

The development of the culture of the United States of America has established boundaries of environmental mediocrity. These limits are generally accepted, and consequently they are usually not questioned. We take our surroundings for granted, the expanse of our land so vast that we believe we will always have new environments to escape to. Sometimes we let our history deteriorate to a point where the original value is forgotten. Often we tear our history down, trusting our lives to memories. We confidently consume without deliberation and are deeply invested in the idea of mass produced environments, where convenience is king and redundancy is expected and respected.

While much of this mentality revolves around economic issues, there is a larger part that has to do with a collective state of chronic depression systematically dispersed throughout our society. Many of us feel powerless do anything to change the world, while countless more are too numbed to realize anything is wrong.

Human/Habitat explores the relationship between the human race and the world we modify. It is common thought that environmental conservation deals primarily with the physical health of our planet, and as such, the social issues inherent in these discussions are often downplayed or completely ignored. I consider the two aspects to be of equal importance - both perspectives are intertwined, inseparable, and each integral to the whole of the issue.

In 2006 I began to photograph the land once known as Riverview Park. Initially billed as "The World's Largest Amusement Park," Riverview operated between 1904 and 1967 on Chicago's Northwest side. It quickly came to represent the fantastic possibilities of new technology in the early Twentieth Century, and the many attractions of the park seemed to exceed the furthest limits of the human imagination.

When Riverview closed in 1967 due to economic issues, it left a gaping hole in the community, one that was partially filled by mundane institutions – a strip mall, a police station, a nursing home. Another section remains untouched - the land overgrown and neglected, concrete rollercoaster foundations left in ruins, snaking between the trees, in and out of maple leaves and mounds of dirt. The land that once served as a tribute to the fantastic now wallows in mediocrity, with very few hints as to what used to be there just forty years ago.

In 2007 I moved to Bridgeport, a working class neighborhood just Southwest of Downtown Chicago. The streets of Bridgeport reflect those working class values - the neighborhood functions on bare necessities. The yards are small and many times are

used for storage, the piles of seemingly random items stirring up curiosity in the passersby. Trees are scarce, parks are few, and architecture is minimalistic. The stench of the South Branch of the Chicago River is almost unbearable on a summer evening, when the silhouettes of abandoned factories rim the horizon, backlit by the setting sun, begging the memory of a time when the neighborhood flourished with production and purpose.

Bridgeport is a faint shadow of what it once was. The land took decades of abuse. The stigma and stench of slaughterhouses are ever present, the ghosts of a bloody past. Consequently, the rent is very affordable for a neighborhood so close and convenient to downtown because the only people who want to stay are those who have always been there. Indeed, this is home.

As different as Bridgeport may seem from Riverview Park, both situations carry similar implications. Both areas harnessed elements of passion and pride in their inception, and each saw the passion dwindle and eventually die out. But ultimately, I dream of a rebirth. Through my work and time spent in each place, I have developed not only a passion for the hope these two examples represent, but also a love for the physical land itself.

My work is very Taoist in nature. I consider the idea of balance in every aspect of my work - conceptually and formally. For this reason, I am very interested in the work of Andy Goldsworthy and have great respect for the harmony each of his pieces shares with its surroundings. Likewise, Robert Smithson has inspired me to a great extent. Both men's installations have led me to consider the idea of working with the environments literally through installation, sharing a more direct relationship with the subject of my images. Visually speaking, I have been most inspired by environmental documentarians like Eugène Atget and Berenice Abbott, whose landscapes reflected the social connections I still seek in the world around me. I also consider Bruce Davidson a major influence, his subjects innocently echoing the sentiments of their surroundings with an undeniable visual eloquence.

Regardless of the methods, I continue to juxtapose the bleak images of life with some of the beautiful ones - glimmers of hope that our society will grow to care more about our surroundings, seek out the full potential for these environments, and ultimately foster a human habitat dedicated to collective happiness and mental well-being.