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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MoCP

Museum of
Contemporary Photography



COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO
600 South Michigan Avenue Chicago IL 60605
312-663-5554 Fax 312-344-8067
mocp@colum.edu www.mocp.org

50+ artists “take it outside” at MoCP this summer

BEYOND THE BACKYARD
June 20 — August 23, 2008

Chicago — In June 2008, the MoCP opens *Beyond the Backyard*, a group exhibition of photography and video that examines the outdoor places in which we spend our leisure time. Centering on the traditional backyard but considering alternatives in other settings as well, the exhibition proposes to look “beyond the backyard” in both a literal and metaphorical sense. The works on display, drawn largely from Museum’s permanent collection and its Midwest Photographers Project, present a multi-faceted view, exploring various ways photographers have perceived and portrayed the backyard over the last 50 years

The backyard has cropped up as a setting for photographs frequently in the past half-century, appearing in work as diverse as **Dorothea Lange’s** photo-essays for *Life* magazine in the 1950s, **Bill Owens’s** landmark study of suburban California two decades later, **Sally Mann’s** renowned photographs of her children, and **Gregory Crewdson’s** large-scale staged photographs that mine the hidden anxieties and mysteries of small town life. But despite its prevalence, the backyard itself has rarely been the focus of extended consideration.

Traditionally the backyard is conceived as an idyllic, private space where one can spend quality time with the family, develop a relationship with nature, and do it all with minimal outside intrusion. But this ideal conceals a complex relationship between the backyard space and what its fences are meant to keep out and it elides a complicated, and not always picture-perfect reality. Many of the photographs in the exhibition touch on themes of voyeurism, encroaching industry, encounters with wildlife, or the loss of childhood innocence. The familiar notion of the backyard as it appears in suburban mythology is variously reflected and challenged. Viewed here alongside suburban perspectives, certain urban and rural settings—city parks, street-side spaces, and

family farms—serve as counterpoints to the familiar backyard, revealing similar ideas and issues to be in play but in different ways.



While many photographs in *Beyond the Backyard* speak to the enduring allure of these spaces, they also address the fragility of the associated notions of privacy, peaceful domesticity, and a comfortable rapport with nature. Several photographers examine the construction of gender roles in these domestic areas or interrogate the "economy" of the backyard by highlighting the labor that allows leisure. In many instances photographers look physically beyond the backyard, highlighting the relationship of this ostensibly secluded space to what lies beyond its fences—whether wild animals, prying eyes, or factories belching smoke just around the corner. This shifting relationship between inside and outside, spreading across permeable boundaries, may in the end be most revealing.

In addition to works by Lange, Owens, Mann, and Crewdson, the exhibition features photographs by **Bruce Davidson, William Christenberry, Martha Rosler, Mark Dion, Nic Nicosia, Amy Stein, Sarah Faust, Kohei Yoshiyuki, Tricia Moreau Sweeney, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Shizuka Yokomizo**, and many others.

For more about this exhibition and the artists' work, please visit <http://mocp.org/exhibitions>.

High resolution photos are available.

MoCP SPONSORS

The exhibitions, presentations, and related programs of the MoCP are sponsored in part by the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; The Mayer and Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; The National Endowment for the Arts; the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs/After School Matters; American Airlines, the official airlines of the MoCP, and our members.

ABOUT MOCP

The Museum of Contemporary Photography (MoCP), a resident organization of Columbia College Chicago, is the only museum in the Midwest with an exclusive commitment to the medium of photography. By presenting projects and exhibitions that embrace a wide range of contemporary aesthetics and technologies, the Museum strives to communicate the value and significance of photographic images as expressions of human thought, imagination, and creativity.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Karen Irvine is the curator of the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College Chicago. She has organized numerous exhibitions including: Audible Imagery: Sound and Photography; Anthony Goicolea; Tracey Baran; Scott Fortino; Shirana Shahbazi: Goftare Nik/Good Words; Jason Salavon; Jin Lee; Paul Shambroom: Evidence of Democracy; Alec Soth: Sleeping by the Mississippi; The Furtive Gaze; and Camera/Action: Performance and Photography, among others. She is a part-time instructor of photography at Columbia College Chicago. She received her MFA in photography from FAMU, Prague.

Natasha Egan, the museum's Associate Director since 2000, has been the Assistant Curator at the Museum since 1995. She holds an MA in museum studies, an MFA in photography, and a BA in Asian studies. She teaches part-time in the Photography Department at Columbia College and has lectured at numerous institutions and juried art exhibitions nationwide.

PRESS CONTACTS

Audrey Michelle Mast
Web/PR/Marketing Administrator
Museum of Contemporary Photography
600 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60605
P: 773.459.5777
F: 312.344.8067
audrey.m.mast@gmail.com

Jeffrey Arnett
Manager of Development and Marketing
Museum of Contemporary Photography
600 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60605
P: 312.344.7779
F: 312.344-8067
jarnett@colum.edu

IMAGES:

Top to bottom:

Amy Stein
Watering Hole, 2005
Chromogenic development print

Bill Owens
I bought the lawn in six-foot rolls. It's easy to handle. I prepare the ground and my wife and son helped me roll out the grass. In one day you have a front yard, 1973
Carbon ink jet print

Shawn Records
Untitled, E-3/F-3, from *The Portland Grid Project*, 2005
Chromogenic development print
30 x 37.5 in.

Kohei Yoshiyuki
Gelatin silver print
Untitled, 1971