding to Photography**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
**Unconventional Photographic Images by Canadian Artists**, Alvin Gallery, Stanley, Hong Kong
- 1985 **Generation Polaroid**, Forum des Halles, Paris, France  
**Visual Facts**, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, Scotland, Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield, England  
**Recent Canadian Sculpture – Selections from the Canada Council Art Bank**, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg
- 1986 **Canada Collects: Contemporary Sculpture from the Art Bank**, Washington, D. C., Atlanta, San Diego  
**Domiciles**, Hallwalls Gallery, Buffalo, New York  
**The Christmas Stocking**, Laurentian University Museum and Arts Centre, Sudbury, Ontario
- 1987 **Olympic Arts Festival, Billboard Project** (travelled)
- 1988 **Scripta Manent**, La Galerie des arts Lavalin, Montreal  
**1988 Persons Award Exhibition** (Status of Women, Government of Canada), Salon of the National Arts Centre, Ottawa  
**Canada-Mexico Photography Exhibition**, Mexico City (travelled)  
**Porkkana Collection**, Pro Museum of Contemporary Art, Finland
- 1989 Kamloops Art Gallery, Kamloops, British Columbia  
**75 Works for 75 Years: Masterworks from the Permanent Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton**, Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario
- 1990 **rock, is there something you're not telling me?**, The Koffler Gallery, North York, Ontario
- 1992 **Astman/Dykhuis Exhibition**, Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, Ontario
- 1993 **Artists with Their Work Exhibition**, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto  
**O.C.A. Faculty Exhibition**, John B. Aird Gallery, Toronto
- 1994 **O.C.A. Faculty Exhibition**, Terminal Art Gallery, Toronto  
**Interconnexions Copigraphiques, Montage 93**, Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York, travelling  
**New Works in the Permanent Collection**, Laurentian University Museum and Arts Centre, Sudbury, Ontario  
**Looking Back II**, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta  
**Hidden Values: Canadian Corporations Collect**, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario

#### Public and Corporate Collections

Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario  
Art Gallery of Hamilton, Hamilton, Ontario  
Art Gallery of Peterborough, Peterborough, Ontario  
Art Gallery of Ontario  
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France  
C.I.L. Corporation, Toronto  
Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa  
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Ottawa  
Confederation Centre of the Arts, Charlottetown, P.E.I.  
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ottawa  
The Gallery/Stratford, Stratford, Ontario  
Hewlett-Packard Canada, Ltd., Toronto  
Kitchener/Waterloo Art Gallery, Kitchener, Ontario  
Laurentian University Museum and Arts Centre, Sudbury, Ontario  
Mackenzie Art Gallery, Regina, Saskatchewan  
McIntosh Gallery, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario  
Nickle Arts Museum, Calgary, Alberta  
Nova Corporation, Calgary, Alberta  
Polysar Limited  
The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England  
Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg, Manitoba

#### Commissions

- 1980 C.B.S. Records, Toronto- cover art for eponymously titled *Loverboy* Album.  
1981 C.I.L. Corporation, Toronto, 4th Floor Lobby, photographic mural.  
1987 Calgary Winter Olympics '88 – 1300 sq. ft. inlaid floor design for the Olympic Speed Skating Oval.  
Olympic Arts Festival '88 – Art on Billboards travelled across Canada.  
1990 C.N. Real Estate, clock tower for C.N. Plaza, Toronto  
1991 City of Ottawa, Art in Public Places Programme, St. Laurent Complex Recreation Project, an integrated art and architecture project. Completion date: 1995-96.  
*Extension*, a quarterly journal published by the Print and Drawing Council of Canada, Vol.1, No.1, Summer 1991, cover commission.

- 1992 Creating Dances in Ontario Schools, National Ballet of Canada, a collaborative dance performance project with Menaka Thakkar, Robert Stevenson and the students of Baythorn Public School  
1993 Bay/Hayter Public Art Project, Toronto, cement pavers.  
1994 Police Service Award, Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police, Ontario, glass sculptural piece.  
Simcoe Place Public Art Project, Toronto, etched glass panels.

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### Artist's Acknowledgements

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My deepest expression of gratitude goes to my high school art instructor, Mr. Harvey Brockley. Without his early encouragement, I might have given in to others' persuasions. I wish to thank Karyn Allen Keenan for her early and continual support of my work. Special thanks to Christine Hawkes, formerly of the Sable-Castelli Gallery, for her continued support and to Jared Sable for his encouragement and friendship in the early years. I wish to thank the many people, too numerous to mention, who throughout the years have been an inspiration to my art/life. Special thanks to my family for their continual patience and support. Finally, special thanks to my parents for teaching me about the important things in life.

– *Barbara Astman*

### Director's Acknowledgements

The Art Gallery of Hamilton is pleased to have initiated this twenty year survey of Barbara Astman's work. The exhibition continues the Gallery's on-going commitment of providing a critical forum for contemporary Canadian artists who have made a significant contribution to the vocabulary of art over a period of time. It is fitting that the Art Gallery of Hamilton should host this project, since Astman's exhibition history with this institution goes back over a dozen years. The Gallery now holds a comprehensive selection of works in the permanent collection, representing various aspects of her career. This retrospective exhibition and the accompanying publication are the first overview of her artistic career.

I would like especially to thank Liz Wylie, the guest curator of *Personal/Persona*, who has spent significant time and showed great sensitivity to this project. Most important, an expression of gratitude must be directed to the artist. If not for Barbara's commitment to her art, we would not be embarking on this venture or enjoying her many works of art.

The Gallery acknowledges the special support provided for this exhibition and publication by the Canada Council, the Kitchener/Waterloo Art Gallery, the Jackman Foundation, Ron and Barbara Woods, and the Toronto Arts Council for their assistance in the circulation of the exhibition. Finally, we extend our appreciation to the individuals and galleries who have lent work for the exhibition and tour, and to the participating galleries who are hosting the exhibition.

– *Ted Pietrzak*

### Curator's Acknowledgement:

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– *Liz Wylie*

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