

art

Images of city and country meet head-on in "Urban View - Rural Sight," a rewarding show at Mpls Photo Center.

**URBAN VIEW - RURAL SIGHT**

What: Photos by more than 50 artists highlighting vistas in the United States and elsewhere.

When: Noon-6 p.m. daily through Feb. 21.

Where: Mpls Photo Center, 2400 N. 2nd St., Mpls.

Admission: Free. 612-643-3511 or www.mplsphotocenter.com

A painting on an easel expands the view and creates a double illusion in Karen Strom's photo "Breakfast at La Chiusa."

A beautiful collision

ART REVIEW MARY ABBE



As photo shows go, "Urban View - Rural Sight" has one of those big-ten themes that could encompass pretty much anything from cityscapes and street life to mountain views and pickup trucks. Like the legendary 1955 "Family of Man" exhibit that documented enduring human experiences in an effort to heal a world shattered by war, "Urban/Rural" depends for its success on how well its gauzy, age-old theme is fleshed out.

Thanks to the sophisticated eye and rigorous editing of guest curator David Travis, "Urban/Rural" dodges the flabby excess, hip irony and nostalgic sentimentality its title could embrace. A former photo curator at the Art Institute of Chicago, Travis wears his erudition lightly (no ponderous catalog essay or chatty labels) and exercises it judiciously. With few exceptions, all the pictures are deftly composed, conceptually engaging and thoughtfully executed. Together they span a great visual and geographic range from unsettling urban decay in Germany and Russia to surrealistic vistas of South Dakota's badlands. It runs through Feb. 21 at the Mpls Photo Center in the Minneapolis Warehouse District.

Some photographers engage just half of the urban/rural dichotomy. Christopher Rodman's "New York City," a black-and-white snap of a tattooed workman on cigarette break, catches the city's gritty hustle in window reflections and bustling passersby. Thomas Schuster's two "Urban Development" photos portray trash-littered cities in distress, yet there's something riveting, even beautiful in his cinematic images. So too, London-based Christos Koukellis delivers a startlingly intimate nocturnal peep into hundreds of brightly lit offices stacked more than 16 stories tall in a jewel-like megacity.

Other pictures emphasize rural or natural motifs. Ann Ginsburgh Hofkin's elegant infrared images of grass, trees and gnarled branches are illuminated by spectral light. In a long, horizontal photo of a field swept by a low thundercloud, Chris Faust also eschews the urban for the natural landscape.

Spectacular light effects are the



In Amy Conger's "Igloo, Minnesota," silver light bounces off an icy lake and the gleaming tent pitched on it.

Images provided by MPLS PHOTO CENTER

key attraction in both urban and rural scenes. Amy Conger's "Igloo, Minnesota" features a high-tech tent pitched on a frozen lake, its opalescent skin shimmering in an apricot sunset. Rose Kohl captures the blinding gleam of sunlight bouncing off wet pavement in her poetic "Mirrored Sky Road." And Brian Sjoquist takes good advantage of the "Morning Light" and shadows that thrust downtown Minneapolis' office towers into stark relief above Nicollet Mall on a winter day.

Magrittan moments

The Belgian surrealist René Magritte proved surprisingly inspirational to several photographers, especially

his paintings-of-paintings within a larger scene. As if reminding us that all images are artifacts, no matter how "real" they look, Karen Strom photographs an Italian landscape from a breakfast nook in which she carefully aligns a painting of the same landscape so that it blends almost seamlessly into the distant scene.

Others use Magrittan conceits to play with time. Alison A. Smith shows the "future" of a newly planted park by centering it with an architectural rendering of the mature trees and buildings that will eventually surround the place. Meanwhile Christine Lenzen and Richard Kent look backward in time by aligning old

photos with whatever remains of the site decades later.

Many of the photographers depict the built environment encroaching on the natural world. In "Magnolia Street," Margalit Slovin of Arlington, Texas, shows a tall tree boxed by brick buildings in a futuristic stranglehold. Corey Gaffner offers an unexpected view of the Kinnickinnic River from directly overhead at a point where it looks like molten lead running between graffiti-encrusted walls.

Incongruous urban-rural collisions give rise to some of the most striking photos. The image of a red barn that Thomas Detwyler found amid New York graffiti is a classic,

as is Dalibor Talajic's photo of a tractor and its gnarled driver rounding a corner in an ancient Croatian town.

Mike Reinders' "Red Rock," which took first prize, is a subtler image of nature colliding with urbanity. It records a modernist amphitheater built into a natural declivity outside Denver. Only on close scrutiny do you notice ribbons of highways and the towers of a modern city in the haze beyond the barren ridges that surround the amphitheater. The magnitude of the landscape is even more daunting than the muscular intrusion of humans.

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