SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHECKLIST

Subhankar Banerjee, Indian, born 1967

Known and Unknown Tracks, from the series Oil and the Geese, negative 2006; print 2009

Digital chromogenic print face-mounted to Plexiglas

Purchased through the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W’18 Fund; 2009.42.1

William Christenberry, American, born 1936

Pure Oil Sign in Landscape, Near Marion, Alabama, 1977

Dye transfer photograph

Purchased through the Fund for Contemporary Photography in honor of Marc Efron, Class of 1965; PH.2003.35

Alex MacLean, American, born 1947

Central Vermont, Subdivision Street Front, 1995

Cibachrome

Purchased through gifts from Peter A. Vogt, Class of 1947, and Robert Eckerson, Class of 1948; PH.998.35.2

A Space for Dialogue, founded with support from the Class of 1948, is made possible with generous endowments from the Class of 1967, Bonnie and Richard Reiss Jr. ’66, and Pamela J. Joyner ’79.
Subhankar Banerjee’s photograph *Known and Unknown Tracks*, from his series *Oil and the Geese*, is a powerful statement about the effects of the oil industry’s push to drill in protected areas of the American Arctic despite the laws against doing so. Its installation alongside *Pure Oil Sign in Landscape*, Taken in 2006, depicts the mark of a now departed human hand upon a quiet landscape. This small image shows the remains of a Pure Oil gas station, one of many that were abandoned in the 1960s and 1970s as the interstates were constructed, the rural routes bypassed, and the gas stations that accompanied them abandoned in favor of new transportation hubs (Jackle and Sculle, 1994). Though Christenberry’s photograph (printed in 1977) is not specifically meant as an environmental commentary, the deserted gas station and the road stretched out alongside it bring to mind both America’s dependence on oil and the environmental changes that have resulted from it. Still, Christenberry is concerned with the disappearance of a different environment. His image reflects nostalgia for a vernacular aesthetic that was rapidly being succeeded by a more modern mode of development (Butler, 2007). He said, “Sadly, for me, a lot of true vernacular architecture is rapidly disappearing. What you often see, much to my disdain, is a mobile home—a flat-roof, aluminum-sided building moved in. And it’ll have to be a whole other generation of artists that, in time, might be interested in those” (Butler, 2007).

In some ways, Alex MacLean is one such artist. While Christenberry documented the American landscape of his youth as it was being superseded by new trends, MacLean works with that incoming development itself, and his interests are more obviously political as well. *Central Vermont, Subdivision Streetfront* uses a single vertical line (the road) to insure that the viewer bears witness to the monotonous repetitiveness of the neighborhood. MacLean utilizes an aerial perspective to emphasize the lifestyle of the neighborhood—note the multiple cars in each driveway, and the lack of sidewalks (Schlegel, 1998). It is a perspective that gives the viewer both a literal and a figurative distance from the image, which in turn encourages the viewer to question some of the everyday practices of modern society.

The expansive and dynamic Arctic tundra seems worlds away from the over-developed yet somehow static subdivision. However, all three of these photographs are ultimately images of the same dangerous trend, in which a push for further development is automatic enough that any means seem justifiable, and any ends, natural. All three artists ask their viewers to take a step back and examine the landscapes that their cameras have captured from a new perspective.

On first viewing the three photographs, the scene of the subdivision (taken nearby in Vermont) may seem the most familiar, while the Arctic seems the most foreign. Upon reflection, however, the subdivision and deserted gas station are the images that feel the most unnatural, while the only unnatural aspect of *Known and Unknown Tracks* is, of course, the manmade tracks themselves. This may at first seem self evident, but it is a disturbing indicator of our disconnection with the natural world—the scene that is the most natural is also the most strikingly foreign. Furthermore, the oil-thirsty culture that MacLean and Christenberry document is the same that threatens the distant wilderness of the Teshekpuk Lake.

In seeing these images together, the viewer might be struck by humanity’s lack of attention to its place in a larger landscape. We seek development without regard for the environmental sacrifices that get us there. We seek new ways of doing things that are more efficient, but they are also more impersonal. These three photographs knit together a troubling narrative of development and the insatiable need for natural resources it demands, though each artist highlights a different part of a much larger story.

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