Wild edges : photographic ink prints.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC INK PRINTS BY GREGORY CONNIFF

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Photographic Ink Prints by Gregory Conniff

Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin–Madison

This book is published on the occasion of the exhibition Wild Edges: Photographic Ink Prints by Gregory Conniff held at the Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin–Madison, September 2 through November 5, 2006.

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Foreword

by Russell Panczenko

In the early 1990s the Chazen Museum of Art, then named the Elvehjem Museum of Art, expanded its mission to include the collection, presentation, and documentation of the work of exceptional Wisconsin artists—artists whose work have not only achieved a high degree of recognition regionally but who have also had an impact on the broader art world. In keeping with this mandate, over the past several years, the Chazen has offered to its public exhibitions by such artists as Warrington Colescott, John Steuart Curry, Fred Fenster, Ray Gloeckler, Dudley Huppler, Eleanor Moty, Don Reitz, and John Wilde. *Wild Edges: Photographic Ink Prints by Gregory Conniff* is the next exhibition in this series.

In this exhibition, as in much of his recent work, Conniff shows us scenes of the natural world. However, he does not photograph the dramatic or the sublime; he does not show us nature buffeted by the elements or abused by man. Rather, Conniff takes nature as he finds it on a beautiful day in rural Wisconsin, Mississippi, or some similar place. The scenes he presents to us are simple, casual, and uncomplicated by human presence. He photographs trees, bushes, or fields that you or I might see, and have often seen, while taking a leisurely walk in the country. His photographs represent those peaceful, hedonistic moments that we, or in this case the artist, experience on such a walk as we discover the simple beauties around us.

The photographs are as much about the artist as they are about nature: "This is what I saw; this is how I felt! Look at it, isn't it beautiful!" In his photographs, Conniff captures these moments, creates a store of memories for himself, and communicates his sensibility and pleasure to the viewer.

Long a traditional photographer, Conniff's most recent work is the result of his excitement for the creative possibilities inherent in the technological changes that have been taking place in the field. Although still an avid believer in the image capturing superiority of film, Conniff now digitally manipulates his images on computer: "It sure beats dodging and burning." But the greatest impact on his work has come from his espousal of the new four-black ink printing processes, which particularly lend themselves to his vision of nature. Collaborating with a master printer, he has revisited negatives that were originally produced as silver gelatin prints to get even closer to what inspired him to take the photograph in the first place.

In addition to capturing the beauty of nature, Conniff now strives to produce beautiful photographs in their own right. His new ink prints are in themselves a magnificent feast for the senses. Beautifully printed on a heavy grade paper, their surfaces, evocative of photogravures of the late nineteenth century, are warm and tonally rich. One imagines them to be soft and somewhat velvety to the touch, if one could but touch them. Significantly larger in scale than Conniff's earlier work, the current photographs attract from a distance but still splendidly reward a detailed, close-up examination. One does not tire of looking at them at any distance in spite of the elegant but wild simplicity of the subject matter.

Like all exhibitions, *Wild Edges: Photographic Ink Prints by Gregory Conniff* required the collaboration of many individuals. First, I

wish to acknowledge Donald and Nancy Eiler, Todd McGrath of McGrath Associates Incorporated, and William White of Michael Best and Friedrich for so graciously lending works to the current exhibition. Second, I wish to thank a number of individuals and institutions for the generous gifts and grants that made this exhibition and catalogue possible. Thank you to Diane Seder and Bruce Rosen, to the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Brittingham and Hilldale Funds, to Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission with additional funds from the Endres Manufacturing Company Foundation and the Overture Foundation, to Madison Arts Commission with funds from the Wisconsin Arts Board, to the Kohler Foundation, Incorporated, and to the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin. Thank you also to the various members of the museum's staff, particularly Christine Javid, the museum's editor, who carried much of the responsibility for production of this catalogue, and other staff members for their individual contributions to a most exciting project.

Finally, I am very grateful to the artist Greg Conniff for his gracious cooperation. It was a pleasure to get to know him and his work better in the course of organizing this exhibition. Thank you, Greg, for your openness and patience.

The Work of Beauty

by Gregory Conniff

When I was in church as a boy, the priest would shift from the mystery of Latin to the dailiness of English for a series of prayers requesting, among other things, the conversion of Russia. I liked this prayer for Russia, with its goal both miraculous and attainable. The prayer that followed I did not like so well. It lacked the refreshing specificity of an attack on Godless Communism, veering instead into a lament that included a reference to our world as this "vale of tears."

I had to look up "vale," since I heard "veil" and that didn't make sense, even allowing for the poetic locutions that marked my parish's conversations with God. Once I had a grip on 'vale' as a piece of geography though, it jarred me every time the priest brought it round. It troubled me that a "place of tears" was not an accurate description of the world I lived in.

Our church, a small, graceful wooden building built in the late nineteenth century, was beautiful. My town was also beautiful, having developed along the face of a ridgeline a dozen miles outside New York City in the same years the parish was building the church. The town's houses had great variety and character, and were substantial without being grandiose. I could see little to complain about and much for which we should be grateful. Even as a kid, it struck me as short-sighted to be signing off from services on a sour note to our Host.

It also troubled me that at the spiritual heart of my church community there was little interest in taking positive notice of the immediate and simple delights of the physical world we shared every day. If there were ever any ecclesiastical impulses towards joy in the everyday, perhaps they were repressed upon seeing the radical world-lover, Francis of Assisi, reduced to sharing gardens with bird feeders and plaster gnomes.

The Catholicism of my youth made the next life its principal focus. The nuns and the brothers in my schools wrung their hands over the temptations of the flesh and how they might lure us astray. And they were right, but over-broad in their anxiety. Even then I felt that to turn away from what we can know through touch and smell and sight and taste and hearing is to turn away from a full understanding of the gift of life, and beauty, in this world. That we might fall into hedonism while pursuing knowledge through our physical selves is less of a danger than missing out on life altogether while fattening our pride on abstemiousness.

It wasn't wasted on me either that in furthering its spiritual ends, the Church made full and highly developed use of sensuality. I saw great theatrical knowingness in its ritual deployment of light, sound, imagery, scent and in the spatial embraces of its holy places. It was possibly the very density of these elements that first drew me across the communion rail and to the altar as an altar boy.

But outside church, out of doors—walking alone after midnight mass through deep snow lit up blue under a wash of stars—I felt the reach of infinity. On the night I refer to I was suddenly pulled out of myself and drawn briefly into something else of which I felt that I was a part, albeit an infinitely small part. And it was something I had experienced once before, years earlier. I felt overwhelmed by a sense of simultaneous infinite largeness and infinite smallness and I knew that each contained the other. Somehow I had been absorbed into an unadorned mystery living at the heart of quotidian elements of winter. Half an hour later I was asleep.

This moment was memorable and part of an incrementally transformative series of moments out-of-doors that continues irregularly to the present. What drew me away eventually from altarplace religion was in substantial measure the difference between the tendentious and hermetic beauty of the temple of belief and the wild and open beauty of the world outside its doors. Even when looking at religious paintings from

the late medieval period or the Renaissance, I would find my eye drawn past the principal figures and the message and into the landscape beyond. There seemed to be genuine affection in the rendering of the land and more room there for my imagination; it was the part of the painting that felt the least bought. Years later, visiting northern Italy, I would recognize these same landscapes and realize that what I had felt in the paintings was a subversive artistic connection to loving the world. Even when artists learned to fake their landscapes, the very idea of the depiction of geography still rose from someone's paying attention to the locus of daily life, Hieronymous Bosch excepted.

For a time as a young adult, at an hour when I would ordinarily have been in church, I would wander in various nearby woods. While exploring the world first-hand, I was conscious of being more connected to a larger order of existence than I ever was while sitting through a round of worship that pointed my attention elsewhere. But this consciousness was not about a "larger order," it was instead an unexamined awareness during these walks when my sense of autonomous self, the "I" watching, made itself absent, leaving only sensation and the ability to remain, somehow, upright.

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What I found in the woods and by the ocean and walking city streets were places that were indifferent to my presence, unlike church, which was there precisely to serve me by directing my focus. The indifference I found in the world is the same, I think, as the indifference described by scientists, although it felt benign, which softened the indifference, and which was not at all scientific. While I did not find nature's disinterest any reason to reconsider my love for the world around me, I began to be aware that many people did not appear to experience anything like my sense of connection to the places that we shared. And it seemed that a large number of them did not appear to notice where they were at all, their attention taken by something I could not see.

A friend of mine, intending to drive 300 miles south, instead drove 300 miles west, realizing his mistake only when he noticed that the sun was setting in front of him. My wife once walked blithely into the side of a bus with the same baffling ease as another friend, an Eagle Scout, who drove into the side of a parked train. On my first trip to California, I almost drove a Volkswagen over a cliff because what I thought was a poorly maintained road was in fact a fire break. In the dim reaches of prehistory, such lack of conscious attention to where one is no doubt eliminated numerous lines of genetic material. I think of this every time someone takes a late night snowmobile ride on river ice in early spring in Wisconsin and does not come back. Bliss can be an unforgiving element of natural selection.

By definition, our evolution as human animals has been in response to the world around us. Paying attention to that world has paid off in survival. Paying attention is adaptive behavior, some of which is hard-wired into us as fear and desire. Even babies turn from the smell of rotting meat and have an innate revulsion for snakes and spiders. Our personal survival requires that we know some things without being taught them. The fact that we are still here is in part because we have intuitive knowledge of what to run from and what to run to. Coupled with conscious attention through our evolved senses, an intuition of danger helps us navigate our environment.

What we run *to*—in the foods we eat, the textures that seduce us, the scents that arouse us, the colors and movement in the world—are the things of pleasure that ensure our health as individuals and encourage our procreation as a species. We have human history because desire draws us out of ourselves and into families, tribes, and culture. In tandem with deliberate attention, our innate appetites, our reasons for living, help us build lives rich with experience. In one form or another, the elements of the world that threaten us and the elements of the world that attract us are part of daily existence. They are day-to-day, they are common, and our body chemistry shifts in rapid response to their presence. My concern in this essay is with beauty as both an ordinary part of life

and as a necessary part of human development.

A good part of what I think of as our relationship with beauty is, I believe, a wired response to the textures, flavors, sounds, smells, and spaces of the natural world. It is something Wordsworth described as "a pure organic pleasure." This is the beauty that calls us to pay attention and has led us to see the satisfactions of order as a sign of merit, a concept that inhabits mathematics as naturally as it does a garden.

The inference for me, in the idea of a wired connection between our surroundings and ourselves is that, underlying the human project, at foundation level, is one code that reads: "It matters how things look." Beauty is part of the pattern language of our environment. We absorb it, paying attention to the details of our home ground. This attention in turn leads to love of place and eventually can bring us to take responsibility for its condition. Beauty as a part of ordinary life is a dependable outcome when culture and nature interact in an environment of attention and care.

Commercial/industrial culture, like the Church of my childhood, has evolved by attempting to sever this "wired" connection to the world. This culture has replaced the patterns of nature (and the Church) with alternative patterns. Our culture has split off, almost with a sigh of relief, from the attention demanded by the unpredictable natural world. It has given us, in our cars for example, something very close to a private environment in the public world. With the windows up, the climate control set, and the bass boosted, the experience is very much like traveling in a womb with an accelerator.

But when we live in a corridor of insistent billboards, characterless retail sprawl, and personal audio, we are, I think, close to the condition of cattle at an abattoir led to step along a wooden chute as if it were just another walk in a field. The numbing landscape isn't pretty, so given our adaptation to the patterns of the industrialized world, it isn't surprising that we, like cattle, often don't notice or care where we are. The landscape of commercial culture conditions us to disconnect. This is as dangerous for us as a people as inattentive bliss is for us as individuals.

There was a time when we Americans could think of ourselves as "citizen farmers." In today's commercial culture, however, we have accepted the description of ourselves as "consumers," something closer to "locust" than "citizen." This shift in our sense of identity has accompanied a steadily attenuating relationship with the highly specific qualities of land, no two parcels of which are identical. We have altered land beyond recognition (Manhattan Island, first). We created abstract real estate by drawing grids upon the west with concern for development, but not topography, (a project begun by Jefferson). And now we occupy, with so much life energy, a world sold to us as "virtual," a diverting technological whimsy. With each step of revised self-consciousness, we have become less physically connected to the places we live in. As a result of this diminishing connection, this buffering, we have lost conscious sensitivity to the effect our immediate world has on our individual lives and our culture.

If beauty is a component of the shared environment within which humans have evolved, how will this continuing evolution be affected by manufactured landscapes increasingly devoid of beauty and increasingly not even shared? The wildfire spread of industrial culture, its expression of itself, its clutter and gossip, has become the hall-of-mirrors environment within which we are evolving as a species. We may well be, as a species, branching off in response to a changed idea of beauty, one engineered and mechanical. Perhaps this is a stretch. Nevertheless, I think that it is a leap of hubris to dispense with the patterns of the world's natural order whenever there is profit in it or simply because we can.

My own cultural evolution is in reverse, in fundamental ways. My thought is this: for all our culture, for all our vaunted intelligence, for all our knowledge and machines, we are still animals in a habitat and this habitat, especially the visual habitat, matters. It matters in important ways that regulations on health and safety never address. We can monitor the quality of air, soil, and water in our ecosystem, but there is no equivalent scientific measure for beauty, which is nevertheless a part of our natural ecology. Nor can there be any such measure, given that every unbuilt place is unique, with a beauty that varies with every change in the elements.

In our culture, when we say "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," we are usually taking the easy way to dismiss another's taste (or to rationalize the destruction of a public view or the construction of one more eyesore). But in this gesture, in its very casualness, we dismiss as well the idea that beauty is significant to our shared daily life. And with this dismissal we cede to economic forces those aspects of our home ground that are beyond price, that feed our hearts, that might open us to sudden, unprogrammed insights. In the early nineteenth century, as this country began its commitment to industrialization and mechanical efficiency, arguments along these lines were dismissed as Romantic European affectations and inherently effeminate. Little has changed, except how America looks. Think about it: next time you plan a trip, where would you rather go—northern New Jersey or southern France?

Whether or not the place we live inspires affection, we are nevertheless influenced by its physical nature, our evolved responses bathing our minds in their own reactive chemistry. Xenophobia aside, if we love where we live, I believe there is an internal mechanism that sweetens our living in that place. This is true for gardeners who are, almost by definition, besotted with affection for this planet. But this is not so true for the rest of us—at least in our cars, in front of our televisions, on the Internet—when we pursue life through the medium of our machines, sitting still while they live for us, and faster, too.

For a rich, active life, we need to live in a world that reaches to the human animal with at least as much understanding as it now extends to machines. For one thing, we need a world that responds more to walking and standing still—with textures, details, spaces, and sudden juxtapositions that reveal themselves only to someone afoot. It is from walking attentively through a place at different times and in different light and weather that we can most assuredly come to know the character that abides within that place despite its changing appearances. Out of this direct knowledge almost inevitably grows understanding, affection, and an impulse to take some responsibility for where we are.

A world built truly for people would provide daily nourishment to the spirit from ubiquitous, subtle and specific moments of lyrical reality, moments when we can see the world with clarity and recognize life as a stroke of good fortune. Our main source of this necessary human experience of lyrical reality ought to be the immediate world we inhabit when we step outside the doors of home and work (where else and why not?) Instead, what most of us encounter beyond those doors is a world where local and fragile beauty is displaced to ease the production and delivery of the rewards of a consumer economy. It has been a canny trade for industry, which promotes its products to us regularly as a means of deliverance from this selfsame commercialized environment.

A world in which beauty is absent, a world treated primarily as an economic arena, is home to chaos and conversation by bumper sticker. It is home to a parade of rude visual encounters that are a form of serial mugging. Power lines sutured thoughtlessly across the face of the land, the billboard jammed in the middle of the best view as you crest a hill, the alien microwave antennae in spiny mobs atop the heretofore unsullied ridge, the soulless malls and housing developments, are blows to the spirit. The only escape is to disconnect, to withdraw into the radio, or the cell phone, or to become, in some way, blind.

For me, these blows activate an emotional wire to that reflex we describe as "fight or flight." I doubt my response is unique. While some of us will react to visual insults by withdrawal, others will not and may lash out. I see "road rage" as an almost inevitable consequence of confining a person to an environment that a human animal perceives, reasonably I think, as an attack. We survive abused landscapes by hardening our minds to the spaces between our destinations and hardening our hearts as well to the people trapped there with us in traffic. Then, when we arrive at our destinations, the tension of that hardening persists as a hormonal hangover that poisons our work, our play, whatever we come to do. Beauty can be beyond price, but ugliness always exacts a toll.

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I am a gardener and have been for a long while, but I have been driving a car far longer. When I am behind the wheel, I metamorphose, like you (and Mr. Toad), from a drifting pedestrian to an alert and decisive motorist. On the road and moving well (and disconnected from my relationship with the land) I think sometimes that I am in love with asphalt. But this is less love than an arrangement of convenience. I know that roads are not ethically neutral parts of the environment. I need the road to take me to my work—even though expanding roads help wear away the world I love, the world I photograph. My behavior and attitude is a conundrum I deal with less effectively than I wish, especially when I find myself reaching for a stone to cast. Decades ago I heard a man rattling on about his idea of beauty, which was a marsh with a road running through it. I thought he was joking as he reeled off one example of highway beauty after another, until I found out he was a lobbyist for the road-building industry and merely possessed by the energy of the happily employed.

For a long time I held this in my head as an angry, buzzing example of what is wrong with our thinking as a nation. As industrialized Americans, we can rationalize the destruction of nearly anything in the name of jobs and economic efficiency, with no sense of long-term consequences, no definable end. We build to tear down and build again, each time more careful than before to construct something no one will miss when it's gone—since to achieve something good might require that we take care of it, maintain it, love it. Better to keep dreaming forward than to reflect on where we are and how we got here. Having the road go on forever is a way to deny that we ever arrive, to be always some kind of pioneer, and in great measure to never have to grow up and love something outside of ourselves.

Later, I got to know the highway lobbyist and discovered he was also a gardener (I had discovered by then too that a road running through a marsh is an effective way to organize a picture). His large property held sprawling and somewhat chaotic perennial beds that he worked himself, unlike his neighbors, whose hired landscape services yielded respectable gardens, but with a predictable order that is not beauty. It was here that I came to see him more clearly, especially through the lens of the two enormous beds of roses that were his pride and chief love. I felt chagrined that I had judged him on the one note of how he made his living. In that garden (and when he visited mine) there was generosity to him that eased the reckoning glitter I had seen in his eyes around his other enthusiasms of politics and the camaraderie of power.

In a garden that one works oneself, there is only the seasonal turning, round and again, of gardener and worked ground. When it is great, visiting a personal place such as this is to experience the world lit up from within. To work such a place as this is to be lit up oneself, as if the energy of its beauty inhabited one's labor in much the way current passes through the filament of an incandescent lamp. My gardener friend understood that gardens like his are outside the common ambitions of men of his achievement. He understood even better the necessity of their beauty to the fullness of his life and the complexity of his self.

Certainly it is possible to be lit up, to feel electric, in a car as well. When I was young and dating in New York City, I would make a game of racing up 10th Avenue above 42nd Street in my car, trying to see how far I could get before I was caught by a red light. It was thrilling urban driving. It made me laugh and it made my blood hum and was, unfortunately, sometimes the best part of the date. This was not the New York I loved, however.

That New York was the one I walked: beginning in the 1950s, accompanying my father when he crossed the Hudson River on business, later as an undergraduate at Columbia, and still later as an outlander adult bringing my photographic work to interested people. What attracted me at first, I think, was the crazed, layered, saturating physical energy of life feeding accidents of beauty on all fronts. As a child, I had no context for this experience beyond immersion in a vortex of sensation but even later, understanding better the character of this great city, this wild river of jazz in stone never failed to sweep me away on its currents. I

imagine the great rivers of the west—the Missouri, the Colorado, the Columbia—having this addictive power before they were dammed, carrying in those days flecks of human consciousness through what must have seemed an incomprehensible vastness of grass, forest, and sky.

Today, of course, those rivers are mostly fat lakes and New York City is steadily becoming more theme park and mall than complex metropolis. Part of the problem is the spread of chain stores, but in addition, a diminished vocabulary of building materials and surface detail has produced a city that increasingly fails to catch light in a way that engages the intuitive eye. And when we don't look, we don't pay attention and then we don't care and, finally, we don't remember. And then where are we?

Even so, when I am in New York, I take time to walk late in the day from the Battery at the tip of the island north to about 100th Street on the west side, hypnotized by the rhythm of the older buildings and the light playing over them, and later in the dark, by the office lights within and the patterns of enterprise they represent. Each of these walks rekindles my romance with New York. I don't feel this way on the subway or on a bus or in a cab. Each motorized trip is about the destination, while the walk is about brushing up against as much of the city out-of-doors as I can. As I walk, the air blows over me and I am awash in sights and sounds and smells that soak the city into me through all my senses. But I am not drunk on sensation. I retain enough alertness to avert a mugging. Even in a garden there are things that bite and sting.

My reengagement with the city comes from moving through it with no other intention than being there and by the simplest means possible: using my feet and following my nose and eyes. And I pay attention to details. As a result of each walk, I know new temporary truths about some of New York's constantly changing neighborhoods. But more important than this to me is the renewed affection I feel for the city after I have moved my body through it, surrounded by New Yorkers, who are—in this place of stone—themselves the natural world. My high-speed drives up 10th Avenue left me in love with myself. At the end of my long walk, I am in love with the city. But this love, real as it is, is an affair and not a marriage. I do not live here. This is not my home any more. And that makes a difference.

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To love a place as home is to develop roots. This means, in part, a sensory relationship with a landscape that has individual character and mystery, but which is usually neither wilderness nor park. The landscapes I am concerned with photographically are the rural middle landscape, the margins of cultivation, and the ordinary landscape of home and yard—where most of us live and dream and where we deserve a setting that strengthens us for the challenge of living well. I am interested in spaces where the human spirit can catch its breath.

I grew up in densely populated northern New Jersey. Although my town was beautiful, much of the region was not, having succumbed, in the twentieth century, to highways, industry and dense, featureless housing—the sort of area that makes the phrase "beautiful New Jersey" an oxymoron. Fewer than seventy-five years before I was born, though, the region near my home was rural and the subject of paintings by the artist George Innes. His presence was strong enough that my town named a public school in his honor. His home was less than two miles from mine.

Today, Innes's paintings of Montclair and Bloomfield, and the landscape work of other artists, too easily finds itself grouped as nostalgic depictions of a world gone by or of a world that never was. Romantic twaddle, too sweet for thought. Never mind that these places *did* exist, and some still do, and that they have an intoxicating beauty. Rare is the museum-goer who will move past the brushwork and take the painter's vision as a suggestion of what the artist actually saw with pleasure, and what we might also see. A painting is not a report, but it does contain information about what its painter valued and at what emotional pitch. When I was young and living in his town, I was aware, despite the changes to the landscape, that I was living in the same light Innes did.

A century after Innes painted north Jersey meadows graced with

mist, I moved to the upper Midwest, to a part of the country where there were then more cows than people. It took me awhile, because the cultural shift blinded me, but eventually I realized that I had come to live in a place that looked like Innes's New Jersey in the nineteenth century—but with the winters of a planet farther from the sun.

Because I arrived in late fall, Wisconsin didn't offer my eyes a lush or physically gracious welcome. It was farmland, a working landscape, a harvested one at that. Life had retreated indoors or underground. But the region had, especially in its unglaciated folds, a plainish mystery that hinted at a beauty I could learn to see. What confused me, at first, is that I was unused to the cycles of a small-farm agricultural landscape and ignorant of its seasonal narrative. I was lulled into inattention by the fact that a well-maintained agricultural landscape was the norm. It was *everywhere*. And how could everywhere possibly be beautiful?

I was unconsciously in thrall to the idea that beauty must of necessity depart from the norm. I think I saw it, in landscape and in other things, as an inflation of desirable characteristics to the point where they made my heart beat faster in their presence. Think Frederick Church and the luminous mythic west or Ansel Adams at Yosemite. In the Midwestern landscape, with its distinct absence of grandeur, this hyperbolic beauty is not available the way it is, say, among the Rockies or along the Oregon coast. The Midwest is mostly flat, and even when it rises a bit, that rise is just a roll of minor difference at highway speed.

In time I learned that the Midwestern landscape, too, though spare and open, has a singular beauty. The origin of this beauty is in the land, as Aldo Leopold professed—the way it turns with the seasons and responds to light passing across it. It is the mind's job, as it reflects on the pattern of experiences with the land, to bring to consciousness the character of this beauty and its range. The body knows, however, as it knows how to breathe, that our grasp of the pleasure of this beauty begins with the flesh. It was my body in motion that first opened me to the large beauty of the place, as well as to the beauty of *being* of the place. Later, snow ducks made it local and brought it home.

Initially there was the bike, which took me into a landscape I had known hitherto only by car. Free of the car's cocoon, I began to experience familiar places as *terra nova*. I began to see Wisconsin for the first time, only two thin tires and a bit of fabric between the world and me. The cycling experience was (and is) that of me matching my body to the topography over and over again, across the seasons, balanced between sensory absorption and alertness (potholes, deer, turkeys). With each rise and descent and flat sprint, I took geography into my muscles, feeling the shape of the land in the pressure on my lungs as my new home place entered my blood and filled me with heat. This was the gift of a beautiful place, taking me out of myself, literally reshaping me, and then bringing me back to where I belonged now and as part of it.

On the bike I found the world by meeting it halfway, touching it. But in that touching I found a different self, as well. It is similar to the way consciously touching someone else can help relocate one's center. It is not simply the reaching out, it is also the warm pressure flowing back. When it snows, I step into my cross-country skis and it begins once more. I am on fire in a cold and empty place. This is not 10th Avenue. This is home.

And where we are, most of us, most of the time, is home. The character of home is made of many things, one of which is local beauty, either natural or built. This came into focus for me late one night alone on a small bridge in my neighborhood during a glorious blizzard. There, along the bridge's familiar concrete balustrade, I was surprised by a row of ducks, a mother and her young, that someone had sculpted from the snow. They fluoresced in the glow of a nearby streetlight while the flakes, which continued to fall, fattened them with a glittering down. In the sculpture of the ducks, I felt the presence of someone who had absorbed much local beauty and who, when circumstances allowed, passed the favor along. I went home and got my camera and woke my wife to come and see.

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It is in our homes and in our hometowns, between work and family, that we live the story of our lives. Our challenge is to make a setting for that story so rich and sustaining that we won't want to seek relief from it by fleeing to some manufactured elsewhere—some tourist Eden, if you believe the brochures. Why not live in a place of the sort people travel to? We could do this if we understood better the sustaining relationship we can have with our local landscapes.

The injunction to tend one's own garden is a familiar one, which can be taken either as metaphoric counsel or as a literal invitation to act. Suppose we were to stop this useless religious fretting over our exile from paradise and instead see our relocation as an opportunity to garden for ourselves. Just that. No more. Suppose we were to ignore the American romance of a new Eden and simply love this imperfect world being itself—love it as if we truly loved ourselves as part of it. If we could love being here, where would we be then? And who?

My friend the lobbyist gardener is gone. And gone, too, are his rose beds, which he maintained on a bluff above a large, glacial lake and smack in the middle of the view. Many of his other plants are in my garden now, in a neighborhood where there is no struggle with a large view. Where a view might have been I have neighbors, all of us on narrow, deep lots in bungalows built in the 1920s. The architecture is historic vernacular, which guarantees a certain character, but does not ensure a sense of beauty. So we garden.

The cultivation of the place where I live has grown slowly over a quarter century. When I arrived on the block, the only real garden was a small, perennial one newly developed by the woman living in the house directly behind. The yard that is my garden now was overwhelmed with suckering elms, thorny black locust, goldenrod, white snakeroot, and an aspiring forest of maples. My first year of gardening was principally one of clearing space, the digging of a few small beds, and the planting of a double handful of plants assured of returning next year and not needing much immediate care.

The second year was one of staring at what grew. That fall I built more beds and the next spring ran the garden along the back property line underneath ancient and untended lilacs. When the neighbor in back saw this, she extended her plantings to that property line as well and *de facto* made one garden out of hers and mine. We talked as we worked and, stepping back and forth at one corner to consider our efforts, created a path between our yards that we use to this day. (Only many years after the fact did I learn that this neighbor was the sculptor of the snow ducks I encountered on the bridge.)

The third year I understood finally that gardening is not so much the imposition of order as it is the inviting of the unknown. The former is landscaping, the latter is weaving texture, volume, line, and color into places that welcome surprise. Gardens are invitations written on land.

The response to the gardens we built was a change in the nature of our place. The biggest initial change, as the gardens grew into their fourth and fifth years, was a return in quantity of songbirds and insects. I was startled to see how even a little bit of tending the earth had such a strong, positive effect on the life of a place, and an urban one at that.

And that life, over the years, began to include other neighbors, none of whom had been in the habit of spending time outdoors. It became easier for the couple next door to be in their yard after their view—my garden—improved. It became easier for me to get to know them in casual exchanges over yard work than it had been in the ritual of occasional social gatherings. In the garden, I became less likely to say something regrettable. Tolerance grew alongside the plants. And we have become friends. On their side as well, the property line is now a perennial bed of borrowed scenery and shared work. Today on the block there are seven properties linked consciously along the back property line as an extended garden, a visual commons—yards expanding into landscape.

Behind our homes, we have torn out the fences, leaving lilacs,

mock orange, honeysuckle, junipers, and one espaliered apple tree to mark divisions that are screen dividers rather than walls. We have wound paths across the property lines so that we can enter each other's gardens to visit, to cut across the block, or just to look. We exchange plants, advice, food, and stories. We share tools. We are not alike, but through a willingness to open ourselves through the medium of the garden there is respect and pleasure mixed with our awareness of significant difference. And under our gaze, children zoom through a small Arcadian wonderland as if it were simply natural, which it is.

The beauty of this place, a beauty we made, is the binding energy that makes my neighborhood a place people are reluctant to leave. The work of making this beauty, the planting, the weeding, the negotiating of borders, the reaching out to new neighbors, is what has given us knowledge of each other, possible only from working physically side by side. The beauty of what we have made by thinking beyond our borders, by seeing our yards from our neighbors' point of view, is what brings us out-of-doors time and again for chance encounters that enlarge our lives in small but meaningful increments. It has been the work of beauty to make it good to be here. It has been our work to recognize the patterns of beauty and to extend them.

In my part of town, gardens are spreading—along terraces, on open land adjacent to railroad tracks, and, of course, in back yards. Beauty is evolving and we are changing with it. Some of us have formed associations that are restoring riverscapes in the neighborhood. Some of us are taking responsibility for parks. We are creating a culture here, even if it is a small one, and we have created it on our own. When we step out of doors, the world we see helps persuade us, day in, day out, that life is good and that there is hope for better if we will work at it—and if we will begin again daily. This is where we live, and it is not free of disagreement or trouble, but by working the ground together we have arrived at a place that is better for our having been here. And we are better, too, for the care we have taken of a piece of the ordinary world—the worker and the worked, the viewer and the viewed, all tangled together in a singularly full life. The tangle is inevitable. The fullness is the work of beauty.

Gardens are a small step; they are small fields, openings on the land. To Thoreau's sweeping insight that "in wildness is the preservation of the world," I would add two ideas that these days fall closer to home: in open land we hold the health of our culture; in gardens we nourish the roots of community.

• • •

I believe that beauty is in the world, not in the eye of the beholder. I believe that the eye is one window through which beauty reaches us, but it is the world itself that is the source even of the idea. I believe that when we recognize beauty and take responsibility for its increase, we are changed for good in the process—returned from exile and awakened to the knowledge that the world washes over us in never-ending transformation and renewal.

Images

16 For all our culture, for all our vaunted intelligence, for all our knowledge and machines, we are still animals in a habitat and this habitat, especially the visual habitat, matters.

18 A good part of what I think of as our relationship with beauty is, I believe, a wired response to the textures, flavors, sounds, smells, and spaces of the natural world.

The inference for me, in the idea of a wired connection between our surroundings and ourselves, is that, underlying the human project is one code that reads: "It matters how things look."

22 We can monitor the quality of air, soil, and water in our ecosystem, but there is no equivalent scientific measure for beauty, which is nevertheless a part of our natural ecology.

24 Even when artists learned to fake their landscapes, the very idea of the depiction of geography still rose from someone's paying attention to the locus of daily life, Hieronymous Bosch excepted.

26 I'm interested in day-to-day life. I'm interested in having the part of our lives that is the greatest quantity of our lives, infused with an awareness of its beauty.

28 To turn away from what we can know through touch and smell and sight and taste and hearing is to turn away from a full understanding of the gift of life, and beauty, in this world.

30 Beauty is part of the pattern language of our environment. Paying attention to home ground leads to love of place and eventually can bring us to take responsibility for its condition.

32 When we say "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," we are taking the easy way to dismiss another's taste (or to rationalize the construction of one more eyesore).

34 I was unconsciously in thrall to the idea that beauty must of necessity depart from the norm. Here, beauty was *everywhere*. And how could everywhere possibly be beautiful?

36 To love a place as home is to develop roots. This means, in part, a sensory relationship with a landscape of individual character and mystery, but which is usually neither wilderness nor park.

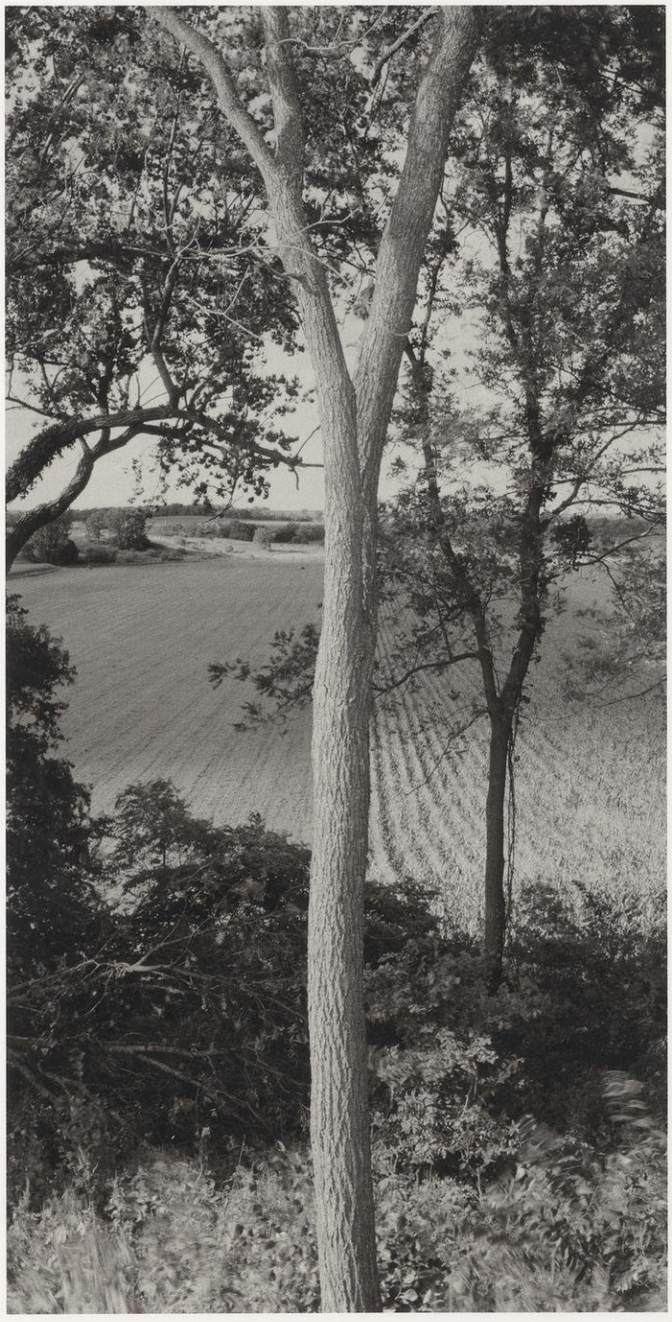
38 Beauty is in the world, not in the eye of the beholder. The eye is one way beauty reaches us, but it is the world itself that is the source even of the idea.

40 Suppose we were to ignore the American romance of a new Eden and simply love this imperfect world being itself—love it as if we truly loved ourselves as part of it.

42 Gardening is not so much the imposition of order as it is the weaving of texture, volume, line, and color into places that welcome surprise. Gardens are invitations written on land.

44 Walking attentively through a place at different times and in different light and weather is how we can most assuredly come to know the character of that place despite its changing appearances.

46 For a rich, active life we need to live in a world that reaches to the human animal with at least as much understanding as it now extends to machines.



Why not live in a place of the sort people travel to? We could do this if we understood better the sustaining relationship we can have with our local landscapes.

50 Where we are, most of us, most of the time, is home. The character of home is made of many things, one of which is local beauty, either natural or built.

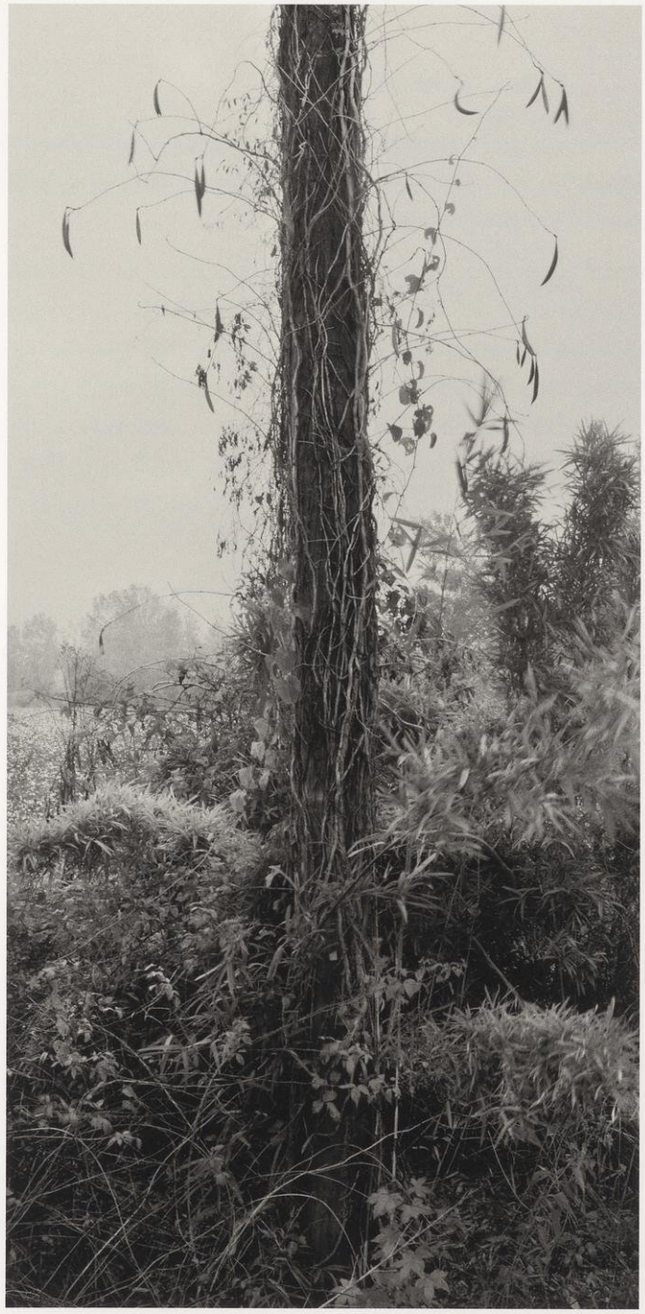


Image list

1. *Dane County, WI*, 2006
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print

2. *Layfayette County, MS*, 2004
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print

3. *Yalobusha County, MS*, 2004
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print
Collection of Donald and Nancy Eiler

4. *Layfayette County, MS*, 2004
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print

5. *Ellsworth County, KS*, 2006
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print

6. *Dane County, WI*, 2006
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print

7. *Dane County, WI*, 2006
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Archival Ink Print

8. *Dane County, WI*, 2006
30 x 60 in.
Archival Ink Print

9. *Dutchess County, NY*, 2005
30 x 30 in.
Archival Ink Print

10. *Dane County, WI*, 2006
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print
Collection of McGrath Associates, Inc.

11. *Dane County, WI*, 2006
30 x 30 in.
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12. *Layfayette County, MS*, 2005
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Archival Ink Print

13. *Layfayette County, MS*, 2005
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print

14. *Layfayette County, MS*, 2005
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Archival Ink Print

15. *Layfayette County, MS*, 2005
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print

16. *Dane County, WI*, 2006
48 x 24 in.
Archival Ink Print

17. *Dane County, WI*, 2006
30 x 36 in.
Archival Ink Print
Collection of Michael Best and Friedrich, LLP

18. *Layfayette County, MS*, 2006
48 x 24 in.
Archival Ink Print

Interview with Gregory Conniff

Conducted by Russell Panczenko

In a recent exhibition catalogue in which your photographs were juxtaposed with photogravures by Judy Pfaff, Sarah Kirk said that your work was documentary. Do you see it as documentary?

I have a problem with the word "documentary" possibly because a long time ago I was a lawyer. A document is something put into evidence while arguing a client's position. In addition, "documentary photography" has an aura of neutrality and truth about it, which is a delusion. Photographs are not true, but they can help make truth possible. "Documentary" is simply a style. Perhaps I'm overreacting, but in my case I am not going out with my camera with a program to collect pictures to advance or illustrate an argument.

If you're not documenting nature, what are you doing?

I am recording a moment in the world, which I can translate into a print, which is then, I suppose, a document of that moment. What I am recording is simply what draws my eye—the way light is falling on whatever aspect of the world I'm looking at. It could be my garden or a rural landscape, or a place with people, or anything, really, that's caused me to want to make a picture of it. Eventually, when there are enough pictures of a certain type, they form a body of personal work about their subject.

How do you find your subjects?

I keep my eyes wide open all the time. My subject is daily life. I'm not interested, photographically, in sublime geography just as I'm not all that interested in extreme examples of cooking, say, or of sports. Somebody said that anybody can be a hero in an emergency, but I'm interested in what it takes to get through day-to-day life. I'm interested in having the part of our lives that is the greatest quantity of our lives, infused with an awareness of its beauty.

However, in your most recent group of photographs, the ones that are in this exhibition, you are not photographing people and the world around you, you are photographing nature.

We are inseparable from nature; but on your point about my work, there are all kinds of pictures we didn't look at and more that I haven't printed. This exhibition is a selection of a certain kind of work made for this show and organized for the experience of this particular room of this museum. But while I am making other kinds of photographs it's nevertheless true that I'm most involved right now with open land that begins at the edge of town. It's a place that I like to be, and it's a place that I like to be most frequently on a bicycle.

What you're seeing in this show, the wildness between the edges of road and field, is the result of my going out with my camera and working to bring back some of what I've come to value from riding a bike through the rural countryside—in Wisconsin especially because I live here, but also in Mississippi and in other places where I've been able to take my bike. It is nature I am part of, not nature I simply observe.

Is there anything in particular that catches your attention, as you're riding your bike through the countryside? What makes you stop and take out your camera?

Nothing makes me stop on the bicycle. That's a problem. Years ago I bought a hybrid bike so that I could pack my camera and tripod and go out on the road. My regular bike is a racing bike, and you can't pack things on it, so I bought this hybrid. And on the first ride I discovered that when I'm on a bike I don't want to stop for anything. It was a waste of money until grandchildren arrived and it became the perfect bike for towing them around.

When I'm photographing, I work from my car. But when I'm in the car going back to those countryside places that I've ridden through, I'm not

looking for a specific thing, although I have returned to specific places, sometimes for years, to make pictures I sense might be there. I don't work with a mental list that says I want a certain landscape with a specific kind of building in it or a particular type of tree. But when I am driving, some part of my brain, my visual intelligence, is reckoning with the mix of elements I'm passing through.

And all of a sudden things are coming together. It's the light, it's the way the branches bend, it's maybe the way foreground objects are connected to stuff in the background. So I feel something that draws me to it, and I stop, and I put the camera on it. When it works, when I know that I've got something, it's a thrill that has never diminished. But, often enough, I won't know what I'm looking at. I'll look through the viewfinder and I'll think, what is this? Why? What is there about this that made me want to look at it, to frame it this way? A long time ago I learned to say to myself when I couldn't figure out what was in front of me, "Film is cheap. Make the exposure and see what's there. See what the world is looking like. Something has stopped you here; maybe you'll figure out what it is later."

And sometimes looking at it later I still can't figure out what it is. But what can happen when this kind of thing works is that maybe three years later I'll make another picture like that, and maybe another couple of years after that I'll make two, and then one day I'll think, wait a minute, I've got five of these things. Let's put them together. And when I put them together, all of a sudden I can see what it is that I am looking at. If I decide this is something I want to explore, then I'm conscious that, at a certain time of the year, under certain conditions of light and humidity, this kind of visual experience is available to me.

So there are two ways of working, one of which is completely intuitive. But even the one in which I have a greater awareness has an intuitive core because the interaction of elements that make the visual moment are random and coming together at some speed as I am sliding through the landscape. The analogy would be to downhill skiing, when all your intelligence is in your muscles.

I've always been intrigued by the fact that you revisit old negatives, even negatives from ten years ago. You juxtapose new prints from those early negatives with pictures that you are making today. In your mind is all your work alive and current?

Yes. Especially the work of the last fifteen years, after I began to place more trust in my subject and in the camera. It helps that sometimes I don't know what I'm seeing when I'm making my negatives. It's a working ignorance that frees me to go back and look through them much later, as if for the first time.

I keep idea books, little notebooks that I carry with me. Little paper brains. And I jot down thoughts as I have them because otherwise they will flee. I look back through them occasionally—and for this show I did that—and saw that I've been wrestling with the same ideas for 30 years.

I've been interested in landscapes of daily life, in beauty and in the nature of work. I've been interested in character and how character is sometimes reflected in art making. I've been interested in what it means to live as someone who makes art. So I've just been doing the same thing but in different places and cutting through it at different angles.

Are your negatives then, in effect, notebooks, notations of your thoughts?

Yes, the negatives are notes. It's note-taking of visual thoughts.

Originally you made silver gelatin prints. Now, when you make prints from those early negatives you scan them and print them via computer. The new prints have a very different feel. And, they've changed in scale. So is the print, then, the finished concept? And is the negative only a preliminary note?

Well, the negative is a note, you can express it different ways. You can voice the negative differently in the darkroom or on the computer, amplifying some aspects and subduing others to gain whatever effect you are after. For example, I don't crop pictures. I don't go hunting around inside the negative for the picture. Nevertheless, I do take slices out of negatives to make

panoramic shaped pictures because, while I want the shape, I don't want to go to the expense of buying a panoramic camera. I am conscious when I make the negative that the center horizontal strip is the entire picture. The rest is excess.

In this show there's a picture that was a panoramic shape in the Milwaukee Art Museum exhibition, and I decided for the fun of it to look at it as a vertical. I haven't made vertical pictures before, but I thought—why not cut through the middle of the negative vertically and see what happens? And it worked out to be an unexpected and interesting picture to me.

So when I express the negative through a different process, the silver gelatin versus the digital, I'm expressing fundamentally the same picture, but revealing different aspects of it.

I love the way a silver gelatin print can look; but when I make the big ink prints they feel, in their sensuality, in the way the paper soaks up the ink, and in their scale, much closer to the way I feel when I am in the landscape and making the negative. And that's a really important thing. That's what keeps me pursuing the ink on paper process—because it's getting much, much closer, as far as I'm concerned, to the moment of releasing the shutter. And I would like the viewer also to come as close as possible to that moment.

The new digital prints have the wonderful tonal richness of old photogravures. Photogravures are of the past. Are you nostalgic for the old days of photography?

I'm very interested in the physical character of nineteenth century photographs. They are very beautiful objects, thanks to the differing characteristics of their light-sensitive materials and paper. Think about platinum prints and palladium prints with their much wider range of grays than silver gelatin. And photogravure, of course, permitted you to make something very luscious out of the choice of inks and paper.

What happened around the turn of the twentieth century was Kodak's democratizing of the medium with the roll film camera and the Brownie. Before that, photography was a business or rich person's hobby. But making photography available to everyone required a less expensive light-sensitive material with which to produce pictures. Silver is less expensive than platinum, but it also has a narrower tonal range and a totally different visual feel.

During the twentieth century with silver prints, faster film, and smaller cameras, all of which are particularly suited to photojournalism, we can see photography's subject matter change along with the way it is presented. The sensuality that was inherent in nineteenth century photographic practice, both in what people looked at and in how they produced their prints, all sort of fell away with war, the Depression and the way society shifted in general.

The silver image fit well with modern times, but there was a loss. There was a loss of physical beauty in the print paralleled by a general dismissal of the idea of beauty itself. What I like about this digital output is that here in the twenty-first century, using twenty-first century technology, we can produce pictures that bring forward to now the rich physicality that was available to us in nineteenth century and early twentieth century work.

You have moved into the new photographic technology, but when you take pictures you still use film.

Yes.

A conscious choice?

Yes, absolutely. Film, with its different grain structures, makes its own mark on the image. I like that feeling. Digital is much too clear for me, too sharp. Perhaps cold is the word. I don't want to say harsh, but it's got a coldness to it, and film provides something I think of as warmth. There is an element in this of the debate that goes on in music between analog and digital sound reproduction.

One of the qualities you have mentioned repeatedly as we've talked about your work is beauty. What is beauty for you?

Oh, God, beauty is a really fraught word. I gave a talk in 1991 at the Land Institute in Kansas called "The Usefulness of Beauty." For that I had to develop some way to talk about what beauty is. What I came up with was this, if I recall it properly—beauty is a line between the surface of something and the mystery at its core. Later, when I thought about it more, it seemed to me that tracing this line was also to learn the character of whatever it was one was examining. And that, then, formed a lot of my idea of what beauty is. At root it is character.

That fits wonderfully when you're talking about people. Let's talk about your landscapes. How do you define beauty in a landscape?

I don't have a verbal definition. I try to show you where I think beauty lies. It's the picture. It's why I make the picture. I believe very strongly that the mind is a collection of kinds of intelligence. I believe that the eye has its own way of understanding the world. There's science to back this up. We've got intuition. There is a part of your mind that's attached to your internal organs and that reacts to what you're sensing in the world before your verbal brain can figure out what's going on. I believe that there are a lot of things that the eye is processing, thinking about, even while another part of you has the idea that you are up to something else.

So when I talk about beauty in landscape, I don't do it in language, I do it with a number of pictures strung together. When you see a large group of coherent and related pictures together, it becomes clear what they're about, even if there is no language to encompass it.

There are two beauties—one, the beautiful landscape itself and secondly the beautiful photograph that uses the landscape as its subject matter. I wonder if Sarah Kirk's comment, to go back to the beginning of this interview, that your work was documentary, referred to the fact that you often do not pick a beautiful landscape. You seem to concentrate on creating the beautiful photograph.

I do want to make a beautiful photograph, but I could not do that without a beautiful subject.

Most of your landscapes are normal, ones that anyone would see.

That is the heart of the matter, the beauty of normal.

But you produce a photograph that in many ways is more beautiful than the original landscape itself. Would that be a true statement?

I don't think so. I think that the landscape that I see is beautiful in itself, and I've simply learned how to untangle its beauty. And I hope that with my photographs it is possible for other people to come to see that beauty as well. There was a show of the photographs from my book, *Common Ground*, the subject of which was backyards all over the country. One of the venues for that show was the Toledo Museum of Art. Here's the story. In Toledo a docent takes a friend through the show, seventy-five carefully sequenced pictures. Friend sees the show, they go back to the friend's house afterwards, friend's in the kitchen making tea, calls her docent friend to come out in the kitchen, and she says, "look at that." She points out the kitchen window. She says, "I've been looking at that view for, what, fifteen years, and I've always thought it was ugly. But I saw that show and now I see that it's beautiful." That's what I work for.

Who influenced your career as a photographer?

Interesting question. Different people influenced me at different times, sometimes about being an artist, other times about the meaning of "career," and still other times about what to look at and maybe how. In the late seventies, a person for whom I have great respect told me that a career was the last thing he thought about, with his family being the first. Excellent advice, major influence.

But I think you're asking about visual influences on my work and that's a less complex subject. From about fifth grade I've been interested in art. Saturdays in junior high I went to a private art school. At about that time also I got my first darkroom and began teaching myself photography. The pictures that made me want to be a picture maker, though, were European landscape drawings and paintings—from the seventeenth century Dutch, through the nineteenth century French. All the usual suspects. They fed my love of being out of doors and still do.

If I could fill my house with photographs, I would hang Charles Marville, Carleton Watkins, Edweard Muybridge, Atget as an old man and Robert Adams. Adams is a Jersey boy. Until he was six, he lived in a town near mine. I think the childhood landscape of Northern New Jersey marked each of us and made us both susceptible to the pictures of Walker Evans.

And then there's Bill Weege, the printmaker. I did a sort of apprenticeship with him in the early seventies so I could learn ink-on-paper techniques. He taught me those skills and also how to make progress through serial failure. "Just do it." Without a healthy attitude about things going wrong I would have had no career at all.

If somebody asked you for a very brief encapsulation, one statement about what your work is about, what would you say?

It's about the beauty of daily life.

—March 2006

CHRONOLOGY

1944 Born May 3, Jersey City, New Jersey to parents Dorothy E. Conniff and James C.G. Conniff. Eldest of seven.

1951 Family moves to Upper Montclair, New Jersey

1952 Becomes an altar boy at St. Cassian's Church

Greg as altar boy, 1953. Photo by Arthur Palmer.

1954 First bicycle, first camera. All through grammar school frequently taken out of classes to accompany father, an independent magazine writer, on interviews with actors, politicians, scientists, etc., or on research trips to go behind the scenes of whatever his father was writing about.

1957 Reads Rachel Carson's *The Sea Around Us,* engendering an awareness of how complex and fragile the natural world is, especially the ocean, which was the center of his summers at the Jersey shore.

1958 Begins two years of classes at Margaret Yard Tyler School of Art; introduced to the work of George Innes.

Begins high school—Essex Catholic, Newark, New Jersey. A great teacher, John Ennis, introduces the idea that nothing is inherently boring. Starts paying attention to everything, with mixed results.

First darkroom. Never without one after that. Parents give him a Nikkorex camera as a high school graduation present.

1962 Begins college: Columbia College, Columbia University, New York City; spends two misguided years as a pre-med, then studies political science, American history, and art history. Reads incessantly, but has trouble with classrooms, preferring instead to roam the city. In junior and senior years deepens interest in art and the lives of artists. Reads Carson's *Silent Spring* and decides that her thesis is but the tip of an iceberg. Soon, the assassinations of John Kennedy and Malcolm X, and the expanding war in Vietnam reinforce this intuition.

1966 Enters University of Virginia School of Law, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Sees Antonioni's *Blow Up*, buys Nikon F. Life does not imitate art.

1968 Sees Ed Kienholz exhibition in Washington, D.C. on same day as visit to Supreme Court to witness major free speech arguments. Witnessing the court affirms core beliefs; seeing through Kienholz's art reveals a world built around an unforgettably different, darker, yet related core.

1969 First automobile trip around the United States. Startled by the space and that so many interesting things are going on outside the Northeast states.

Passes bar exam in Colorado.

1970 Arrives in Wisconsin. Becomes involved with the Madison Art Center. Meets Joe Wilfer, whose pragmatic, non-sacred approach to art making gives Greg the idea that this world is open to him.

1971 Meets Bill Weege, University of Wisconsin professor of art. Helps Weege build Jones Road Print Shop and Stable, converting a dairy barn into an atelier for experimental printmaking. Works with artists Alan Shields, Sam Gilliam. Learns serigraphy, offset lithography and a variety of experimental processes. Returns to the camera with new vigor, concentrating on people and ordinary places such as stairwells and alleys.

Passes bar exam in Wisconsin. Begins involvement with legal problems of artists. Reads the dark essays of Loren Eisely.

1972 First museum exhibition. Milwaukee Art Museum. Juried group show; thirteen pictures.

First ten-speed bike.

1974 Visits Europe for the first time—Cologne, Amsterdam, Paris, London. Experiences a sense of deep human time in the built environment, something he'd never felt in America. Also first taste of good wine.

1976 Begins near total involvement with picture making, practicing just enough law to meet expenses, which were minimal. Purchases Bronica 6.45, a medium-format camera, and vows for a year to make pictures of anything but people. Starts with piles of gravel and sand.

Travels widely around the United States. Also visits Montreal and Quebec, and then drives up the Gaspe Peninsula to look at a landscape that attracted Paul Strand and his camera in the 1920s and '30s. Once again experiences a sense of deep time, but on the Gaspe this experience lies in the connection between spare settlement and the stark environment along the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Begins friendship with painters Jack Beal and Sondra Freckelton. Sondra introduces him to gardening and Jack introduces the idea to "make art like life. Make life like art." From their example sees that daily life can hold as much beauty as one has the mind to give it.

With attorney Michael Skindrud, offers seminars on art and law to artists and arts organizations for several years.

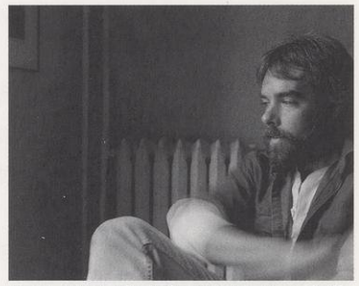
Meets Dorothy and her daughter, Ruth.

1978 Begins to show work to museums, galleries, fellow photographers, collectors, and visual thinkers, while traveling and making photographs. Positive response to his work encourages him to think about disengaging from the practice of law.

Sam Gilliam introduces him to print maker Lou Stovall and from there a cascade of interesting people offer him generous advice and professional welcome. Among these are: Frances Fralin, Jane Livingston, William Christenberry, Sam Wagstaff, Marvin Heiferman, Harry Lunn, Bill Crawford, Rodger Kingston, Richard Benson, George Tice.

Reads John Kouwenhoven's *Made in America* and William H. Ivins' *Prints and Visual Communication.* Also discovers Wendell Berry, whose understanding of agricultural life and deep ethical center further extend the environmental and political awareness engendered by Rachel Carson. Begins gardening. Makes commitment to full time picture making to see if it is possible for him to live as an artist, whatever that phrase might turn out to mean.

1979 Solo exhibition Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., simultaneous exhibition at the Diane Brown Gallery, also in Washington. Harry Lunn introduces him to the work of Carleton Watkins. Marvin Heiferman shows him prints by Robert Adams.



Greg, 1979. Photo by Megan Campbell.

1980 Begins photographing abandoned Brier Hill Steel Mill in Youngstown, OH, in the company of fellow trespasser/artist Jim Pernotto.

Meets Ralph Steiner, Alan Fern.

1981 National Endowment for the Arts Photographers Fellowship permits a hiatus in constant cycle of travel, picture making and picture showing. Studies five years of his work and identifies for good his character as a photographer involved with the places of daily life.

Greg and Dorothy Conniff wedding, 1981. Photo by Greg and Jim Pernotto.

First prints bought by the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Seagram Collection.

Image published in *The Print*, part of the Time-Life series of books on photography.

Meets Richard Pare, who shows him prints by Marville and Baldus.

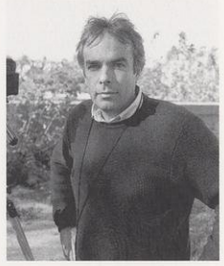
Marries Dorothy in the garden of their home.

1982 Visits John Coplans, for the first of a series of invigorating conversations filled with radical passion and cold realism. These conversations coincide with a growing awareness that his work was at odds with the climate of art practice. Redirects his focus to the long term exploration of his subject and the development of family life.

1983 Meets John Kouwenhoven, John Stilgoe, and the Minneapolis Mob—Tom Arndt, Frank Gohlke, Stuart Klipper, and Peter Latner. Begins friendship with Tom Bamberger.

Starts building cedar strip canoe with Neil Rickman, with the goal of making a beautiful functional object. Project carries on for two years.

1984 Visiting artist for a semester in the Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Wisconsin, Madison. An eye-opening encounter with people who, while drawn to the form of his pictures, could also talk about levels of content of which he was unaware.



Greg, 1984. Photo by Tom Bamberger.

1985 *Common Ground* published. Yale University Press. Seventy-five black and white photographs of domestic landscapes from various parts of the United States. Writes the book's essay, "Why a Camera," on visual intelligence and the role of the camera as the voice of the eye.

Visits Ecuador, where daughter Ruth is spending a semester abroad.

1987 Visits Hale County, Alabama, to look at an area that drew the photographic attentions of Walker Evans and native son, Bill Christenberry.

Meets Michael Book in Baton Rouge, LA. There, gets together with Frank Gohlke and the two spend a couple of days making photographs near the Mississippi River.

Travels to Amsterdam, Paris, Ireland, England. Sees *Land and Water* exhibition of seventeenth century Dutch landscape drawings at the Reichsmuseum in Amsterdam. Is deeply invigorated by the affection and accuracy with which the artists pictured their world.

Garden included in Olbrich Gardens Tour.

1989 Water in the West group collaborative project begins; founding member. The collaborative organized itself around the irreducible fact that there is too little rainfall west of the 100th meridian to support population growth in the western United States. At first meeting begins lasting friendship with Terry Evans.

Photographs extensively in the Dakotas.

1990 Makes first visit to Mississippi, begins friendship with Jane Rule Burdine, Mayor of Taylor, MS. At her table meets writers such as Richard Ford, Barry Hannah and the late Larry Brown and begins immersion in the culture of the deep south that continues in extended visits to this day.

Begins collaborative photographic work with Terry Evans in the Sand Hills of Nebraska.

1991 Decides to spend more time photographing the Wisconsin countryside he has come to know through bicycling.

Delivers talk, "The Usefulness of Beauty," at the Land Institute, Salina, KS, in conjunction with collaborative *Haystacks* show with Terry Evans.

Greg and Terry Evans, 1991. Photo by Sam Evans.

1992 For the Water in the West Project, begins multiple trips with Terry Evans to Cheyenne Bottoms, a wetland in Kansas that is a major part of the migratory flyway. Their project is premised on the impact of drought. Naturally, the weather begins a cycle of rainy years.

1993 Intensifies photographing own gardens, usually in the late afternoon, until it is time to sit there and simply stare at them.

1994 Custom bike for 50th birthday.

1996 Photographs gardens in Cleveland for the George Gund Foundation annual report.

1999 *Twenty Years in the Field.* Mid-career retrospective at the Sordoni Gallery at Wilkes University, Wilkes Barre, PA. Organized by Stanley Grand, who had known him for more than twenty years.

Completes work on *Ordinary Beauty*, a book of landscape photographs from the Deep South, the Great Plains, and the upper Midwest. Decides the book has problems and withdraws it from the publisher. The essay, "The Work of Beauty" originated with this project.

2000 John Szarkowski visits Madison to teach the history of photography for a semester and is seduced by Dorothy's bread and the opportunity to graft Northern Spy scions on Greg's espaliered apple tree. A pretty good friendship emerges.

Invited to participate in Acadia Summer Arts Program, an artists' residency program of enormous generosity on Mt. Desert Island, ME.

2001 Granddaughter Lily born.

2003 Asked by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago to produce a print eight feet wide. Enters the digital world and discovers an ink and paper combination that reminds him of the physical beauty of nineteenth century photographs and photogravure. It is also a return to the ink and paper processes he explored in the early '70s.

Granddaughter Rose born.

2004 Rides L'Ariegoise, an all-day bicycle race in the Pyrenees. Finishes, but is never a threat to the leaders.

2005 Photographs the trees on the Vassar campus for the Vassar Annual Report, a commission that puts to good use thirty years of adjusting to trees that inevitably block the view.

2006 Starts to photograph the Hudson River Valley.

Greg and Lily Conniff Cooper, 2005. Photo by Dorothy Conniff.

GREGORY CONNIFF

EDUCATION

1966 Columbia University, B.A.
1969 University of Virginia School of Law, LL.B.
1971 Independent Apprenticeship with William Weege. Jones Road Print Shop and Stable, Barneveld, Wisconsin

EXHIBITIONS (solo/two person)

2006 CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART, University of Wisconsin, Madison (catalogue)
2006 CANDACE DWAN GALLERY, New York City, New York
2004 MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; *Judy Pfaff and Gregory Conniff: Camera and Ink* (catalogue)
2000 WENDY COOPER GALLERY, Madison, Wisconsin
PACIFICO FINE ART, New York City, New York
1999 SORDONI GALLERY, Wilkes University, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; *20 Year Survey* (catalogue)
POLK MUSEUM OF ART, Lakeland, Florida
1996 SPENCER MUSEUM OF ART, Lawrence, Kansas; *Western Waters*, (with Terry Evans and Wanda Hammerbeck) (catalogue)
1995 SOUTHSIDE GALLERY, Oxford, Mississippi
1994 JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER, Kohler, Wisconsin
RIVERFRONT MUSEUM, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (with Frank Gohlke)
1991 THE LAND INSTITUTE, Salina, Kansas (with Terry Evans)
CARLSTEN GALLERY, University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point
1989 MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (with Frank Gohlke) (catalogue)
ST. NORBERT COLLEGE, De Pere, Wisconsin
1986 AKRON ART MUSEUM, Akron, Ohio
MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY, Chicago, Illinois
1984 TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART, Toledo, Ohio
1983 E. J. BELLOCQ GALLERY, Ruston, Louisiana
1980 CENTER GALLERY, Madison, Wisconsin
MILWAUKEE CENTER FOR PHOTOGRAPHY, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1979 DIANE BROWN GALLERY, Washington, D.C.
CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART, Washington, D.C.
MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, MADISON, Wisconsin
MADISON ART CENTER, Madison Wisconsin

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2006 THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, Chicago, Illinois, *Photographs by the Score: Personal Visions Twenty-some Years Apart*
2003 THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO, Chicago, Illinois, *Recently Seen;*
SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, (traveling), *The Land Through a Lens: Highlights of the Smithsonian American Art Museum;*
CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART, Cleveland, Ohio, *A City Seen;*
LUDWIG MUSEUM, Budapest, Hungary, *The View from Here: Recent Pictures from Central Europe and the American Midwest* (traveling);
WISCONSIN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, ARTS AND LETTERS, Madison, Wisconsin, *Visions of Water*
2001 MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, *Masterpieces of Photography;*
SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, San Francisco, California, *Ansel Adams at 100*
2000 WENDY COOPER GALLERY, Madison, Wisconsin
JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, *Gardens of Pleasure;*
MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin
1999 ALAN KLOTZ/PHOTOCOLLECT, New York City, New York, *Up from Down;*
PACIFICO FINE ART, New York City, New York, *Industry*
1998 CANDACE PERICH GALLERY, Katonah, New York, *The American Farm;*
MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1996 HIGH MUSEUM OF ART, Atlanta, Georgia, *Picturing the South;*
MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, *American Landscapes;*
SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, San Francisco, California, *Crossing the Frontier: Photographing the Development of the West 1849 to the Present* (Catalogue);
HODGES TAYLOR GALLERY, Charlotte, North Carolina, *Creating the North American Landscape*
1995 MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin, *Photography from Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois*
1994 AMERICAN EMBASSY, Oslo, Norway;
TORY FOLLIARD GALLERY, Milwaukee, Wisconsin;
PHILBROOK MUSEUM OF ART, Tulsa, Oklahoma;
MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin, *Wisconsin Triennial;*
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, Washington, D.C., *Between Home and Heaven* (Catalogue);
UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, Reno, Nevada, *Water in the West;*
SALINA ART CENTER, Salina, Kansas;
MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1990 JOHN MICHAEL KOHLER ARTS CENTER, Sheboygan, Wisconsin
1989 MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

NATASHA NICHOLSON WORKS OF ART, Madison, Wisconsin
1987 MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin
1986 MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1985 MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1984 HUDSON RIVER MUSEUM, Yonkers, New York, *The Lens in the Garden;*
MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1983 BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART, Baltimore, Maryland
1982 LAWRENCE OLIVER GALLERY, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin
MINNESOTA MUSEUM OF ART, St. Paul, Minnesota
1981 MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, Boston, Massachusetts;
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, Stevens Point, Wisconsin;
SEUFERER CHOSY GALLERY, Madison, Wisconsin
1980 FOGG ART MUSEUM, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
1979 MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin;
MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin;
WUSTUM MUSEUM, Racine, Wisconsin
1978 HIGH MUSEUM OF ART, Atlanta, Georgia;
MADISON ART CENTER, Madison, Wisconsin;
MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
1972 MILWAUKEE ART MUSEUM, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

SELECTED PUBLIC AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland
Commodities Corporation, Princeton, New Jersey
Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Elvehjem (Chazen) Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin
Federal Reserve Bank, Chicago, Illinois
Fidelity Investments, Boston, Massachusetts
First Bank, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia
Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois
LaFollette Godfrey Kahn, Madison, Wisconsin
LaSalle Bank, Chicago, Illinois
Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, Madison, Wisconsin
McGrath Associates
Michael Best & Friedrich, Madison, Wisconsin
Milwaukee Museum of Art, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, Illinois
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts
Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York
National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.
Norwest Bank, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Paine Webber, New York, New York
Rayovac Corporation (Spectrum Brands), Madison, Wisconsin
Reader's Digest Collection, Pleasantville, New York
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California
Joseph E. Seagram Collection, New York, New York
Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas
Stein Roe Farnham, Chicago, Illinois

FELLOWSHIPS

1992 National Endowment for the Arts Photographer's Fellowship
National Endowment for the Arts International Exchange Fellowship (declined)
1990 Dane County/City of Madison Creative Arts Fellowship
Wisconsin Arts Board Visual Arts Fellowship
1989 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship
1987 Wisconsin Arts Board Visual Arts Fellowship
1981 National Endowment for the Arts Photographer's Fellowship
1979 Wisconsin Arts Board Visual Arts Fellowship

RESIDENCIES

2001 Acadia Summer Arts Program, Mt. Desert Island, Maine (also 2000)

PROJECT GRANTS

1983 Dane County Cultural Affairs Committee
1987 Wisconsin Arts Board (also '83, '80, '77, '76)

COMMISSIONS

2005 Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York; *Trees at Vassar*
1996 George Gund Foundation, Cleveland, Ohio; *Urban Gardens*
1995 National Road Project, Center for American Places, Staunton, Virginia
1992 Governor's Awards in the Arts, Wisconsin Arts Foundation, Madison

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Curtis, Verna. *Gregory Conniff and Frank Gohlke: Two Days in Louisiana.* Milwaukee: Milwaukee Museum of Art, 1989.

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Finkhouse, Joseph and Crawford, Mark. *A River Too Far: The Past and Future of The Arid West, Illustrated with Photographs by the Water in the West Project.* Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991.

Foresta, Merry, et al. *Between Home and Heaven: Contemporary American Landscape Photography.* Albuquerque: National Museum of American Art/ University of New Mexico Press, 1992.

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Phillips, Sandra. *Crossing the Frontier.* San Francisco: Museum of Modern Art/Chronicle Books, 1996.

Pultz, John. *Western Waters, Gregory Conniff/Terry Evans/Wanda Hammerbeck.* Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1996.

Raitz, Karl, ed. *A Guide to the National Road.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Read, Michael, ed. *Ansel Adams/New Light, Essays on His Legacy and Legend.* San Francisco: The Friends of Photography Bookstore, 1993.

Szarkowski, John. *A City Seen, Photographs from the George Gund Collection.* Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 2002.

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Time-Life, ed. *The Print (Life Library of Photography).* Virginia Beach, VA: Time-Life Books, 1981.

Thompson, George, ed. *Landscape in America.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Who's Who in American Art, 26th ed., 2005–2006. New Providence, NJ: Marquis Who's Who, 2005.

VISITING ARTIST/LECTURER

Acadia Summer Arts Program, Mt. Desert Island, ME; Columbia College, Chicago, IL; Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Land Institute, Salina, KS; Madison Art Center, Madison, WI; Massachusetts College of Art, Boston, MA; Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI; School of the Arts, Winston-Salem, NC; Spencer Museum, Lawrence, KS; University of Illinois, Chicago, IL; University of Wisconsin, Madison & Stevens Point

RELATED

1990–2000	Center for American Places; founding member, Board of Directors
1990–1994	Water in the West Project; founding member
1987–2004	Consulting Editor, Johns Hopkins University Press, for the series, *Creating the North American Landscapes.*
1985–	Writer, occasional essays, reviews, artist profiles for periodicals and catalogues.
1975–1980	Consultant and Lecturer, *Art and the Law*; Provided information and counsel to artists, administrators, arts councils, collectors and universities on the law and ethics of the business of art. Taught art and law in the graduate department of art at the University of Wisconsin for two years.
1970–1978	Attorney, private practice with a special interest in the law of art and publishing, Madison, Wisconsin
1969–1970	VISTA, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, Atlanta, Georgia

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