

PRESS COVERAGE



Crime Unseen

October 28 — January 15, 2012

1. CBC Chicago, Jan. 2, 2012
2. Chicagoist, Jan. 15, 2012
3. F News Magazine, Jan. 5, 2012
4. New City, Nov. 15, 2011
5. Hyperallergic, Nov. 25, 2011
6. Chicago Reader, Oct. 21, 2011
7. Time Out Chicago, Nov. 9, 2011

Last Chance: See 'Crime Unseen' At MoCP

January 2, 2012 6:00 AM

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by Amy Cavanaugh

Museum of Contemporary Photography

600 S. Michigan
Chicago, IL
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Angela Strassheim; Evidence No. 2, 2009; Archival pigment print, 48 x 60 inches (Courtesy of the artist)

Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thurs 10 a.m.-8 p.m.;
Sun, 12 p.m. - 5 p.m.
Free

The images in *Crime Unseen*, the Museum of Contemporary Photography's latest show, are lurid, dark, and incredibly captivating. Each of the photographers takes pictures of crime scenes, well after the crime has occurred. There are no people in these images; just houses, street corners, snowy roads, and other places that violent crimes have occurred. The photographs draw out questions about how we look at murder, remember victims, and the role the medium plays in solving crimes.

In her series "Evidence," Angela Strassheim uses "Blue Star," a chemical forensic spray that makes blood remaining on crime scenes appear blue. She began using "Blue Star" while working for the Miami Forensic Imaging Bureau, and the series features images from several crime scenes. The photographs are gothic-inspired and visually stunning – the rooms appear dim, except for patches that the viewer knows are blood from the victim. A photograph of a bedroom has splatters glowing on a wall.

In "Redheaded Peckerwood," Christian Patterson traced the path of teenage couple Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate, who committed a series of murders in Wyoming and Nebraska in the winters of 1957 and 1958. Patterson shot crime scenes and documents relating to the murders, then added in his own ideas about what may have happened. This mix of fact and fiction allows us to see how prominently imagination figures into our perception of crimes. Images include "House at Night," which captures the corner of a house with glowing gold and turquoise light pouring from the windows. There's snow outside and a dead end sign visible on the road. "Falling Flowers" offers a close-up of yellow-rose printed wallpaper, and "Bloody Snow" documents a field of white snow broken up by vibrant red lines and spatters. The images are inviting yet eerie, and they encapsulate the lonely, dark aesthetic that the whole show puts forth.

Chicago also figures prominently in the show. One room is devoted to photographs from the Chicago History Museum's Chicago Daily News archive. Represented are Al Capone, Bugs Malone, and other gangsters from the '20s and '30s, along with photographs of crime scenes and criminals. It's a brief but compelling look back at major parts of Chicago's history. There are also photographs that Richard Barnes took of Ted Kaczynski (the Unabomber's) cabin. Kaczynski was born in Chicago and mailed bombs to protest human destruction of the natural world and our dependence on technology. Barnes photographed Kaczynski's Montana cabin while it sat in storage facility, where it was being held for evidence, and he also shot the location where it once stood. Barnes' images explore how we look at evidence in relation to a crime.



Corinne May Botz; Pink Bathroom (Slippers), 2004, C-print, 11 x 14 inches (courtesy of MoCP)

Crime Unseen is a large show, but each element is strong and adds to the overall narrative – crime is a terrible thing, but our fascination with it and desire to know more is something we just can't escape.

Crime Unseen runs through January 15.

The Week in Art: January 15-21

BY [AMY CAVANAUGH](#) IN [ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT](#) ON JAN 15, 2012 1:00 PM



Angela Strassheim, *Evidence No. 2*, 2009, *Courtesy of the artist*

Several big museum shows end today, so spend the afternoon soaking up art at one of these spots. All three museums close at 5 p.m.:

- The [Museum of Contemporary Photography](#) closes [Crime Unseen](#), a lurid show of photographs that depict crime scenes (above), wrongly convicted people, and the Unabomber's cabin.
- Learn some Chicago history at [Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention](#) at the [Art Institute of Chicago](#). The large show details the architect's career and pays particular attention to his contributions to Chicago architecture, including Marina City.
- The [Museum of Contemporary Art](#) closes [Ron Terada: Being There](#) and [IAIN BAXTER&: Works 1958-2011](#). Terada, a Canadian artist, works in a range of media but particularly focuses on signage and ideas about language. BAXTER& explores commerce and nature in a large overview of his work.

Openings this week:

- Today:

>> [Arc Gallery](#) hosts the opening reception from 2-5 p.m. for three shows, including *Residues* by Ray Klimek and Rajorshi Ghosh. The videos and photographs explore the history and imagination of landscapes.

- Tuesday:

>> The [Block Museum of Art](#) opens [Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe](#), which looks at Renaissance artists' involvement in science. Also opening is *Theo Leffmann: Weaving a Life into Art*, a retrospective of work by the Chicago fiber artist.

- Friday:

>> [Jackson Jurge Gallery](#) opens *REVOLUTION 2012: An Exposition on Change Around the World* with a reception from 6-9 p.m. The show, with work from more than two dozen artists, predicts where 2012 will take us.

>> The [National Museum of Mexican Art](#) opens *El Alma de la Fiesta*, which explores the various Mexican fiestas that occur throughout the year.

>> Gallery 400 opens [Global Cities, Model Worlds](#) with work by Ryan Griffis, Lize Mogel, and Sarah Ross that looks at the spatial and social impacts of large events like the Olympics. The three artists will be lecturing at 12 p.m., and the opening reception is from 5-8 p.m.

Contact the [author](#) of this article or email ips@chicagoist.com with further questions, comments or tips.

ARC GALLERY	ART INSTITUTE	BERTRAND GOLDBERG	BLOCK MUSEUM OF ART
GALLERY 400	JACKSON JURGE GALLERY	MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART	
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY	NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MEXICAN ART		

“Crime Unseen” at Museum of Contemporary Photography

By Flip Dash January 5, 2012 Subfeature

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Angela Strassheim, "Evidence No. 2," 2009. Archival pigment print 48 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

One is surprised by the scope of “Crime Unseen” at the Museum of Contemporary Photography. It spans all three floors of the gallery space and presents the work of eight contemporary American artists and a selection of news images from the Chicago History Museum. Perhaps it is not the scope, but the subject matter — the revisiting of past crime scenes by artists, and an implicit rethinking of the power of photography as evidence — which seems to catch one off guard with its ability to occupy and engage a large art space. Of course, this discovery is an intentional component of the curator, Karen Irvine’s case, who frames the exhibition as “a rallying cry against forgetting,” the forgetting being the flip-side of our total fascination with murder.

The first two rooms of the exhibition are devoted to artists that directly explore the de-contextualization of the crime scene in the indiscriminate hands of time and its accomplices — nature and refurbishing. Deborah Luster and Angela Strassheim present us with parking lots and living rooms, once the domain of yellow tape and photojournalism, the subjectivity of which is accentuated by the artists’ aesthetic touch. The images themselves do not illuminate the ghosts of atrocities they capture, and it thus becomes apparent that the message of the exhibition vanishes without the accompanying text. The issue of vanishing — the disappearing memory of crimes as their spectacle flashes and withers — is of key concern for all the artists and their unique subject matter. We read that the black-and-white photo of a wood cabin in the middle of an empty warehouse is Richard Barnes’ “Unabomber 01”, 1998, and that the image is of Ted Kaczynski’s home transplanted from rural Montana to the FBI headquarters. The adjacent photograph of an empty rectangle of land, its flourishing in grassy oblivion delineated by a fence, also comes into context through the labels. The artists are obviously using the gory allusions to expose the objective/subjective trickery of our double agent — the camera. Perhaps this exposé is redundant, after all, even Susan Sontag in her 1973 book *On Photography* acknowledges “That photographic recording is always, potentially, a means of control was already recognized when such powers were in their infancy” (after which she quotes Delacroix from 1850).



Corinne May Botz, "Pink Bathroom (Slippers)," 2004. C-print, 11 x 14 inches. Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Photography

There are two series of works that draw you in for closer examination. The eighteen photographs from the Chicago Daily News archive of 1900-1930, on loan from the Chicago History Museum, are fascinating. Framed, small, and thoroughly aged, the photographs of the nascent documentation of the infamous Chicago crime world are the stuff that still feeds the entertainment industry and keeps captivating our imagination. There is an excellent photo of Al Capone arriving to trial with his posse of lawyers from 1931. Another lovely image, sepiá with age, of a wooden table in some sort of a barn, topped with bottles, canisters and a strange mink garment — it is the evidence from a major drug bust, cocaine and other drug containers, arranged on display by the police, 1908.

The second engaging series is the work of Corinne May Botz. The artist takes close-up shots of doll-houses which were originally made for the forensic police training in 1940- 50’s. The photos are sweet and thus mildly disturbing. They depict the rooms of a utopian doll-house — florid wallpaper, a full stocked kitchen, a comfy sitting room — and are adorned with a hopsotch splatter of brown stains or a bottle of liquor rolling on the floor. Some of the images have doll victims laying face down on the carpet, or covered in blood under the covers of their miniature beds. The perversity of the detail is oddly entertaining.

The only work in the exhibition that speaks directly of victims is the video project by the artist Taryn Simon, occupying a modest space at the end of the staircase. The artist worked with several former inmates — some on death row — but after serving several years in prison, were later acquitted through DNA evidence. The videos are excerpts from interviews with the men, who are mostly middle-aged, and are conducted in places that are somehow tied to their conviction. “The Innocents,” 2004, initially exhibited at the Gagosian Gallery in London in 2004, has real emotional resonance. The stories of the men are powerful, and effectively challenge the notion of victim-hood. The accusations that destroyed their lives are never redeemed, and the men continue to live in their shadow, though proven innocent. There is nothing that can be done to save the lives of people who are gone, which the rest of the exhibition honors. Counterbalancing the exhibitions’ defeatism, the draw to action is particularly heartfelt.

On the third floor artists Christopher Dawson and Krista Wortendyke offer closing remarks. The former presents work that reveals the monstrosity of the technological occupation by television crews of crime scenes. Among other works, Wortendyke in “Killing Season: Chicago” shows a website that documents the site of murders in Chicago with captions of basic information about the victim.

After seeing the last evidence in particular, I ask myself whether this exhibition — having dug up and revisited what we have collectively buried — has reincarnated the facts of these committed crimes, their victims and memory? I am not sure that the appeal is qualitatively different from what it might have been before. In many ways, the exhibition continues the spectacle, which some of its artists critique, by giving it new details: blood stains that are now only visible with Blue Start forensic technology, familiar street names, a victim of the same age as me. Nonetheless, it is as if by critiquing the sensationalism and then the ephemerality of the photojournalism that accompanies a gruesome crime, the exhibition simply restores it to a more dignified place of observation. Knowing it is art, it is indeed less perverse to let your imagination go wild while contemplating stains of blood.

Crime Unseen
through January 15, 2011
Museum of Contemporary Photography
600 S. Michigan

Nov 15 Eye Exam: On Happiness and Violence

► Performance, Photography

[Add comments](#)

By Jason Foubberg

During a typically violent summer in Chicago this year, Tony Fitzpatrick wrote an article for *Artnet* magazine about Chicago's legacy of crime and murder—among cops and gangsters alike—and he arrived at the moral that “the city gets just as many killers as it deserves.” Fitzpatrick innately understands, as do many artists, that tragedy makes for great art. Contrary to the common good, some of our greatest art is fueled by conflict. “Reading about the happiness of others is often boring,” writes Charles Baxter in his essay “Regarding Happiness.” Baxter cites Adam and Eve. Before their sin, “they are virtually non-narratable.” It is their sin, and their guilt, that gives their story drive. Following them, we have the Greek tragedies and Shakespeare, George Carlin and Lars von Trier. Two current exhibitions investigate the delicate topics of happiness and violence: “Crime Unseen” at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, and “The Happiness Project,” a citywide curatorial initiative organized by Tricia Van Eck.



Krista Wortendyke, from “Crime Unseen”

“Crime Unseen” is an excellent exhibition because its depictions of violent crime—murder, in most cases—are not horror-film perverse. Here, eight contemporary photographers explore the natural relationship between documentary photography and truth, but they all arrive at the crime scenes after the act, sometimes decades after. These are not witness accounts of the killings but reenactments, reconstructions and retraced steps of infamous murder sprees and everyday drive-bys. While our judiciary system aims to be unambiguous, most of the photographs on view here are open-ended, as if artists have extra sensitivity for interpreting a crime scene, reopening old cases by coloring their terrible realities with attractive presentations.



from “The Happiness Project”

“In what way is the landscape a crime?” The question was not posed at “Crime Unseen” but inside a vacant storefront serving as a venue for “The Happiness Project.” The storefront, in Edgewater, had previously served as a community “neighborhood watch” center on a street popular with gangs. Now, the storefront is a home base for several performance-art pieces, including the prompt for performers and visitors to “observe your surroundings as a forensics of the crime scene ‘happiness.’” I intended to be a bystander in that performance but by happy accident I was asked to walk the neighborhood, look for clues, and report my findings on Twitter,

which the artists Judd Morrissey and Mark Jeffery collected on a map. Littered mini drug bags and sketchy strangers did not qualify as evidence on this crime scene of happiness; instead, I was propelled to interpret my surroundings as omens of joy. I did not see pure happiness flowing from the gutters, but many manifestations of desire for happiness: lottery scratchers, loose-change charity, a tree dedicated, by schoolchildren, to patriotic death.

Cruising crime scenes has also been on Krista Wortendyke's mind. For her ongoing photo project, “Killing Season,” she returns to murder sites in Chicago one year after. There is no “caution” tape or body outlines drawn in chalk, just people-less landscapes. The images end up looking like studies of vernacular Chicago architecture. The sites are shot in a straightforward, deadpan way, akin to Joel Sternfeld or Lewis Baltz. The only thing gloomy about these old crime sites is that they are so banal. Here, murder is common, and life goes on. Wortendyke photographs all of the sites by daylight, although it's likely that most of the killings happened at dark. The artist's revision of the time-of-death would seem like a fault were it not for almost all the other artists in “Crime Unseen” making similar creative interventions in fact. For example, Christian Patterson followed his obsession with an infamous 1957-58 Midwestern killing spree in order to make some provocatively pretty images. What looks like bloody snow is just red earth beneath snowdrifts. A fire consuming a house makes an appearance just for dramatic texture. Patterson is a masterful storyteller. His images, made over five years, on the site of the Nebraska killings, and only in January, are evocative and haunting.



Christian Patterson, “Bloody Snow”



from “The Happiness Project”

While the artworks in “The Happiness Project” are not reliant on objects, they are, like “Crime Unseen,” indebted to the specifics of place. Crime scenes happen in a particular place, and, in turn, the place offers up clues and context. Happiness, too, is site-specific. In Pilsen, a “Cosmic Workshop” has been set up by Derek Chan and Lisa Alvarado to display their large, colorful paintings with patterns reminiscent of indigenous American textiles. In a neighborhood where hand-painted paper signs displayed in windows are common fare, Chan and Alvarado's pieces beckoned passersby inside, including neighborhood kids who visit the site regularly, like a clubhouse. At the Edgewater storefront, Kirsten Leenaars is interviewing community members, aldermen and local students about the needs and wants of the 48th ward. Using the group therapy approach, she will have everyone play themselves in a film, expressing their desires for happier selves. If more people become involved, the happiness will prosper.

“Crime Unseen” shows at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 South Michigan, through January 15, 2012. “The Happiness Project” takes place through November at various venues. See 6018north.net for more information.



Plastic Bongs, Chinese Mini-Zines, and Endless Labors of Love at the LA Art Book Fair



Vinegar Valentines: The Nasty Anonymous Letters of the Victorian Age



Ancient Erotic Dreams and Explicit Scenes in the New York Public Library Collection



Revisiting a Subversive Mexican Art Collective and the Country's Forgotten Crimes



A Japanese Artist Who Sculpted Rather Than Painted His Canvases



The Urgent Protest Art of the Berkeley Political Poster Workshop

MUSEUMS

Can We Trust a Photograph?

by Philip A Harrigan on November 25, 2011

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Angela Strasseheim, "Evidence No 2" (2009) (Courtesy of the artist)

CHICAGO — I was standing in front of a large black and white photograph by Angela Strasseheim in the [Museum of Contemporary Photography](#), Chicago. It appeared to show the interior of a boring suburban home, complete with bad furniture and family photos in ugly frames. Everything seemed normal, nothing was out of place — except for the tidal splatter of white marks, like someone had hurled a can of paint at the walls.

After a quick reading of the text beside the photo, it turned out that those splashes were bloodstains, which Strasseheim revealed by spraying the room with a chemical compound used in forensic science called Blue Star. This enables the bloodstains to be captured by the camera even after the rooms have been scrubbed clean and repainted. Strasseheim uses long exposures in ambient lighting, which partly explains the strong contrasts between dark areas and the brightness of the bloodstains. After absorbing this information, I was struck by two things: the artistry and patience of the photography, with its noticeable attention to tonal balance and symmetry of the different picture areas; and a feeling of guilt, of being slightly appalled at myself for looking at evidence of such a grisly act and getting a real aesthetic pleasure from it. Death is horrible, the photograph seems to say, but blood is beautiful.



Christian Patterson, "House on Fire" (2010) (Courtesy of the artist)

That is without question Strasseheim's point — a point that is well made by most of the work on display in *Crime Unseen* curated by Karen Irvine. It put me in mind of all the structuralist, post-structuralist, deconstructionist and feminist criticism I've read, from Roland Barthe's *Camera Lucida* to Susan Sontag's *On Photography* — the theorizing about the camera as gaze, the gaze as never entirely innocent, the gaze as caught in some variation of guilt-laden

complicity in the exploitation of the camera's subject. I thought of all the work that purports to express these ideas, and how little of it actually does (because it's a lot easier to quote Derrida than to illustrate him). And I thought: wow, this is the real thing. I'm enjoying these photographs and I feel guilty about it. Sontag was right!

There are works by eight contemporary photographers on the museum's three levels, with the addition of some great pictures of 1920s mob-ridden Chicago from the archive of the *Chicago Daily News*. Each photographer shows a different kind of crime scene. Some of them are real, some of them are imaginary, and some of them are re-imagined. Christian Patterson's pieces use a mixture of his own photos, found photos and objects, drawings and his own small paintings to allude to a series of murders from the 1950s. The actual inspiration remains hidden, I think, unless you read the accompanying text, but that doesn't lessen the originality of the approach, and the sinister intimations of the images, even if you can't quite work out what those bloodstains in the snow come from.

Turning from Patterson's work to Corinne May Botz, we see images of brightly-colored rooms showing evidence of burglary or murder: blood on the carpet, a figure lying face down, the contents of a desk spilling out onto the floor.

My first mistaken assumption was that they were real rooms, when on closer inspection they were doll's-house-sized reproductions. My second mistaken assumption was that Botz had constructed these miniature crime scenes to mess with our perceptions of what's real and what's not. In fact, it turns out that they were constructed in the 1940s by a Chicagoan called Frances Glessner Lee, and they were used in training detectives to hone their observational skills. So the photographs end up being slightly hilarious and disturbing at the same time, in a novel interpretation of the show's investigation into voyeurism.



Corinne May Botz, "Three Room Dwelling (Knocked Over Chair)" (2004) (Courtesy of the artist)

The more documentary side of crime scenes is well represented by Krista Wortendyke, who photographed the site of every murder in Chicago during a three month period and then mounted the photos on the wall in a bar-graph arrangement. The theme here seems to be the banality of each crime scene, and the fact that all those sidewalks and parking lots combine to become just a series of numbers. Compare this to the emotional impact of Taryn Simon's film, consisting of interviews with people wrongly convicted of terrible crimes, often on the basis of photographic "identification." Listening to the harrowing experiences of innocent men who spent years in jail, watching as they move from barely-concealed anger to unrestrained sobbing, we are ashamed to be watching their moments of grief, but more ashamed of the system that brought them to this place.



Krista Wortendyke, "Killing Season Chicago" (October 28, 2010 – January 15, 2011) (Courtesy of the artist)

So what is evident in these places? What crimes were committed? Were they even crimes at all? Are they even pictures of real places? Is a photograph an absolutely unimpeachable record of an object or an event, or is it as untrustworthy as any first person account? Why do we flinch from the spray of blood on the wall, while secretly enjoying what it implies? These are some of the questions raised by this show, and for me the images brought those ideas to life in ways I haven't seen before. The photographers' answers are not at all comforting or reassuring — for which they should be thanked.

Crime Unseen continues at the [Museum of Contemporary Photography](#) (600 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois) until January 15, 2012.

Angela Strasseheim Christian Patterson Corinne May Botz Karen Irvine Krista Wortendyke
Museum of Contemporary Photography Chicago photography

READER








Pink Bathroom (Slippers) by Corinne May Botz

Crime Unseen


When: Oct. 27-Jan. 15 2012

If you're interested in how violent crime resonates through American culture, you could do worse than to study the case of Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate, the Nebraska teens who murdered ten people and a dog over the course of eight days in January, 1958. Their spree has inspired at least a half-dozen movies, including Terrence Malick's 1973 *Badlands*, and prompted Bruce Springsteen to write the song "Nebraska" ("Me and her went for a ride, sir, and ten innocent people died"). Now visual artist Christian Patterson has traced the pair's path with original photographs that he displays alongside actual images and documents from the case, blurring the line between fiction and fact. Patterson's installation is part of "Crime Unseen," a new group show that looks at mayhem through the lens of the camera--a modern invention, says curator Karen Irvine, that offers the public "voyeuristic access" to violence. Angela Strassheim photographs old crime scenes, using a chemical spray to bring back the ghosts of bloodstains long since scrubbed away. Krista Wortendyke has documented the site of every homicide committed in Chicago between October 28, 2010, and January 15, 2011 (the dates of "Crime Unseen" minus a year). Corinne May Botz's pictures depict the "Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death," true-to-scale miniature crime scenes created by Frances Glessner Lee in the 1940s and '50s to help train detectives in forensics. A Chicago heiress who earned the honorary title of police captain, Lee used her mother's old needlework to create clothing for tiny murder victims and incorporated details from her own home into the dioramas. She called her life "lonely and rather terrifying." —**Sam Worley**

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"Crime Unseen" at the Museum of Contemporary Photography

[ADD C](#)

Taryn Simon, Corinne May Botz and other artists investigate the relationship between photography and crime at the MoCP.



Photograph: Courtesy of the MoCP
Corinne May Botz, *Pink Bathroom (Slippers)*, 2004.

A dead woman lies on the floor of her 1940s kitchen. She took a cake out of the oven before collapsing—perhaps from carbon monoxide poisoning? (Guess again.) On a table nearby, we see her rolling pin. It's probably no more than an inch long.

The victim is a doll, an inhabitant of [Frances Glessner Lee's Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death](#), which artist [Corinne May Botz](#) photographed in 2004. Lee, a forensics enthusiast who grew up in Chicago's [Glessner House](#), created the 19 dollhouse-like Nutshell Studies to train detectives how to decipher visual clues.

Titles like *Pink Bathroom (Slippers)* (pictured) focus our attention on Lee's dazzling miniature details, so that Botz's series emphasizes the contrast between these signs of cozy domesticity and the gory real-life crimes that Lee reenacted. Her charming, creepy photos are the highlights of this thoughtful exhibition.

Curated by Karen Irvine, "Crime Unseen" aims to examine the relationships among photography, crime and evidence. [Taryn Simon's](#) series "The Innocents" demonstrates the danger of relying on photography's truth: In a heartbreaking video, she interviews men who served several years in prison for capital offenses before DNA evidence exonerated them.

The exhibition fixates tediously on place, however, as four of its eight artists dwell on how quickly meaning vanishes from the scene of a crime. Or so it seems: Blood glows on the walls in [Angela Strassheim's](#) "Evidence" photos, chemically revealed to unwitting homeowners years after the stains were created and cleaned.

Even the early-20th-century [Chicago Daily News](#) crime photos filling one gallery emphasize the sites where crimes occurred, rather than the acts themselves. Most of "Crime Unseen" leaves viewers melancholy, unable to recognize its sad or sordid histories in the banal scenes before us.