

Excavation

Photographs by Gary Carwood

Excavation is an ongoing body of photographs I began in 2006. Since the natural landscape is considered expendable in our culture, the surface scars we create seemed like an intriguing subject to explore. I selected sites that were excavated long ago, and at first I focused on the surprising forms and colors created by erosion. Soon I began adding throwaways to the compositions. Like the land, much of the stuff we buy is considered disposable and makes its way to sites like these. The photographs utilize the scarred landscape as a context for the stuff we abandon.

The word excavation conjures up digging for some ancient ruin. And while archeologists try to reconstruct a logical narrative from discarded objects, my purpose is to create a more poetic interpretation. I carefully select the items to be included in the compositions, based on an intuitive sense of the contradictions inherent in our culture. Lately I'm also drawn to the objects created in the landscape itself. I hope the range of my selections seem as quirky and mysterious as our mode of existence.

Essentially I'm doing still life, using the mud, rocks and ash as part of the setup. This staged approach, focusing on relatively small details, tends to emphasize formal order, and indeed I delight in the contemplative aspect of view camera work. But I also consciously mimic the haphazard look of the discarded, which can in turn be ordered by the process of seeing photographically. Art gives us the opportunity to imagine order where none is apparent.

I'm especially interested in the order that the forces of nature impose on our wastefulness. Rust and rot. Mold and mildew. Given enough time, even the most synthetic materials will at least look like something from the earth. My compositions evolve. The sun, wind and rain can significantly change the effect in only a few months. The process creates surprises—good and bad—as I photograph the various stages of deterioration. My intent is to find the one moment that best represents each composition.

As the work proceeds, there seems to be a growing awareness of the havoc our lifestyles impose on the environment. I'm hopeful that a more sustainable lifestyle will emerge from our depleted economy, and that future generations will have the wisdom to capitalize on the possibilities of less. Such a transformation would require a creative mindset, a vision based on real needs and higher aspirations.