

Death becomes her  
by Dale Smith

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Ri Anderson at La Petite Mort

## Fear and fantasy draw us into Ri Anderson's morbid universe

Photographer Ri Anderson admits to a bit of an obsession with death, although it's no more serious than anyone else's. But one has to wonder if it's a sense of the morbid or a dark sense of humour that drives her work. Anderson's latest series, *Dead Bodies: A Travel Portfolio*, is enticing, drawing the viewer into the black-and-white world of fictionalized murder-mysteries.

"I think that the fictionalization of death - both watching it on TV and acting it out in my pictures - is both a way of facing death but at the same time keeping it at a distance," Anderson says. She adds that the representation of the female figure - the objectified woman, fictionalized victim and muse - is also crucial to her work.



Road out of Roswell (Roswell, New Mexico), by Ri Anderson

Most of her photographs were taken during travels through the American Southwest, a place Anderson describes as "beautiful and awesome and desolate." The scenes they depict are compelling: the body at the bottom of the stairs; the body on the side of a road; the body in an abandoned building. That body is always a fictionalized self-portrait, and always in one of three cocktail dresses.

In some photos there are clues as to her demise, in others a hint of the absurd evokes laughter to cover our own unease. Otherwise the contemplation of her death would be too terrible.

"A lot of what fascinates me about photography is its ability to act as both document and fiction, to be both true to life and completely removed from it," Anderson says. "I tried, in this series, to combine a hint of autobiography - me, the places I visited, and the people I travelled with and met along the way - along with a fiction, a staging of events, the recurring murder that was never a real event in the world."

Something that surprised Anderson during the shooting was the absence of the usual reluctance of her subjects to get involved. This series drew in people who wanted to be a part of these fictionalized crime scenes, which Anderson says may have to do with our preoccupation with death, or fictionalized death at the very least. And it is this simultaneous fear and fascination that resonates most in her series. Like watching a train wreck or scrutinizing a crime scene, these photos allow us that sense of voyeuristic thrill at the horrific.

"I think that there is a cultural fascination with death - we are afraid of it and want to know what it will be like, but at the same time are in complete denial of it," Anderson muses. "I think that our culture's eroticization of death and violence, in TV, the movies, and many news stories and features, aims to deal with our fascination and fear of death, but in the end evades it so that we end up using this fictionalization of death as a thrill, an amusement, and a distraction."

*Dead Bodies* shows at La Petite Mort Gallery (306 Cumberland Street) from December 2 to January 6.