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AROUND THE GALLERIES
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Finding Some New Terrain
By Sharon Mizota



For many, landscape photography need proceed no further than the majestic idylls of Ansel Adams, but in 1975, an exhibition titled “New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape” presented a new approach to landscape that has quietly infiltrated the mainstream of art photography. Bernd and Hilla Becher, Stephen Shore and the other artists in that show, which was first presented at George Eastman House in Rochester, N.Y., and is now restaged at LACMA, created spare, straightforward images, most often in black and white, that depicted not the glories of pristine nature but how it had been transformed by human intervention.

“Locating Landscape: New Strategies, New Technologies” at Sam Lee Gallery is a thought-provoking look at how nine contemporary artists are updating this aesthetic. It includes pieces by two artists from the original exhibition – **Lewis Baltz** and **Frank Gohlke**. These works, in particular Baltz’s small, 1977 images of bleak Nevada landscapes, function as touchstones, allowing us to evaluate how their dispassionate, matter-of-fact approach appears in the exhibition’s other works.

Baltz and his contemporaries were interested in stripping landscape photography of its romantic tendencies. The younger artists in this show combine that clear-eyed vision with humor, new technologies and narrative to suggest a different kind of psychic investment in the environment.

Paho Mann’s photos of vacated Circle-K convenience stores are straightforward documents of generic, corporate architecture re-purposed by smaller businesses, often to amusing effect. Each of his nine images is a full frontal view of what looks like the same building: a nondescript modernist box with large windows and an overhang in front. However, each structure is a different, former Circle-K that, like a paper doll, has been variously re-dressed as “Mr. Formal” (a tuxedo rental shop), “Big Apple Cleaners” or “Carniceria Cuerrero.” While Mann’s relentlessly similar compositions attest to the corporate homogenization of the landscape, they also offer a glimmer of hope that this blankness might be a canvas for a more quirky, local presence to assert itself.

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Several artists use GPS technology, a quantitative take on landscape that the “New Topographics” artists would (and do) appreciate. **Margot Anne Kelley** pairs her landscape photos with first-person texts about her adventures in geo-caching, a kind of treasure hunt in which participants hide caches of various things and post their GPS coordinates to a website for others to locate. **Christiana Caro** used GPS to locate places exactly 10 miles from her home in eight different directions and took 365-degree panoramas at each spot. Unfortunately only one of them, a wooded area, is on view.

Similarly under-represented is Gohlke’s project, a collaboration with poet Herbert Gottfried, in which they use GPS to explore a particular latitude line and respond to what they see. Serial projects like these are often more interesting as ideas than visuals anyway, but it might have been better to keep the show more focused than to include such small sections of these works.

More successful is **Andrew Freeman**’s series “[Manzanar] Architectural Double.” When Freeman learned that the barracks from Manzanar, a World War II Japanese American internment camp, had been relocated all over California after the war, he set out to find them. His photographs of their new locations and identities as apartments, garages, even museums, are poignant evidence of how a national shame becomes part of the everyday landscape. As such, the series excavates history hidden in plain view and, like Mann’s recycled Circle-K’s, suggests how a certain architectural blankness can be a clean slate for starting over.

Also included are works by **Adam Thorman**, **Mark Klett** and **Byron Wolfe**.

“**Locating Landscape**,” Sam Lee Gallery, 990 N. Hill St., No. 190, (323) 227-0275, through December 5. Closed Sundays through Tuesdays. www.samleegallery.com