

PATRICK MIKHAIL GALLERY

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# VERA GREENWOOD

## ARTIST STATEMENT

### ■ MAGNIFICENT CORPSES

My early work focused on visual politics, especially the concept of the gaze and the voyeuristic position, a thread of which still runs through my projects. In recent years my printmaking/installation practice has developed into a creative exploration and documentation of events excerpted from everyday life. It foregrounds storytelling, social studies and a way of working based on observation of the world. Through various projects involving private and public spaces I have employed social probes to investigate the complexities of human interaction.

My art practice also places emphasis on the exploration of various narrative structures (autobiographical, historical, literary) as well as their conventions (museology, popular fiction). The *Magnificent Corpses* print-set is a continuation of my ongoing interest in the conventions used in the transmission of sanctioned information (the dominant narrative) and the possibility for subversion (the counter narrative) within those conventions.

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While reading Sarah Vowel's *Assassination Vacation*, I came across an interesting quote by Anneli Rufus, from her 1999 book **Magnificent Corpses: Searching Through Europe for St. Peter's Head, St. Chiara's Heart, St. Stephen's Hand, and Other Saints' Relics**. Upon borrowing this book from the Ottawa Public Library, I observed, with much chagrin, that a previous reader had written copious notes in the margins throughout. At first I tried to ignore this parallel narrative, but ultimately the marginalia was too abundant and proved to be quite compelling in and of itself. The pencilled-in running commentary generates a portrait of a woman, who while demonstrating an intense religious devotion simultaneously reveals rather an ironic abhorrence for the author.

I photographed all the page-sets, including the cover, which had been marked, even minimally, in pencil. I developed the format for the prints: three panels of 12 images, but this too, in keeping with previous work, has blossomed into a process piece. It was my original intent to photograph 36 page-sets, but while engaged in the Photoshop segment of the project I discovered that somehow, in the repetitive process of copy stand photography, I had neglected to document pages 146-147. The book had already been returned to the library by this point and quite possibly altered - I'll never know, because that phase of project development was over and, in my mind, done with. The remaining 35 images, all actual size, have been arranged in a loose grid fashion on the three panels.

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A year previously, in June 2004, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher accidentally flew into my living room window, effectively killing herself. I documented the corpse immediately after the crash, filling my digital camera memory card - a total of 114 photographs. I then stored the series in my archives for possible later use. *Dead Bird* is a selection of 49 of those images and is being paired, under the same title (for obvious reasons), with the Magnificent Corpses prints for this exhibition only.