

Out & About

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THROUGH WISCONSIN'S LENS



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Through their lenses

Wustum Museum showing life through Wisconsinites' lenses

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RACINE — The eyes find you no matter where you are in the room. A group of ordinary people who emote the feelings experienced in their daily lives, they come from various walks of life whose paths all converged in this one location.

All of these people just stare at you until you feel obligated to leave the room. Not because of uncomfotability, but because there is more to see in the next room. In this room, lines point every which way — criss-crossing, zig-zagging and gliding around the room as if following a set of bad directions, a mix of vibrant and subtle colors framed along the walls that they seem to intersect around the room.

The lines eventually lead you out to a staircase where you rise into rooms focused on the environments and landscapes of Midwestern staples with the slightest of twists to offer a new perspective on the regular. One moment you stare into the face of a city building, and the next you're in a field. It's a trip across the Midwest right before your eyes.

These picture-perfect moments and scenes adorn the walls of the Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, 2519 Northwestern Ave., to highlight the best photographs Wisconsin photographers have to offer.

"These artists are great because they take something familiar and make it unfamiliar," said Lena Vigna, curator of exhibitions at the Racine Art Museum. "You see the range. Even though there are commonalities in here, there are also a lot of differences."

With a longstanding debate on whether photography is a recognized art form, 38 Wisconsin photographers and one videographer make a strong case for the craft of photography.

If You Go

WHAT: Wisconsin Photography 2016 exhibit
WHEN: Open through Nov. 26. Wustum Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Closed on Thanksgiving Day.
WHERE: Charles A. Wustum Museum of Fine Arts, 2519 Northwestern Ave.
COST: Free

"Jenny Wustum wanted the lands used for arts," Vigna said. "This exhibit shows the artistic side of these photographers who can make really beautiful and amazing photographs."

Local flavor

Of the 91 artists who submitted work for the exhibit, 39 were accepted into the exhibit to create the 102-piece gallery. More than 880 pieces were submitted for the Wisconsin Photography 2016 exhibit.

The exhibit debuted Aug. 11 at Wustum Museum and will be on display until Nov. 26. The event is typically held by the Racine Art Museum every three years; however, this is the first time in four years the exhibit has been opened.

Artists from all over the state submitted work, including three Racine County residents: Martha Coaty of Racine, Valerie Christell of Burlington and Celia Schulz of Mount Pleasant. Three of Coaty's pieces were selected, including one of eight that was purchased for the Racine Art Museum's collection, and two were selected from Christell and Schulz.

Coaty said her process for making photographs comes from a feeling. For one of her photos involving a woman in a red coat on a train, she was in a limousine with her family for their mother's birthday. She looked and saw the train and shot the picture while the car was moving

at the same speed.

That, like many of her photos, struck a chord in her. That, she says, is why photography is an art and is ecstatic about the opportunity to display her and other Wisconsin photographers' works.

"We're one of the fly-over states," Coaty said. "I think there's a huge number of artists in Wisconsin who are creating a lot of really good and thoughtful work. I think pulling together the photographers in the state is part of showing photography is a true art form."

On the other end of the county, Christell said she also finds artistic release through her photography. Though she also paints and draws, photography allows her to explore a new way to "capture the world as (she) sees it."

Christell's photography focuses on the symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment.

"It's like blinds," Christell said. "It blocks out pieces of what you see but you fill in the blanks with your mind. It may not be filled in the same way someone else may fill it in."

Wustum highlights

The 101 photographs and one video exhibit can be viewed for free admission at Wustum. All exhibits at Wustum are free whereas the Racine Art Museum charges for admission except for the first Friday of every month.

Wustum is open from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

"It's as simple as walking in the door," Vigna said. "Somebody at the front will greet you and then you are free to roam."

Once the photography is taken down after Nov. 26, the next exhibit, which is the "Watercolor Wisconsin" exhibit, will go up at Wustum. That show will run Dec. 11-April 22. Wustum will also celebrate its 75th anniversary starting this week.

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