

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

514 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001 Tel. 212 941 0012 Fax. 212 929 3265
info@lennonweinberg.com www.lennonweinberg.com

Laura Larson

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**Laura Larson,
"Complimentary"**
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(see Soho).

Hotel rooms are unsettling places when the guests have gone: Traces of people's messy presence prompt a sense of intrigue, unease or disgust in the imagination. With "Complimentary," Laura Larson becomes a kind of furtive ghostbuster, taking a series of pictures of recently vacated hotel rooms before the maids have cleaned up. In some hotels, Larson snapped her photos on the sly (an approach that resembles Sophie Calle's in her own famous series of hotel room photographs); elsewhere, she arranged with the concierge to take a peek. Either way, Larson has captured strange, sometimes serene traces of the travelers who have hit the road.

The images' serial nature creates some formal interest here. Pictures of cramped New York rooms—Larson has found a claustrophobic one in

which the air conditioner nearly meets the bed—are situated among others of larger suites in Miami and Boston. Evidence of a bad night's sleep pervade these images: Beds still marked with impressions of lone individuals are shrouded by twisted sheets. Uncomfortable pillows, often bunched up into something on which a head can rest, seem like monuments to exasperated insomnia. Paper-thin sheets and bad mattresses equip the torture racks that seem designed specifically to make sleepers toss and turn. Before Larson's lens, possibly unhygienic bedspreads become spontaneous sculptures that have apparently been folded, heaped and piled in frustration. Hotel towels are thin, and guests obviously have to use more than one before tossing them around or draping them on the furniture. In one small wallpapered room, a real pig of a guest has piled wet towels on the floor in one corner.

Larson also zeros in on the strange decor of the rooms themselves, which is often unwelcoming. A photograph taken in Miami, featuring a wrenched pillow on the bed, suggests that the cause of sleeplessness may have been the room's truly scary pleated curtains. In a few minutes, once the maids have returned everything to normal, such angst-ridden evidence will vanish: Larson has captured the forensic forms of fear and loneliness just in time.

—Robert Mahoney



Laura Larson, *Boston #205*, 2000.