



In the twentieth century hygiene is the religion and the toilet its icon.

According to Octavio Paz' formulation (cited in Albrecht Wellmer's *the Persistence of Modernity*), beauty was once bound to one of two realms, the sacred – religious art – and the secular – craft. In the process of modern industrialism, craftsmanship is supplanted by industrial design and art becomes independent of religious purpose. Some vestige of religious beauty persists in what in Benjaminian terms is the aura of the work of art, while at the same time functionalist aesthetics deem that for any industrial object to be beautiful, its form must properly follow its function. That is, modern beauty is the shortest distance between the design of an object and its utility, a kind of evolutionary theory for design, a survival of the most fitting. Thus, only if an industrial object is pared back to its essential form can it be elegant. As a modern icon, a 'madonna of the bathroom' (to appropriate one view of Duchamp's *Fountain*), the toilet is such a beautiful thing. Yet, as we understand of theories of evolution, survival has at least as much to do with being fit enough as with being fittest. So too for our toilets, they must be functional enough, clean enough, shining enough, to stand the associations with which, in the modern, they are burdened. They may be 'piss elegant' but they're always sullied by the inevitable traces of human usage, the ordinary spillage of quotidian life. A century of plumbing shows me this new religion. My piece, *Century*, draws upon my photographic archive of bathrooms in public places. I chose one hundred bathrooms that I have taken over a span of twenty years in the public institutions through which we modern folks move in the name of mobility, democracy, shared and contested opinions, shared and contested communities. The images are from both hemispheres, many continents and include the bathrooms of universities, museums, trains, planes, shopping malls, union offices, hospitals, libraries and the like. As documents of the private spaces of the public sphere, the photographs are necessarily taken on the run. Out of balance and snapped like the locking of a not very secure door, they are often mis-colored, sometimes out of focus and always uncanny. Though familiar to any visitor to these different public spheres, these images are denatured by the play of my own desire to document and arrange them in a grid of their imperfection, color by unbalanced color. A return of the repressed, a coming together of those things – intimacy and the public – that modern life would rather were separate. I think of *Century* as an index of intimacy in public. For me its beauty lies in the inevitable failure of those terms to remain discrete and untouched.

Margaret Morgan, 1998