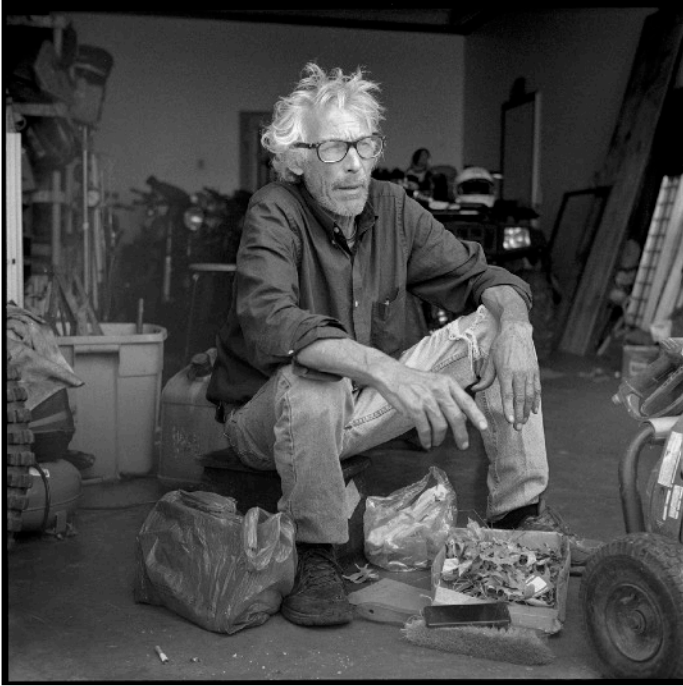


Through the Lenses of
LEASHA OVERTURF, JOSEPH GARRETT & JASON GRAY
N E I G H B O R H O O D S



JOSEPH GARRETT



CEDARHURST CENTER FOR THE ARTS
June 27 - September 20, 2026

JASON GRAY



LEASHA OVERTURF





**Neighborhoods:
Through the Lenses of
Leasha Overturf, Joseph Garrett &
Jason Gray**

June 27 - September 20, 2026

New Semantics Gallery, Mitchell Museum
Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, Mt. Vernon, Illinois

GALLERY SPONSORS

Hunt and Donna Bonan



Booklet printed by Peacock Printing, Mt. Vernon, IL
Booklet design R. Freeman

Cedarhurst Center for the Arts is an activity of the John R. and
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BOOKLET COVER

Joseph Garrett, *Jim Jarvis, Cycle Tech,*
Murphysboro, IL, 2020

Jason Gray, *Reveler, Souldard Mardi Gras, 2016*

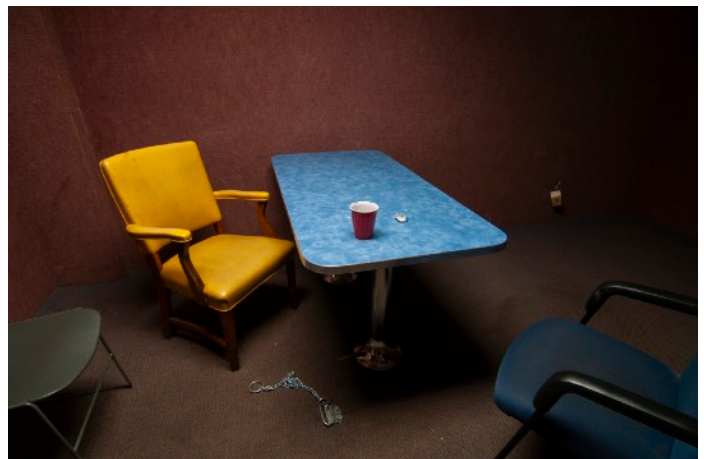
Leasha Overturf, *The Family, 2014*



JOSEPH GARRETT *Pink Elephant Antique Mall,*
2025



LEASHA OVERTURF *Conger Ave, 2014*



JASON GRAY *Interrogation Room, Former St.
Louis Metropolitan Police Headquarters, 2014*

***Neighborhoods: Through the Lenses of
Leasha Overturf, Joseph Garrett & Jason Gray***

INTRODUCTION

Rusty Freeman, Director of Visual Arts

We take our Measure of Being from what surrounds us, and what surrounds us is always, to some extent, of our own making. Robert Pogue Harrison, *Landscape and Power*, 2002

At virtually every level, and within every context, the portrait photograph is fraught with ambiguity. The portrait photograph is, then, the site of a complex series of interactions— aesthetic, cultural, ideological, sociological, and psychological. Graham Clarke, *The Photograph*, 1997

What does a person bring to looking? What is the intention of the person that is asking you to look? It took a while for me to understand that just because you are looking at something doesn't mean you understand the historical meaning. You need other information.

Martha Rosler, *Positions in the Life World*, 1998

To quote out of context is the essence of the photographer's craft. John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye*, 1966

Photography is both document and metaphor. Photography can depict real people in real events while that same literal document can also generate additional metaphoric messages. Two readings, one photograph.

The theme of this essay explores Agency and Place and how the two work reciprocally. Each informs the other to generate personal empowerment and define place. Who has agency? the photographer? the subject? the viewer?

Photography is key here, for it is *the* method for representing agency and place.

Agency - the personal and social abilities and wherewithal needed for a person to make choices and take action.

Place - the total physical, social, and symbolic dimensions of an environment.

Agency and Place co-exist in deeply intertwined, reciprocal relationships.

A person's agency depends on language. When a mom says to her child "you can do this" she builds agency through language. Without language and words to express and bring forth the concepts of agency self-empowerment cannot occur.

Photography itself can be another type of flexible language empowerment.

Photography can emulate agency. The *Black Panther* and *Barbie* movies deconstructed agency through photographic representation. To deconstruct a topic, or work of art, is to read for its multiple and often contradictory, often complementary, entangled layers of meaning, understanding, and power.

Place is just a physical space until human agency attaches memories, values, and significance to it. This creation of "sense of place" empowers how people interact with it, or alter it, or protect it.

Through concerted actions—furnishing one's home, public gathering spaces, building communities—individuals and groups materially and culturally transform spaces into meaningful places.

Every place has unwritten social rules that guide behavior. The American South has *differing* but *similar* codes of behavior like the upper Midwest. "Minnesota Nice" is but a version of "Southern Hospitality."

What social rules did Leasha Overturf, Joe Garrett, and Jason Gray face while navigating acceptance to photograph total strangers? What social codes, what influential agencies were respected in order to interpret and understand what the photograph recorded?

When Leasha, Joe, or Jason photograph people and their places they can support, or question, their subjects' *identities* and their *sense of place*.

Place inspires Agency; Agency shapes Place.

LEASHA OVERTURF

The social landscapes and portraits of Leasha Overturf are the thematic model for the **Neighborhoods** exhibition. Each photograph speaks to her singular theme "714 Conger," Leasha's childhood neighborhood. Her scene selections are subtle, and have a lot in them, but are so subtle that we might not pay attention to them if we drove by. However, she gives us clues, signs of her intention, and her values. Her carefully photographed, themed, selected, precise photographs establish a Sense of Place, that subtle Measure of Being that only a neighborhood, only a place, can bring about. Her portraits bring out something in the person that makes me feel as though I somehow know the person. Her artistry begins with selection of place, and her deep respect for the vulnerability of being human.

There is a little bit of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine in Leasha's visual essay. Her personal and friendly approach, though, is worlds apart from theirs. Photographs of *714 Conger* record a *serenity* that is not always there in the real life reality of the neighborhood. The reality of *714 Conger* is closer to the harsh realities Riis (1880s) and Hine (1910s/30s) photographed in New York City. The poverty is there in Leasha's photographs, but so are the residents who eventually befriended the photographer, who then made pictures of them at their best, relaxed and engaging before the camera of their new acquaintance. Leasha established a *visual opposition* between what was there, a harshness, and another side, more pleasant, not regularly experienced there.

Leasha accomplished this by choosing not to emphasize the poverty as did Riis and Hine. Her scene selections belie the overarching conditions and atmosphere of the *714* neighborhood. It is today still a rough neighborhood. That doesn't mean every person there is rough. Or that every apartment or the grounds are uncared for. But the conditions and environment do cast a dark spell over the neighborhood. Leasha broke that spell with her camera and her willingness to share a little common courtesy.

"714 Conger is where I lived with my mom and little sister. It was really not the 'home' she wished it to be. If anything, it became a hell at times. Still known as 'The Projects.' Kids from school made



LEASHA OVERTURF *Reflecting*, 2014

fun of us for living there. I was haunted by the time spent at 714 Conger."

"A dear friend encouraged me to go back to explore and photograph in and around that neighborhood. My idea of doing a longer-term project came to life."

"What kind of life was unfolding in the same apartment I lived in as a child? What if I knocked on the door of 714 Conger? Would they let me in?"

"Multiple attempts to gain access were unsuccessful. One day I went to the door to explain my ideas and the door was slammed in my face. I was met with a hateful and threatening response. It almost kept me from trying again. But, I was not going to let that deter me. I kept on going."

"I had to ask myself the question a few times of who am I, and what am I doing here?"

"Finally, the door opened, a young mom let me back in the apartment of 714 Conger. The memories flooded over me. This project is not only about memories and visiting one's past, *it is also about unlocking new connections to the future.*"

Years later, during her study of photography at SIUC, Leasha wanted to be a war photographer. Photographers like Marie Colvin, Susan Meisalas, or Christine Spengler. Leasha's boldness and fierce determination to consider photographing wars was perhaps instilled during childhood at 714 Conger.

"As I started the *714* project I quickly realized that it was also a statement about making choices. We all have choices. You make the choice for yourself to happy or to be sad. You can choose to leave or stay. I see so many people in my hometown that



LEASHA OVERTURF *The Family* 2014

continually blame the system rather than choosing to make better choices. I chose to take a different path proving to myself that I am just as smart and good as the kids that had ‘everything.’”

“As I photographed some of the kids that now live in and around the neighborhood of the projects, they seem mystified that I even wanted to come back. They say I’m way different than they are. Nevaeh gave me a hard time saying that I could not have possibly ever lived in her neighborhood, let alone in the projects. I finally won her over to do a portrait of her by herself. I told them that I used to be them. I found myself giving a mini-workshop on the message ‘you can do whatever your dream is. You just have to work for it.’”

“One of my goals with my photography is to invoke the viewer to think about their own stories and emotions. Essentially, I feel the most successful photography becomes the viewer’s story as well.”

Leasha using photography, inviting them to have their portraits made, showing kindness, and “mini-workshops” demonstrated that personal agency is possible, no matter what place you find yourself in.

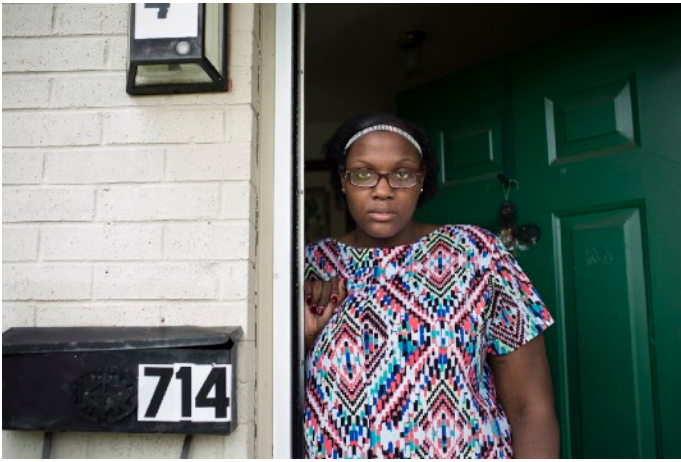
“The only way to be successful in this is to believe in yourself. I love the quote by E.E. Cummings ‘It takes courage to be nobody but yourself.’ You have to put yourself into your images.”

LEASHA OVERTURF *The Family*

This is an angelic moment as a family enjoys being outside on a bright sunny day playing with their pets as the grandfather watches over two nieces. A working class home possibly entertaining middle class aspirations given the Infiniti in their driveway. The backyard flows nicely into the neighbors. Nothing in this scene is indicative of the true rough and tumble, harsh, even dangerous environment of the 714 Conger neighborhood.

The overall relaxed mood is led by the grandfather and the photographer. The grandfather, the littlest girl, and all three dogs are looking right into the camera and at Leasha; the Border Terrier mix and the American Foxhound mix puppy seem quite curious, relaxed; while the Pit Bull Terrier mix is transfixed.

Quirky signs of eccentric home improvisation include the use of trees as posts to leash both dogs. The pit bull as watchdog might be a sign of just how unstable the neighborhood can be.



LEASHA OVERTURF *Jazmine*, 2016

More to the point of the photograph's significance is the ability of Leasha, as a white woman, as a photographer, as an unknown stranger, coming from a no-doubt recognized class of privilege and freedom, was able to represent this family with a bit of dignity without passing judgement on where they live, or who they are.



LEASHA OVERTURF *The Quiet One*, 2014



LEASHA OVERTURF *Established 1993*, 2014

Therefore, because of Leasha's art, we are able to see people and their places as they might wish to be seen. To see them with empathy and without prejudice.

JOSEPH GARRETT

Joseph Garrett practices the art of photography that welcomes a diverse gathering of family, friends, and acquaintances enshrining all with his unique vision and talent to represent character and spirit. Joe begins portraits with respect for each subject; they are relaxed and equally engaged and respectful with Joe behind the camera.



JOSEPH GARRETT *Herrin, IL June 20, 2025*, 2025

His varied and themed photographs of social landscapes reflect our times, while some step out, and do quite the opposite acknowledging the significances of our past histories.

Perhaps most striking are Joe's gift and consummate eye for *aestheticism*. To make the ordinary extraordinary. Joe can so craft a photograph that it can bring out the unique way something looks and still have it say more than it actually is. *Aestheticism* is the magic art of art for art's sake. To make for the joy of making. To see for the pleasures in seeing.

John Szarkowski, director of photography at MoMA from 1962 to 1991, described *aestheticism* as: "The compelling clarity with which a photograph recorded the trivial suggested that *the subject had never before been properly seen*, that it was in fact perhaps *not* trivial, but *filled with undiscovered meaning*." (my emphasis).

As Joe has demonstrated, for a photograph to function as a metaphor, as *aesthetically symbolic*, the aesthetic sensibilities of the photographer must be of the highest order for the photograph's

potential symbolisms to kick in. It is not easy to make a photograph that brings together the frame, the view, the composition, the potential iconography and have them sing in harmony.

Aestheticism and Symbolism go hand in hand, as Stephane Mallarmé and Paul Gauguin have shown. See more Szarkowski quotes at the end of the essay that illustrate the intertwined functions of aestheticism and symbolism in photography.

Joe described his own practice as that which “strives to make compelling images that reveal both what is seen and what lies beneath the surface; the stories woven into the fabric of everyday life. Each image breathes its own life while contributing to a larger narrative, inviting viewers to explore the *deeper connections hidden in plain sight*. The successful expression of my vision will integrate well with the viewer’s own vision. If my photograph elicits an emotional response, invokes a memory, then the photo is a success. *This collaborative storytelling aspect is what truly fascinates me about the medium.*”

“My work is focused on capturing the beauty in everyday moments and finding harmony in the chaos of the world.”

“An artist is a man who seeks new structures in which *to order and simplify* his sense of reality of life.” Szarkowski, *The Photographer’s Eye*, 1966.

“There’s a lot of confusion out there. You know, life can get pretty chaotic and overwhelming at times, and I find myself constantly trying to grasp at fleeting thoughts and ideas. Some days, my mind just drifts. I am not able to grasp a thought, it just melts away between my fingers. I get worn down, torn apart, divided into many selves trying to complete a task. There is no presence, only constant seconds waiting to happen.”

“Thanks to photography, however, I have the opportunity to put things in order, organize the elements, and find harmony. Through my photography I am able to find a sense of clarity and purpose. It’s my way of navigating through the chaos and creating something meaningful out of it.”

Joe studies and deals with today’s world; he is alive to it, and makes something of it. Many have recognized the world’s ongoing social disorders including Bob Dylan and the Temptations. Dylan’s iconic “Desolation Row” 1965 riffs on a metaphoric state of mind pondering the absurdity, the chaos, the realities of a world gone mad.



JOSEPH GARRETT *Panama City Beach*, 2024

Dylan also wrote an essay on The Temptations *Ball of Confusion (That’s What the World is Today)* 1970. Excerpt from Dylan’s essay interpreting lyrics by Barrett Strong and Norman Whitfield:

“Chaos everywhere—prejudice and death, starvation, destruction. It’s rolling like a ball and you’re packed inside it. These are turbulent times, and the sons of dogs are roaming the streets. Anarchy is breaking out. The air is full of poison and the whole city is disorganized. Your money doesn’t buy you anything, or influence anybody. It’s the same thing over and over, every ten seconds another news flash, another scandal, more headlines, more news commentators and they’re giving you the creeps. This is a song about the human condition, and rules don’t apply.”

The Philosophy of Modern Song, 2022.

Compare the historical years of the two songs—1965, 1970—with today 2026. What has changed, what has stayed the same? The social chaos that Joe orders, stabilizes, masters, poeticizes through his photography are quite different, yet all historically quite similar.



JOSEPH GARRETT *Du Quoin State Fair 2025*

JOSEPH GARRETT Du Quoin State Fair

44 people in Joe’s photo, everybody in a T-shirt, at least six phones in use, heads looking in all directions, one baby. Body gestures expressing how many moods?

It’s hard to ignore the delightful spectacle of colorful characters just above the crowd. A *bull*, a *pig*, the *friendly/aggressive* yellow Pikachu, the *sweet/feisty* orange Charmander, the *well-behaved/rebellious* turquoise Squirtle, Sonic the *blue* Hedgehog, Shadow the *black* Hedgehog, and even a sinister smiling *clown* with fangs.

The stuffed animals, the Pokémon and Sonic characters reflect some of the world archetypes of mythology studied by Carl Jung and others.

The cuddly, fluffy avatars do not echo in anyway the diverse state fair crowd; they do represent the

myriad ways human nature itself is diverse and with useful, built-in opposing personalities.

Two men wearing baseball caps, dark sunglasses, bearded, T-shirts; one with arms folded, the other with hand on his baby’s stroller. Different, yet similar representations of manhood. Everyone makes use of differing, yet similar, social masks in our daily lives.

Compare how nearly everyone is wearing a T-shirt that itself signals comfort, leisure, with additional textual or graphic symbolisms that further signify aspects of personal identity.



JASON GRAY *Apotheosis of Saint Louis Re-Patinazation, Forest Park, 2017*

JASON GRAY

Jason Gray brings the painter's touch to his photographs of portraits and social environments. His selected pictorial elements and settings oscillate between the literal and the metaphor. Aestheticisms intertwine Symbolisms. Metaphors hit the Body; response is unconsciously at first. Analysis comes later. It is not easy to make an aesthetically spot on and symbolically resonant photograph. One needs to know local history and be motivated by a universal cause. A just cause that may embrace diverse communities and their histories.

JASON GRAY *Apotheosis of Saint Louis Re-Patinazation*

This will be read here as if it were a contemporary painting. Jason's chosen moment of composition carefully centers the bronze monument and a worker atop scaffolding all in front of the Saint Louis Art Museum. It is a beautiful day.

The all-important "frame" selection by Jason bisected a blue sky, green trees, and lawns on one side of the composition, and the museum, worker,

and monument on the other; each side setting up a subtle, but clear, opposition of nature and culture.

Of all the iconography in the photograph, I take the scaffolding to be the most interesting. The other icons are: the monument itself, the real Medieval King Louis IX, the horse, the sword/Cross, the helmeted worker (art conservator), the art museum, the flowers and greenery, the blue sky and bright, sunny day.

Analogous to framework, the scaffolding becomes a symbol for a system. A framework is an essential signifying structure supporting, defining personal, societal, or institutional beliefs. A photograph's frame is itself a scaffold.

With scaffolding, or a framework, you can analyze a work of art at multiple levels. Say, Panofsky's three levels of art history analysis of images: the pre-iconographic, iconographic, and iconology. Or one can explore artifacts up and down the layers of sedimentation as in an archaeological dig. Or you could consider a 360-degree examination in order to situate the object of study in its aesthetic and historic totality.



JASON GRAY *Union Station, Downtown West*, 2015

One focus for Jason's *Apotheosis* illuminates the relationships between a work of art and the art museum. The institution of an art museum supports, frames, scaffolds the various histories of art preserved within its halls.

Frameworks unpack intention in a socially-symbolic work of art to get at its influential cultural meanings and understandings.



LEASHA OVERTURF *Cat Boy*, 2014

This aspect of the art object/museum relationship is seen just to the left of the worker's head.

Visible on the museum's entablature are four of the six allegorical muses represented in the art museum: Classic Art, Gothic Art, Renaissance Art, and Oriental Art. Egyptian Art and Modern Art are obscured.

A second subject in the photograph a framework might examine is the city of St. Louis, which owns the public monument. The monument was

commissioned for the 1904 World's Fair and later became the official city landmark. It was the city icon until the Arch debuted in 1965.

The 1904 monument was controversial at inception. The originally accepted commission was handed over to another builder. The original designer later compensated. In 2020 some citizens sought its removal, some its stay. The monument's cultural issues were publicly expressed and every one remain important.

For this essay's theme of agency and place, how might any public monument represent an ethnically diverse and culturally advanced city?

How might a city redress its origins, paradoxically imperfect and hopeful though they may be?



JOSEPH GARRETT *Chesterfield MO February 1 2024*, 2024

Does the Arch signify more than a gateway? Is there such an icon as an Arch or Arc of Relationships?

Might the two poles of the arch represent a blend of Identity and Difference working together? A unity reaching for the heavens?

Might it be beneficial to begin to see public monuments as some kind of Other that may complement and work with other Others in a city?

Visit in St. Louis *Pillars of the Valley* by local artist Damon Davis.



JOSEPH GARRETT *Globe Theater, Christopher, IL, 2025*

The Apotheosis of Saint Louis Re-Patinazation is one of many photographs and series that explore Jason's study of the evolutions of the diverse cultures and complex histories of St. Louis.

Jason's post-documentary photography follows "a path meant to investigate my place and my impact here, and the history of those things, like the river, that cultural forces claim, carve away, and redefine."

"This process of removing and replacing, and of what is removed and what is replaced, is something that I am very interested in and have focused on telling for the last decade."

"It is not a usual telling. This is important. For just as the aboriginal mounds of 'Mound City' are all but gone, so will be many of the places and people photographed. Like a dream, only their impressions will remain."



LEASHA OVERTURF *My Nickname is Snap, 2014*

American West photographer Robert Adams reflecting on the word "home" wrote: "Art has, I think, fundamentally always been about *that place and condition.*"

Home and Neighborhood are *metonyms* for a Place that has become historically infused with human values.

Leasha and Joe and Jason and Robert Adams photograph their respective homes and conditions: St. Louis, Southern Illinois, and the Western US.

In his long practice photographing "place and condition" in western American landscapes, Robert Adams has always documented—in relation to the land's beauty—the environmental and cultural conditions of home.



JASON GRAY *Steve Potter of St. Louis City Corner in Studio, King's Oak, 2021*

The condition that Leasha responded to with *714 Conger*; the condition through which Joe responded to societal chaos; the condition through which Jason responded to civic histories.

For what is a Place if not its memory of itself—a place where Time reflects back upon itself?
Robert Pogue Harrison.

"Like a dream, only their impressions will remain."



JOSEPH GARRETT, *Du Quoin, IL September 28 2025, 2025*. "A sudden knowing" written by Joe as a haiku styled caption for *Du Quoin*.

SOCIAL LANDSCAPES

*A sudden knowing,
Ancient pattern recognized,
It was always here...*

There is something poetic about Joe's photograph and haiku caption of his "Drive-Thru" landscape of ruins. How it rolls easily with similar works by Leasha and Jason. How Joe's image and haiku sync seemingly, seamlessly with Walter Benjamin's theory of the allegory of ruins. "Ancient" implies "History."

Walter Benjamin wrote in 1928 "An appreciation of the transience of things, and the concern to rescue them for eternity, is one of the strongest impulses in allegory."

For some, modern life rolls over, drives-thru, crushing all in its path. What cannot pay its own way, is abandoned, be it person or place. In these landscape photographs, the personal and social relationships of specific places that each

photographer in their own way brings into view are economically and culturally tenuous.

Joe's image of a ruin can be understood to represent the real abandoned building itself, but his image as a sign of contemporary decline can also represent all buildings and sites that have been abandoned and made derelict by market forces.

This sign becomes a sign for a system, a social order, a way of life. The image stands for the disruptions that recur cyclically in the economy. Who can care for one business going under?

This is the cycle of life. Perhaps the *memento mori* embedded in vanitas painting reflects better what these photographs document.

People, families, and communities are affected. Neighborhoods appropriated, sacrificed without malicious intent. Neighborhoods end up as collateral damage.



LEASHA OVERTURF *Mt. Vernon, IL, 2014*
Abandoned Park Plaza Mall, three blocks north of
Conger Avenue. Recently acquired for development.

GENRE OF ALLEGORICAL RUINS

The social landscapes of our three photographers share concern for local ruins and their histories as does St. Louis photographer Jennifer Colten.

“Colten’s practice has long documented the edges of society where cultural traditions and progressive innovations collide. For Colten, the cultural margin is an event horizon that she brings into focus and dialogue with her photography as she documents relationships between the differing communities and the lands they live on and use.”

“Marking downtown St. Louis with the billboard photograph may catalyze awareness of the architectural and economic histories of Real Estate Row.”

“Colten seeks margin places marked by earlier urban development now abandoned and where nature has begun to reclaim the site. From her documents, issues of representation, myths, and beliefs with regard to the land may be unfolded.”



Ruins among the first photographs made.
Pierre-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, *Le Parthenon à Athènes*, 1839, print after daguerreotype, Getty Museum, Los Angeles

“The most fundamentally critical component of [Colten’s] practice reinserts the photographs into the documented communities encouraging dialogue with the people who live and work there.”



JASON GRAY *Staircase into Cupola, St. Louis Forensic Psychology Center (former St. Louis Lunatic Asylum), 2024*

“Multiple, overlapping stories (economic, political, cultural) may come into view or consideration. By [Colten] photographing the margins, viewers begin to experience a deeper understanding of the [urban] center and its relationship with nature. These photographs put into play geographical connections to people. A sense of place unfolds.”

“Experiences of Colten’s photographs are a way of knowing.” Rusty Freeman, Excerpts of Review of Colten’s “Real Estate Row,” *New Art Examiner*, Chicago, January 2020.

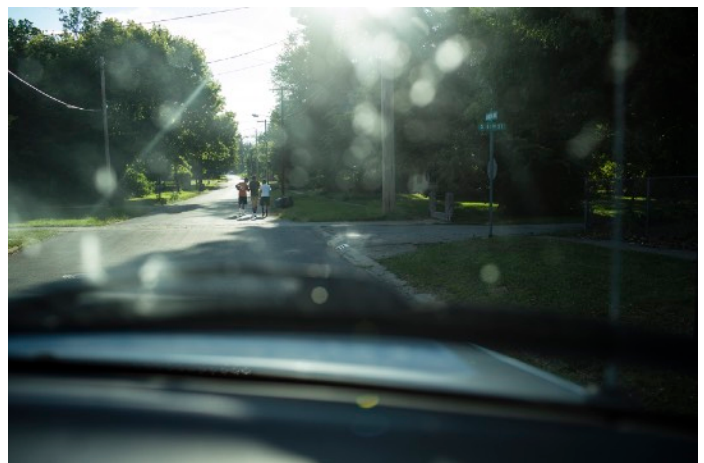
Leasha, Joe, and Jason mark “the cultural margins” bringing their own style and point-of-view to the history of a place.

The photographs of abandoned buildings by Leasha, Joe, and Jason are not incidental or without meaning. In fact, ruin photographs carry great weight. They form a line in a long-running genre which has been heralded by Benjamin’s allegory of the ruins. Contemporary photos of ruins may not suggest archaeological or architectural aesthetic value; but they can have allegorical resonance and historical value.

TAKING PHOTOGRAPHY SERIOUSLY

The everyday photograph does not often attract our critical attention the way oil paintings or the movies might. Most photographs are taken for granted, I don’t read them carefully or critically.

We bring a different set of tools for critically reading paintings and movies. Photographs, portrait or landscape, require the same scrutiny. The photography of advertising, social media, and the photography and videos generated by unchecked,



LEASHA OVERTURF *Discolored Memory, 2014*

unregulated machinery of artificial intelligence can all be read with the same deep study that is brought to bear on art, films, or art photography.

A dedicated artist will master many languages for a variety of intentions. An aesthetically, culturally substantial work of art valued by more than one culture will speak in a variety of languages.

No image *speaks for itself* unless the viewer knows and uses already the languages that were used by the artist to make the image. Certain words will not render meaning until the code is known.

Even when known, certain aspects of pictorial imagery and their meaning still remain latent and need coaxing.

Denotation and Connotations of Images are the culturally important signs and symbols that working together create significance and meaning for an image. Denotation is the literal, visible representation of an image. Connotations are the latent, hidden second meanings aesthetically or culturally relevant to a denotation.

The combined defining operations of denotation and connotations bear closer study given their critical powers to shape and influence the social and cultural meanings of visual images.

To interpret/read a photograph ask: who made this photograph and for what purpose. How does the photograph's style and techniques attract, guide, or win over one's attention. What personal or social values and points-of-view are represented, and whose views are left out. Consider how different people will experience the same photograph differently. Take into the analysis the historical time period and geographic location where the photograph was made. Time and Place affect perceptions.

Consider how photography itself may be used to critique the institutional power of photography.

Careful reading elicits understanding by connecting a picture's iconography to its aesthetic, social, and historical sources. Post-Documentary Photography works with these many levels of analysis.

"Post-Documentary Photography" evolved over the last two generations into a rehabilitated art photography; its emphasis is on poetic style with message(s) meant to prompt viewer questioning. Post-Doc does not shy away from social issues; it questions what is authenticity, what is power.



LEASHA OVERTURF *In the Shadows*, 2014



JOSEPH GARRETT *Wabash Cannonball Bridge*, 2025



JASON GRAY *Michael Brown Memorial, Ferguson*, 2015



JOSEPH GARRETT *Sayword Hill*, 2023

ON AESTHETICISM & SYMBOLISM

Szarkowski was beloved and excoriated for his implacable stance on formalism (*aestheticism*) and photography.

The difference between Szarkowski's Aestheticism and his Symbolism is the difference between Lee Friedlander/Diane Arbus and Cindy Sherman/Sherrie Levine. Artists shifted the referent from the symbolic/poetic to the aesthetic/social function of photography itself.

Szarkowski identified five "Characteristics and Problems" of photography. *The Thing Itself. The Detail. The Frame. Time. Vantage Point.* From the book *The Photographer's Eye*, 1966.

Below, I have selected six quotes which emphasize Szarkowski's keen awareness of the symbolic, lyrical dimensions of art photography.

Post-Doc remains especially aware of the history and power of photography to represent identity and place and, inadvertently or not, to sanction inequity and biases.

Post-Documentary Photography works to open, for discussion, these ambiguities, these biases, these insights.



JASON GRAY *Singer Aysia Berlyn promo shoot Jay's International Market, Tower Grove East*, 2010



LEASHA OVERTURF *Glass Eyed Gaze*, 2014

"The subject and the picture were *not the same thing*, although they would afterwards seem so." (my emphasis), from *The Thing Itself*.

"If photographs could not be read as stories, they could be read as *symbols*." (my emphasis), from *The Detail*.



JASON GRAY *A Couple Enjoys the Total Solar Eclipse in Bellevue Park*, 2017

“The central act of photography, the act of choosing and eliminating, forces a concentration on the picture edge—the line that separates in from out—and on the shapes that are created by it.” from *The Frame*.

“The edges of his film demarcated what he thought most important, but the subject he had shot was something else; it had extended in four directions. If the photographer’s frame surrounded two figures, isolating them from the crowd in which they stood, it created *a relationship* between those two figures *that had not existed before*.” (my emphasis), from *The Frame*.



LEASHA OVERTURF *Linda and daughter*, 2014

“It was the photographer’s problem to see not simply the reality before him *but the still invisible picture*, and to make his choices in terms of the latter.” (my emphasis), from *The Thing Itself*.

“Intuitively, the photographer sought and found *the significant detail*. His work, incapable of narrative, turned toward *symbol*.” (my emphasis), from *The Detail*.



JOSEPH GARRETT *Sonny*, 2021

PHOTOGRAPHY AS HISTORY

Photographs can say many things about the world; sometimes about beauty, sometimes about emotions, and sometimes about our social and cultural perspectives that make the world go around.

In the globally-, digitally-, economically-integrated, politically-diversified 21st century, our three photographers are keenly aware of the uses of photography: documentary, art, commentary, reportage, commercial, surveillance, fraud, utilitarian, science, and more.

Our three photographers may be said to practice their individual practices as a practice of differing contexts. By context, I mean at some point in their photographing they place prime relevance on context. A context of their choosing. Their subject —be it the real person, a landscape, the art metaphor, or the social condition—at some point must rhyme with their chosen context. Contexts at some point unfold in the discourses of the social, the cultural, and the political worlds, soliciting everyone’s dialogue in determining, negotiating, compromising, and ultimately agreeing on provisional, mutually beneficial judgements.

This exhibition’s 89 photographs of history document the various ways our three photographers have chosen to represent their views of America. It starts with their personal tastes and styles, that in turn, may emotionally touch audiences. Through their various photographic representations of personal agency and place, the three photographers and their participants celebrate, defend, or question traditional and progressive conceptions of American Identity.

The universal cause is “to imagine a nation that encompasses all of these pieces of history, a nation that is not weakened by diversity, contradiction, or conflict but defined and enlarged by it.” Steven Lubar, Kathleen Kendrick, *Legacies: Collecting America’s History at the Smithsonian*, 2001.

Our three photographers see in their Midwest landscapes unique geopolitical relationships definitively connecting persons with their neighborhoods.

Above all, these three photographers empower agency through the art of the portrait and the social landscape. The power to represent who a person is.

Neighborhoods are the Places where Identities begin; Agency is how Identities evolve.

Agency and Place evolve historically supported by the aesthetic documentations of Art and Photography. ■

A word about “frames” and the manner **Neighborhoods** is exhibited in the New Semantics gallery. The 89 photographs are presented without traditional mats or frames. This presentation in a sense puts all 89 photographs on equal footing with an eye towards how the subjective “frame” of each photographer influences their intention and thereby our potential interpretations.

This essay is dedicated to Leasha Overturf, Joe Garrett, and Jason Gray for their art of photography and the people and places they chose to represent. Their practices are personally inspiring. 🍷



JOSEPH GARRETT *Club Cabaret, Carbondale, 1992*



LEASHA OVERTURF *Tannayha's Mom, 2014*

“The different places and people are meant to be clearly defined, but literal content is not always the only critical measure when looking at the work.

Daniel Overturf



JOSEPH GARRETT *Cairo June 15 2020, 2020*

My impulses and visual dynamic are rooted in what Garry Winogrand said years ago: ‘Photography is about finding out what can happen in the frame. When you put four edges around some facts, you change those facts.’

Winogrand also said: ‘Photography is not about the thing photographed. It is about how that thing looks photographed.’”

Daniel Overturf, Professor Emeritus
Department of Cinema and Photography
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JASON GRAY *Jesuit Settlement Commemoration Site, The Patch, 2021*

Excerpt from Dan’s Introduction to the exhibition *Places Been, People Met, Photographs Made: Daniel Overturf*, Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, October 21 - December 30, 2018



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