

Building a Community and a Sense of Place

Creative Place-Making in a Small Rural Town

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Picturing a Rural Life: Special Exhibit in Luverne

The upside-down figure on the ground glass was carefully composed and focused. Documentary photographer Eric Dusenbery withdrew from under the dark focusing cloth of the 4 x 5 large-format camera and put in a film holder, set the shutter and asked the subject to remain very still. He then clicked off an exposure. It's an experience that the photographer finds hard to resist. Meeting strangers is never easy. Asking if they mind being photographed is even harder.



Boyd Berry, Glenwood, Alabama

But, learning about Alabama and the desire to understand people and find out what they have to say is a bit of an adventure and far outweighs the risks of being too timid to discover and share stories. And, everyone has a story.

This is the impetus behind **Crenshaw Crossroads** a documentary project to be exhibited at The Harrison Cultural Center in Luverne, Alabama from May 3 to May 31. Working with the City of Luverne and County of Crenshaw, the photographer produced a new body of work by traveling and looking for narratives and stories that dive beneath the surface, giving Alabama its distinctive character.

“The project is part of Alabama 200 Bicentennial Program that is celebrating our heritage as a state, by Discovering our Places, Honoring our People and Sharing our Stories,” Kathy Smyth, Luverne City Council Member, said. “Our local committee thought that this exhibit by Mr. Dusenbery was the perfect way to share about Crenshaw County through our very own folks, with photos and stories for new generations to see, hear and appreciate.”

Through unconventional photography and conversations with local residents, **Crenshaw Crossroads** shapes our understanding of what it means to live *rural* and *small town*. The exhibit shares a different angle than the normal narrative and shed light on things not usually reported. The focus is on local, ordinary people to find

out their perspectives and captures some of the little known and compelling stories through pictures and the anecdotes of those who live “small town” and “rural.”

Emphasizing the traditions of documentary photography as a way of seeing and interpreting cultural life, the project fieldwork is accomplished primarily through the lens of large-format, black-and-white hand-printed silver gelatin film photography in a style reminiscent of legendary documentary photographers Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee and Walker Evans.

The project is a continuation of the photographer’s multi-year journey that began when working on his first book project, “Florida Soup: Putting History On the Table.” For more than three years, he traveled back roads to complete the study of old Florida cooking and food traditions. But, he was eager to explore more of the rural, small town South.

“I like to explore the people and communities that are known only by the locals — to create a new sense of place,” Dusenbery said.

Dusenbery collects content through still photography and storytelling, and relies on first-person narratives. Hearing stories straight from the source puts information in an accessible and entertaining light. Accompanying the photographs of the **Crenshaw Crossroads** exhibit are oral history excerpts.

While using a large-format camera is not unique to Dusenbery, it does give his work a rare quality. And, quite a bit has changed over the past few years as technical skills and a knowledge of f-stops, exposure and shutter speeds have been replaced by smart phones and apps.

“I call it slow-cooker journalism,” Dusenbery said. “Using a large-format camera forces you to slow way down and interact with subjects. It’s a long, slow, deliberate process for capturing details and people in their environments. But, it’s important to have your own perspective and style.”

And, it doesn’t stop with making the photograph. The process continues in the darkroom. It’s as far from a selfie on a cell phone as you can get.

According to Dusenbery, the true character of the South can be found among everyday people who call rural and small-town home. While the definition of “rural” and “small town” may seem obvious, Dusenbery’s work is refocusing what they mean through the words and imagery of those who live it and new places discovered.

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