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John Sanderson

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The images present at LoosenArt belong to the series titled "Railroad Landscape", a project dedicated to US railroads and to the symbolic value these have taken in the culture of this country

JOHN SANDERSON

The power of reality, or the suggestion that a photograph describes is a reality, underscores what a photograph extracts from the infinite, unsculpted mass that is the visible universe. - J. Sanderson

John Sanderson class 1983 was born and lives in New York city, artist and photographer who recognizes his passion since his teens. In 2013 he receives a scholarship from the Center for Railroad Photography and Art, which allows him to continue working on his project and to exhibit in several galleries and public spaces throughout the NYC region, like New York Transit Museum from 2014 to 2016. In recent years, John Sanderson obtains several awards, participates in residency programs, his images are part of numerous group exhibitions, make part of several solo exhibitions and are published in numerous media.

The images present at LoosenArt belong to the series titled "Railroad Landscape", a project dedicated to US railroads and to the symbolic value these have taken in the culture of this country, a metaphorical depiction of the railroad whose spirit has imbibed the American psyche since its inception.

As the same Sanderson says, his photography is a kind of "extension of what Walker Evan's called the lyric documentary", he explores the urban and rural American landscape using the documentary method but at the same time he demonstrates the interest on employing the photography as a means through which to convey a poetic vision of his experience.

Railroad Landscape is the testimony of a long journey, images are crossed by the tracks that make up the thread of a nation which tells of itself, guide the viewer just like a "passenger" who discovers his landscapes, cultures, past and present.

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INTERVIEW WITH JOHN SANDERSON



L.A.: John how and when did you become interested in photography?

John Sanderson: Even when I was very young I can remember being in visual awe of the world. Sights to me were appetizing. Long car trips spent looking out the window at the landscapes passing by held an unlimited number of stories, each roadway disappearing off into the distance was a curiosity and the places I explored with my father would later inform my photographic practice.

As I have grown as an artist it has become apparent to me that I've confronted the deepest levels of my personality through my photography. Every photograph I take speaks to something deep inside me which has developed up to that point in time. But one memory, a singular observation from my childhood has stayed with me...

For about two years I lived with my father in Delaware. We would often drive to New York City, about a two hour drive. Leaving in the early morning in order to beat traffic, after about an hour's driving time the sun would rise in the east over the New Jersey landscape. As we drove, I often slept in his pick-up truck throughout most of the trip, but this time I awoke from my nap beside him. It was a particularly rich sunrise, and as I looked out from the window I spotted the most intriguing sight. Against the bright sky, a red hot-air balloon rose up above the landscape, its translucent color illuminated with the rising sun. The simplicity of this moment has never escaped me, nor has the emotion and excitement it stirred left my memory. Each time I grab the camera to take a picture, I feel like I'm returning to that moment.

L.A.: What do you like most about being a photographer?

John Sanderson: Photography is a way of opening myself up to world. Experience through the medium of photography is a way of achieving a state of observation that can I only describe as euphoric.

To quote a recent passage I wrote on a photography trip:

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"Long stretches of time spent in observation, with the camera next to me sitting on the foam pad, which I sleep on, leaning against a pillow. It is a traveling companion, in a way. Its presence alone forces me to look, to keep searching for something to photograph that's important to my own biases and taste. It speaks to me not in tongues but in stasis -- I look restless there, or at least I see it as such -- and I want to point it at something, figure out what lens to use and peer into that big ground-glass at the world. After all that comes the click of the shutter. It's an acknowledgement of the frozen moment, when time and place is recorded, never to be seen quite the same way again. The power of reality, or the suggestion that a photograph describes is a reality, underscores what a photograph extracts from the infinite, unsculpted mass that is the visible universe."



Port of Superior, Wisconsin

L.A.: What characterized the evolution of your photography? Have you always moved in the same direction stylistically or have you noticed substantial variations over the years?

John Sanderson: A 35mm SLR was my first camera. It was with this format I learned the basics of photography. My photography mentor in high school suggested that I try out a large format camera because my style was landscape based -- I was no means the street photography type at that point. I tried out a 4x5" view camera but its weight and slowness took awhile to adapt to. I didn't start using the large format camera until I saw Edward Burtynsky's show *Manufactured Landscapes* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. I was so impressed with his work that I dedicated myself to the application of 4x5" and 8x10" view cameras in the creation of landscape photographs.

Many people wax fondly over the 'zen' like quality using a large format camera imparts. I'm here to affirm that cliché. The slower, more deliberate process with these cameras undoubtedly forced me to hone my vision to where I feel I'm creating images that speak to something beyond mere surface ornament.

L.A.: Can you tell us a little about your *Railroad Landscape* series? What led to this project?

John Sanderson: Trains, not the railroad landscape, are where I started. I was struck with the expressive quality of the steam locomotive, how it seemed to breathe and excrete vapors, it is a most human-like machine. During the same time I found myself being drawn towards images of the landscape and tracks, typically during down time when there weren't any trains present. The landscape independent of its intended use, standing in a quietly present state, began to capture my interest. As I began looking into photographers of the past, I discovered an image by Carleton Watkins, titled *Cape Horn near Celilo, Oregon* (1867). The formal qualities it shared with another location I had photographed along the Hudson River, at Storm King, related on a historical level.

The relation between past and present was humbling. I began to consider the railroad's

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environment as a way of expressing the qualities of movement, space and explore how the geometry of a rail line can be formed into a harmonious balance with its surroundings. Yet these images also speak to my background in the social sciences, documents of the decay and progress surrounding the railroad corridors.



Studebaker Plant, South Bend, Indiana



Behind Broad Street, Waverly, Pennsylvania

L.A.: In your opinion what are the characteristics that a good Documentary Photographer needs to have?

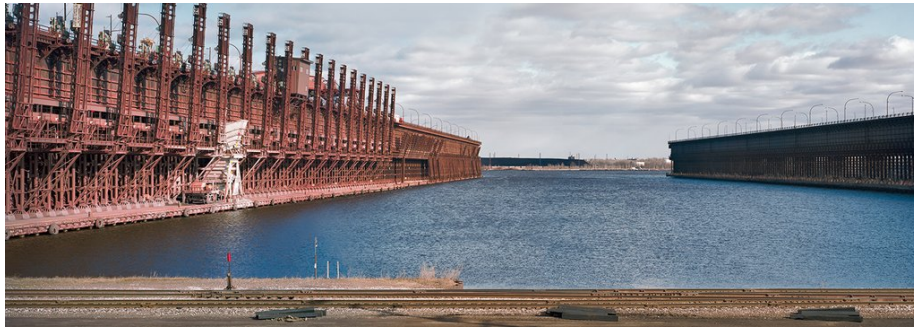
John Sanderson: Good documentary photographers have one thing in common, there's a certain level of poetic lyricism in their work. Walker Evans coined the phrase "lyric documentary" during a lecture he gave at Yale which describes this idea in more detail. It is essentially creating photographs that are a stop or two back from being cliché and this is not easy. Pure documentary photographs are often listless.

I have a strong preference for color photography, at least at this point in my career. The way some photographers can look at an otherwise mundane subject and bring it to life through the observation of certain mixtures of color and shape is something I strive for in my own work. Along those lines, I feel many of the subjects I work with demand color to bring them to life. There are often very subtle shades of reds, yellows, and oranges from industrial subjects represented in my work. This would be lost in black and white.

L.A.: What are you busy doing in this period? Have you any future project?

John Sanderson: I am eager to begin the process of putting a book together. the railroad landscapes would shine as a two-part book: one panoramic and the other rectangular. I am also planning to photograph three more regions in the United States, the West Coast, the Southwest and the southern mountain states.

Aside from the Railroad Landscape project, I am developing a wide-ranging project with the working title American Traditions. Pulling together an eclectic array of photographs this project is distilled into short picture sequences which begin with text in the image, a literal beginning to figurative end.



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