

DESIGN FOR THE WELL-LIVED LIFE

HOUSE & GARDEN

SEPTEMBER 2006

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photography

STRANGELY FAMILIAR

SCENES OF LEISURE ACTIVITIES ARE SUBVERTED BY KARINE LAVAL'S ODD ANGLES AND SATURATED COLORS by caroline cunningham

KARINE LAVAL'S photographs capture scenes of leisure in images that resemble surrealist stills from an old home movie—the images are infused with a nostalgia that is offset by a certain dislocation. Laval uses extreme perspective and the unexpected juxtaposition of monochromatic and saturated hues to organize her work into a silent but powerful image of shape, space, and suspended motion. Swimming ladders and beach umbrellas are abstracted by high-contrast fields of color, diving platforms become monumental stages under cerulean skies, and human figures are transformed into sculptural forms.

Laval takes a very deliberate approach to her work. "I can be quick in making decisions," she says, "but I am a slow person in other things, and I like to observe. The picture comes into my mind first—the arrangement of natural elements with man-made constructions, the contrast of shapes and colors, and the association of all these elements within the frame—and then I wait for the moment that I find special or quirky." Laval uses an old Rolleiflex that she often holds at waist height, allowing her to work in close proximity to her subjects. She becomes part of the scene she is shooting, as opposed to an intruder on the periphery. But there is a tension in these elegant compositions, with their off-kilter angles and dramatic bands and accents of color, that runs counter to the implied intimacy.



In "Untitled No. 58 (Morocco, 2005)" the hazy blue sky hangs in the background like a gauzy curtain on a hot summer day and provides an ethereal backdrop for people along the water's edge. Bright yellow flippers and a red tire become delicate portals through which the beach walkers wander, isolated in a frozen ballet of movement and color. The photographer is both dispassionate observer and omniscient choreographer; the subverted perspective puts us right on the beach, but we're also on the outside looking in. Laval has a nomad's soul, and her photographs reflect a watchful yet restless sensibility. They are the work of a young, confident artist making her way in the world.

In Laval's "Untitled No. 58 (Morocco, 2005)" a collection of flippers frames beach walkers, isolating them in a dance of suspended movement.

■ For more information: karinelaval.com.