

DAVID M GYSCEK, artist statement [January 2015]

Photography can both capture and create. It is a discipline mediated by dynamic and evolving technologies, but its product, the photographic image, is understood as a direct record of the real. It is this understanding that I wish to complicate and in so doing, return to our experience of the real with a greater depth of understanding. Through projects that alternate between the documentary and staged, that exploit our expectations about photography's relationship to the real, by further mediating the photographic image from its source through physical intervention on the printed image, through the construction and staging of the image, or in separating a photographic subject from its context, I aim to create work that approaches a more truthful and humane phenomenology than the presumed objectivity of photography allows.

Habits of Seeing

My most recent work departs from my earlier work in both its subject and in my approach to it. The work began quite spontaneously and as it has developed, I have allowed it to lead me. Rules have emerged that organize the process and give significance to the decisions I make. At first, however, before it was anything, while spending a lot of time commuting in my car, I found myself compelled to pull out my iPhone and shoot the scenes in front of me as the landscape sped past. I would shoot as quickly as my camera-phone would allow (while safely staying in my lane and maintaining my speed), capturing a series of images, separated by fractions of a second. My goal was simple: to return to those images in moments of stillness to appreciate whatever detail of the landscape or whatever scene compelled me to document it in the first place. In those moments of stillness and reflection, interesting phenomena and ideas emerged. First, there were moments when the iPhone would focus on the windshield revealing a blurry, painterly landscape with strange details of dirt and dust crisply in focus on the surface of the windshield. At other times, often when the windshield was cleaner, the camera would focus beyond it, into the landscape. Seeing these sequential images change and alternate from one moment to the next, I started to find the human-made aspects of the landscape in the crisply focused images to be problematic and incongruous with my experience of the actual landscape. I realized that we often imagine those parts out and see only what we want to see when we pass through the world mediated only by our senses. This is much more difficult to do with a medium as visually generous and complete as photography. And so I began to paint out all of the cars, roads, signs, mile markers, overpasses, etc. to reveal the landscape itself by hiding, quite obviously, the interventions of humans. The result is landscape images, presented serially. The images alternate between unedited and out of focus landscapes and crisply focused landscapes with monochromatic paint, masking the human constructions found within the roadside scenes. I do not presume to mimic human experience of the landscape in this work, but rather to point out the disconnection between that experience and the photographic depiction of it.

Hide and Seek

Hide and Seek is composed of "found" imagery captured photographically. As the title suggests, this work uses concealment and revelation to pique the curiosity of the viewer. The work in Hide and Seek attempts to interrogate the relationship between daydreams and reality—a relationship that parallels the one between photography and the world that it mirrors. Some of the images are seen through a mediating material like sheer curtains or window screens, while others show unobstructed fragments of larger (unseen) scenes. In these images I am looking to provide just enough information to activate the imagination. Those small bits of information are familiar, yet somewhat mysterious in their incompleteness; they tap into latent memories or details from dreams that are barely recalled.

The Effects of Gravity

The Effects of Gravity, was conceived of in 2001 in the aftermath of 9/11. It was not until ten-years later however, that the idea began to coalesce. Since then the project has remained in progress and will continue into the foreseeable future. All of the work in this series responds to notions of gravity—both in terms of the literal, physical forces of attraction between objects and in terms of gravity's implied meanings. The specific subjects of the images range from the mundane to the mysterious. The images imply various narratives as a vehicle for exploring themes of loss and uncertainty, desire and disgust. Through this work, I aim to weave the seriousness—the gravity of our historical moment with the personal through humor, cliché, absurdity, intrigue, and eroticism in an attempt to humanize the inquiry and to allow points of access to the work. This work represents an attempt to think through our mortality—that elementary fact of life that connects us all—visually. In facing these forces, I hope to find moments of transcendence or, at least, imagine the possibility of such.