



# Seeing the Outside In:

## Shopping Centres and Spectacle

Panizza Allmark



## Seeing the outside in: Shopping Centres and Spectacle

The photographic series is a commentary on the seduction of modern consumption and the progression from the High Street to intensified shopping spaces – centres and malls across the world. As a result of enclosing our marketplace, consumers willingly surround themselves with the artificial, and in an effort to humanise the experience and subdue the consumer nature is brought inside.

The idea of 'nature' in the shopping malls harks back to theories of the shopping centre being a retreat or an oasis, a place of respite and leisure (within the sphere of commodity fetishism). There is a mixing of high culture with mass culture incorporating larger than life images and artefacts. There is the loss of temporality and place. The photographs convey an intimacy with the close-up of the gaze which reflects the Surrealist tradition of 'making familiar the strange and the strange familiar'. There is a disruption of reality and the photographs take the viewer to another visual space in which the reflection transforms the objects seen in the image, producing a somewhat hallucinatory or dream-like state. These scenes, which I have captured, are the strange visual backdrop to the shopping centre experience.

One example of allegorical imagery is the photograph of the aquarium at the Dubai Mall (cover image). It combines what may be considered the



perils of nature - the shark and ocean life, with the signifiers of consumption and cultural capital - the retail outlet. My reflection is also within this image, conveying my presence as photographer and consumer in the scene. I am part of the spectacle. The photograph appears as a Surrealist montage; an uncanny representation of culture and nature, or, perhaps, a mythical, feminine space. This last suggestion because the shopping mall has been commonly identified as a feminine realm.

As a documentary photographer, or visualista, photographing the interior spaces of malls was an opportunity to provide commentary, a record, on the visual spectacle with which I was engaging. In my approach 'like effective shopping, feminist criticism includes moments of sharpened focus, narrow gaze – of sceptical, if not paranoid assessment' (Morris, 1999, p. 395).

Reference: Morris, M. (1999). 'Things to do with Shopping Centres', in Simon During (ed.) *The Cultural Studies Reader: Second Edition*. Routledge: London, pp. 391-409.

### **Panizza Allmark, Australia 2016**

The photographs exhibited at G511ery, London, were taken in the following locations: Budapest, Buenos Aires, Dubai, Kuta, Melbourne, Paris, Perth, Surabaya, Sheffield and Wollongong.





## Seeing the Inside Out: Capturing a Late Capitalist Dream

Allmark's urban photographic work departs from traditional urban photography in that it is resolutely not focused on aspects of the outside environment. The shopping mall is unambiguously a clean and orderly indoor space of consumption, an apparently "mythical feminine space" set apart from our unruly and abject 'masculine' outdoor urban environments. Her work captures the surrealism of these liminal non-places that exist within, yet somehow beside, the rest of life. We know – from the catalogue – that Allmark's malls exist – in reality – thousands of miles apart. However, in the absence of this supplementary information the geographic location of the malls in her photographs is oblique – blurred by the similarity of the overlapping hyperreal



planes and doubling reflections of these glossy environment, and united by the unspoken common purpose of our movement through these spaces.

Enclosed shopping malls appear to be a feature of late capitalism that, within North America at least, are rapidly declining in popularity. Rather, there is a growing trend towards creating outdoor urban spaces that nostalgically mimic the features of the traditional high street (or main street) that, as such, eschew the artificiality and unabashed consumerism of the indoor mall. These new spaces of consumption offer a hyperreal resurrection of the local businesses lost to various recessions, now supplanted by the careful naturalistic placement of the international and national stores once only to be found in the indoor malls photographed here by Allmark.

Allmark's dreamlike work is invaluable then, in that it so effectively captures the phenomenological experience of the mall in this particular late capitalist moment, where such perfect non-places of consumption – though still ubiquitous – are perhaps soon destined to eventual ruin, abandonment and disrepair, much as the main streets began to crumble when malls were first erected in the 'Golden Age of Capitalism', in the post war economic boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Allmark will be discussing her work at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, on Monday October 10th as part of the Art on the Streets: Creative Responses to the Urban Environment Symposium. See <https://www.ica.org.uk/whats-on/symposium-art-streets> for more details.

Susan Hansen & Phil Healey, Middlesex University London, October 2016.





**Panizza Allmark** is an Australian photographer. She has published in the field of visual culture, photography, gender, identity, transnationalism, and urban space. Her photographic fieldwork extends across twenty countries.

As an artist, Panizza has had nine solo exhibitions and numerous group exhibitions. Her work has been exhibited internationally in London, Shanghai, New York, Urbino, Frankfurt and cities across Australia.

Panizza is currently the Associate Dean of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia. She has a PhD in Media Studies and is an Associate Professor in Media and Cultural Studies

#### **Photographs:**

- Front cover: Dubai Mall, United Arab Emirates, 2014
- Page 1: Dubai Mall, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2014
- Page 2: Wollongong Central, Wollongong, Australia 2014
- Page 3: Grand City, Surabaya, Java, Indonesia, 2015
- Page 4: Queen Victoria Building Sydney, Australia 2014
- Back Cover: City Centre Deira, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2014