



# *The View From Here*

*Recent Pictures From Central Europe  
and the American Midwest*

Curated by Catherine Evans

May 22 — July 6, 2003

*The View From Here: Recent Pictures From Central Europe and the American Midwest* investigates the significance of place in shaping cultural identity. It is about two distinctly different areas—the American Midwest and Central Europe. These regions have very different cultures, languages and histories but, as seen through this exhibition, are similar in many respects.

The exhibition includes work by 22 contemporary photographers whose work has been materially informed by the places in which they live—the cities, towns, and villages of the American Midwest and Central Europe. In reflecting the physical nature, social issues, values and ideas of their respective regions—all of which lie outside the large cultural centers of those regions—these artists reveal a unique identity.

Overall, four broad themes emerge. These include the natural landscape, built or constructed environments, social commentaries gleaned through the artists' experiences, and reflections on indigenous, core values. These themes are common to the work of artists from both the American Midwest and Central Europe, and when their work is juxtaposed, their similarities and contrasts gain resonance.

### *Landscape*

Gregory Conniff, Tom Bamberger, Robo Kočan and the creative team of Lukáš Jasanský and Martin Polák focus their artistic energies on the influence of landscape on the cultural development of the areas in which they reside. Topographically, the American Midwest has a vast and primarily flat terrain, while the landscape of Central Europe is dramatically punctuated by jagged mountain ranges.

Tom Bamberger, from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, draws our attention to the unrelenting horizontality of much of the Midwest's panorama. His images, which look like the natural Midwest geography, are actually synthetic. Bamberger makes a single image of the landscape, and then digitally repeats it to fill the larger final picture. Bamberger's work presents landscapes that are familiar and credible but that are not found.

Robo Kočan was born and raised in Poprad, in Eastern Slovakia. By using multiple exposures and stencils on ordinary negatives, Kočan creates fantasy images of the fields and mountains surrounding Poprad. *Stred Európy/The Middle of Europe* depicts a dark winter landscape. On the far right, a crucifix is pictured with a barren tree nearby. Into this mute and gothic world, Kočan adds small starbursts that infuse the photograph with enchantment and transform the literal landscape into a fairy tale.

### *Built Environment*

Krzysztof Zieliński, Andrew Borowiec, Éva Köves, Stephen Szoradi and Katherine Turczan focus on physical structures to make statements about life within their communities. The artists may use the function and design of the structures as a starting point for more abstract explorations or as a metaphor for more complex social interaction.

Krzysztof Zieliński documents his hometown of Wąbrzeźno, Poland through the work in this exhibition. Wąbrzeźno is a small, struggling industrial town practically devoid of young people, many of whom have had to leave to seek work elsewhere. His pictures depict a depressed community, yet reveal the artist's attachment to

his town, a duality played out in American Scene paintings by artists such as Charles Burchfield and Edward Hopper.

Akron, Ohio artist Andrew Borowiec has produced an extensive series of photographs of small towns and landscapes along the Ohio River. He respects the importance of river life in the development of the North American continent, as well as in the industrial revolution. Now in a post-industrial phase, many communities along the river have lost their commercial importance, and their residents must eke out a living under limited circumstances. His photographs portray this struggle and yet also reveal the resourcefulness of the American spirit.

### *Social Commentary*

Social commentary has been well served by the camera throughout history. Andrej Bán, Tyagan Miller, András Bozsó, Wing Young Huie, Melissa Ann Pinney, Paul Shambroom, Terry Evans and Czaba Nemes follow in this tradition, presenting straightforward images that reflect how the confluence of history, politics and place create what is known as "culture."

Melissa Ann Pinney lives and works around Chicago, Illinois. Her work shows viewers the poignant, often disturbing world of pre-adolescent girls from two different perspectives—the private and the public. In *Washington Park Pool, Chicago*, a young girl shyly meets the gaze of the artist's camera while using her hand to cover a hole in her bathing suit. One senses a private connection to the girl because there is no veil of public spectacle. By contrast, in her photos of beauty contests, Pinney shows very young girls attempting to be self-confident while surrounded by materialistic competition. This image reveals more about social behavior than individual subjects.

Hungarian artist Czaba Nemes looks to historical artifacts in his series *Past Continuous*. Nemes collected images from magazines that were popular when he was a child in the 1950s and juxtaposed them with similar images from Western magazines from the same period. Nemes was inspired to create this series when he realized that images in the Communist propaganda press were similar in style to those in the Western popular press. Each

pair of images in the series reveals remarkable parallels.

### *Cultural Values*

Drawing on their personal experiences and cultural surroundings, Míla Preslová, Gábor Gerhes, Eric Rippert, Zuzanna Janin and Wojciech Prażmowski use the camera to fabricate images that illuminate both ideas and issues. These artists are most interested in expressing emotions and attitudes shared by their particular society.

Prague-based Míla Preslová's self-portraits raise issues about gender roles in Central Europe. In her triptych *House Wife*, Preslová dons three different outfits, complete with fuzzy slippers and socks, striking the same dejected pose with hunched shoulders and fogged-over eyeglasses. In *Wrapped Up*, Preslová has literally knitted herself into a web of yarn, creating an image that is at once sexy and distressing. These images remind us of the challenges women face in the Czech Republic as it increasingly embraces the West.

Elements of fiction and child's play are prominent in the work of Cleveland-based Eric Rippert whose *Midwest Tableaux* comprise pseudo-documentary color pictures of miniature figures set in and around the Cleveland, Ohio area. The juxtaposition of civic landmarks and plastic toys blurs the lines between fact and fiction and captures the stereotypical dichotomy of the American Midwest: its idyllic yet provincial qualities.

Bringing together the work of the artists in *The View From Here* encourages the discovery of differences and parallels, resulting in a deeper understanding of cultural identities. These works communicate novel perspectives and emotions that could only derive from the place in which the photographs were made. Place is increasingly significant, as artists continue to contend with an ever expanding homogeneous, global culture.

*From an essay by Catherine Evans, Curator  
The View From Here*



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## Riffe Gallery Events

Wednesday, June 4, 2003, 12 - 1 p.m.

### Lecture and Tour with Catherine Evans

Curator Catherine Evans will lead a tour of the exhibition while discussing the similarities and differences between the American Midwest and Central Europe as presented through the photographs in *The View From Here*.

Sunday, June 22, 2003, 2 - 4 p.m.

### SNAP! Family Day at the Riffe Gallery

Children of all ages and their parents are invited to learn the basics of photography with professional photographer Stephanie Bair-Garant. Participants should bring an item of significance – or even a person – to photograph in one of our unique photo stations. Create your own portrait or still life and learn to shoot like a pro. Disposable cameras will be provided. Participants also may have a free Polaroid portrait snapped with family or friends inside a giant picture frame.

### *Additional Venues*

SPACES, Cleveland, OH

*September 12 – October 24, 2003*

Minnesota Center for Photography, Minneapolis, MN

*December 6, 2003 – January 25, 2004*

Erie Art Museum, Erie, PA

*February 13 – April 11, 2004*

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### Riffe Gallery

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