

Seeing the human landscape

Andrew Borowiec, who teaches photography at the University of Akron, has the largest one-man show in Photofest 2002. "The Ohio River Valley" features some 60 images from his book with the same name.

The show opens Tuesday, with a public reception from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Promega Gallery in Fitchburg (5445 E. Cheryl Parkway, off Fish Hatchery Road) and

VISUAL ART

Jacob Stockinger

will run through May 25. Monday night at 7, Bo-

rowiec will sign copies of his book at Canterbury Booksellers, 315 W. Gorham St.

Borowiec seems deeply American in his approach to vernacular landscape. Like that of his mentor, Robert Adams, his work is understated — a chamber music of the land, not some grand opera.

He recently discussed his work.

I don't think of myself as a documentary photographer in the strictest sense. The landscape is a point of departure. If you're successful, it ends up being about broader issues.

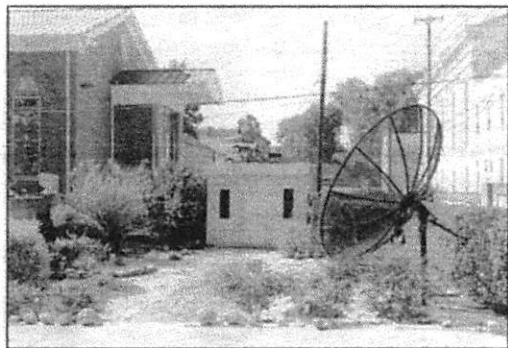
I didn't start with the idea of doing the Ohio River Valley. I was looking for a certain kind of America that existed and used to be economically and historically important but is now overlooked.

My method is pretty simple. I drive around until I find interesting places. Then I get out and walk. Often what I end up photographing is not what I saw from the car.

I try to make photographs that don't have any artfulness to them, pictures where style is secondary to meaning. I compare photography to poetry. The ordinariness is just a guise. I want them to look believable. So the pictures look straightforward, but the longer you look at them the more complex the meanings are.

I hope people come away with an understanding of the place. There is peace and beauty to be found in these places we don't think of as conventionally beautiful. It's not only Yosemite and grand architecture that are worthy of our attention, but also ordinary places.

I'm interested in environmental ideas, but in my photography I am not an environmentalist. I'm interested in how to read a land-



Andrew Borowiec's simple theme: how people live.

scape and figure out why it is the way it is.

To most people, landscape is nature without any presence of man. In my work, I'm absolutely uninterested in nature on its own. I'm interested in the intersection between man and his place in this world.

"The inhabited landscape" is the term people use. I'm interested in people. My pictures are about the people who inhabit that landscape and shape it. I don't want people actually in them, though, because they become the only thing viewers see.

If I won the lottery, I would keep on doing what I'm doing. Making photographs is my way of understanding the world. I'd make them even if no one looked at them. The process of grappling with the world and making some sense and structure of it is what motivates me.

It's important to me that people looking at the pictures understand a shared idea of America, not the idea that the media invent for us. I hope they come to appreciate the things they are actually seeing and not only the things they've been conditioned to see.

I'm always touched when people get it. There are always those people who ask "Why do you show only the negative stuff?" The merit isn't to show that the Ohio River Valley has what every other place has, but that it is unique.

■ **A reminder:** After 15 years, the always affordable "Artful Women Art Show and Sale" has a new sponsor (the Wisconsin Women's Network) and a new, bigger location (the Skylight Lounge Gallery, C2-5, at University Hospital). A free public reception will be held Sunday from 3 to 6 p.m.

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