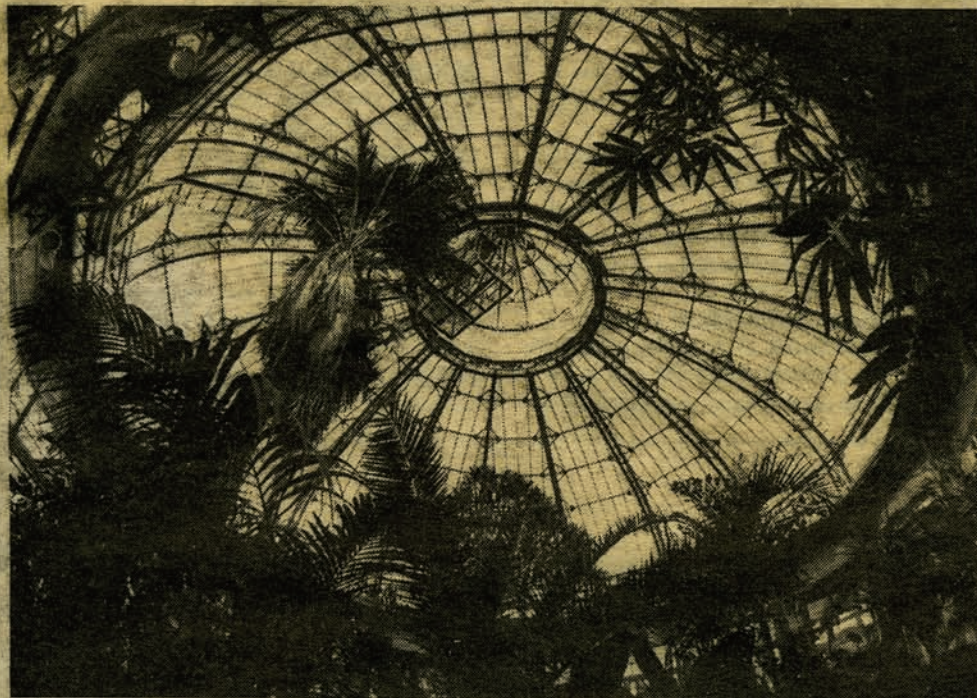


# NOW magazine

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In Penelope Stewart's *Terminus*, a greenhouse displays plants like artworks.

photography

## Dreamlike domes

Photos probe glass as it contains nature **By FRAN SCHECHTER**

**PENELOPE STEWART** at Edward Day Gallery (952 Queen West), to November 30. 416-921-6540. Rating: **NNNN**

IN A GRACEFUL, HAUNTING SHOW called *Echo Utopias*, Toronto artist Penelope Stewart, who also sculpts in beeswax and drapes buildings, uses photography to further her inquiries into the relationship between nature and architectural containment.

It's part of her *Genius Loci* project, which examines 19th- and 20th-century glasshouses and conservatories. Drawn to the glass and steel structures for their beauty and the sensual environments they hold, Stewart also explores their deeper functions: envelopes for a remembered Eden of palms and ferns, attempts to force nature into utopian ideas of formal order, museums for rare plants collected like artworks, colonizers' recreations

of conquered lands whose resources they have plundered.

The show consists primarily of dreamlike black-and-white photographs of greenhouses, many printed as negatives, enhancing their graphic, linear quality.

Domes echo the form of circular flowers, and Stewart uses symmetry – making a ghostly negative of a San Francisco greenhouse into a mirror image ink-blot-style or pairing a flipped positive and negative of Allan Gardens' dome – to highlight the dualities in these sites of nature vs. artifice.

The smaller *Trace Laminations* pieces, made of film adhered to glass, sit on a ledge so they cast delicate shadows on the wall behind. Depicting conservatory entrances and planting equipment, they resemble 19th-century glass negatives and bring to mind the fact that U.S. Civil War photo plates often ended up as greenhouse panes when people found their subjects too painful.

A slide show documents Stewart's *Cloche* project at Edward Day's *Kiwi Sculpture Garden* in Perth, Ontario, where her 9-foot-high photos of glass garden cloches (also represented here by three smaller colour prints) blended into the woodland, making the little bell jars appear to be strange domed dwellings a person might enter.

It's quiet, thoughtful, resonant work that stays with you after you leave the gallery. ©

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