

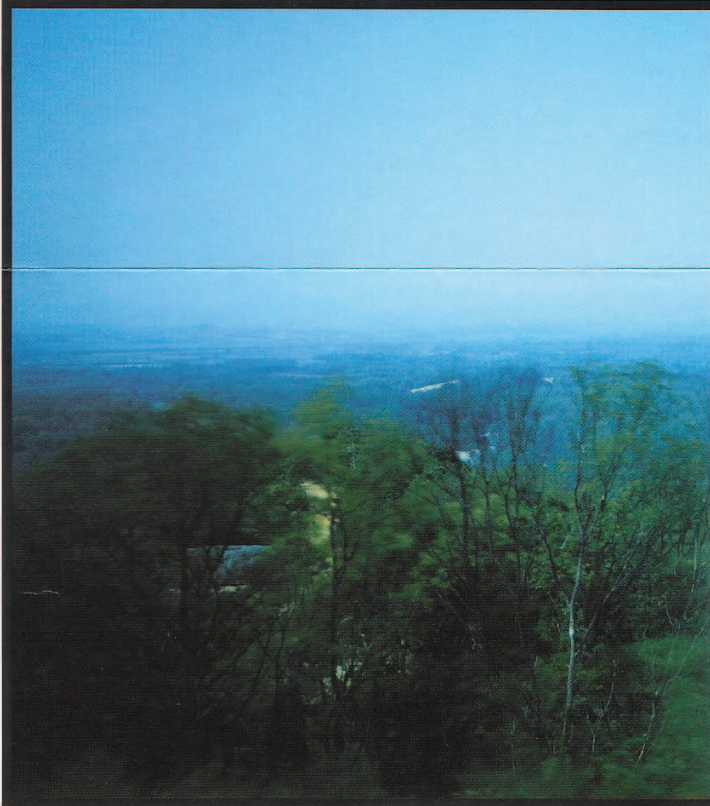
PRESS COVERAGE



Loaded Landscapes

August 16 — October 13, 2007

1. Art on Paper, Fall 2007
2. Chicago Tribune, 8.23.2007
3. Time Out Chicago, 9.20.2007



Loaded Landscapes

August 16 – October 13, 2007

Works by:

**Ayreen Anastas / Alan Cohen / John Duncan /
Isabelle Hayeur / Atta Kim / Shai Kremer /
New Catalogue (Luke Batten & Jonathan Sadler) / Simon Norfolk /
Paul Shambroom / Anna Shteynshleyer / Joel Sternfeld**

Image credit: **Atta Kim**, Korean b. 1956.

ON-AIR Project, DMZ Series, The Western Front, 4 Hours, 2003
Courtesy the Artist

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Contemporary Photography

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT: ART REVIEW

Photos don't always shed light

By Alan G. Artner

Tribune art critic

August 23, 2007

The new season of Chicago art museum exhibitions has begun early this year with "Loaded Landscapes," an uneasy group show at the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

The primary source of unease is how the works by a dozen photographers are mostly landscapes of one sort or another. That is, they are images of places at which terrible things have happened or continue to happen. But several of the pictures alone, apart from titles and texts, give little evidence of the horror. So the exhibition's secondary source of unease lies in how it is perhaps as much about the failure of photography as photography being a powerful means for bearing witness.

Underlying a number of the pictures is the apparent belief that places retain physical, verifiable evidence of their history, that photographs, in effect, search out and make clear, as X-rays reveal certain kinds of diseases. But in the images on view, that seldom happens. Neither Alan Cohen's black-and-white close-ups of Cambodian killing fields nor Anna Shteynshleyger's Siberian panoramas show any sign that millions lost their lives there, as nature often resists being scanned like a picture book, demanding instead that words -- in Cohen's case, a lot of them; in Joel Sternfield's shots of American historic sites, just enough -- tell the stories.

The stories themselves vary more than one initially would suspect, sometimes (as in the instances of Paul Shambroom's American military figures dressed to combat terrorism and Isabelle Hayeur's unpeopled digital montages) drawing away from the observable landscape and coming close to different kinds of fiction. Then there are what we might call images of architectural remains, close-to-documentary photographs in which landscapes in North America, Ireland and the Middle East are littered or actually transformed by structures made "necessary" by illegal immigration or war.

The central thrust of the show is, however, represented best by the extremes of Atta Kim and the two-artist team known as New Catalogue. Kim shoots four-to-eight-hour exposures of the



demilitarized zone between North and South Korea that have almost no sign of human habitation and present the heavily armed region almost as a modern-day Eden. New Catalogue, on the other hand, slams down the ironies of Adolf Hitler's mountain retreat becoming a site of middle-class vacations. In both, something has vanished or has been suppressed but, still, largely through titles and printed captions, we are made aware of the pain -- one continuing, the other past -- seemingly inherent in each landscape.

The weakest pictures, it seems to me, are Hayeur's, which do not really fulfill the show's theme and look out of place. The strongest are Sternfield's, which despite a reliance on words, are more formally convincing than most of the others, testifying to the mastery of this pioneer of contemporary color photography.

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"Loaded Landscapes" continues at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan Ave., through Oct. 13; several of the photographers will be available in an exhibition tour, a lecture and discussions on, respectively, Sept. 12, 17, 20 and Oct. 4. 312-726-3860.

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Time Out Chicago / Issue 134 : September 20, 2007 - September 26, 2007

Critics' Pick

Location, location, location

MoCP's eerie landscapes omit some of those 1,000 words.

By Lauren Weinberg

One wouldn't normally associate a Wheaten Terrier with unspeakable evil. But New Catalogue's photographs of a dog led by two hikers; quiet mountain roads; and snow-covered rocks from the 2005 series "A. Hitler and D. Eckart: Obersaltzberg to Hoher Gall" focus precisely on something we cannot see. The images come from Berchtesgaden, a former Nazi resort in Bavaria, where Hitler bought a home in 1932 with royalties from *Mein Kampf*. Neo-Nazis still make pilgrimages to the site, even as the Bavarian government hastens to cover up its past with a wave of new construction. The spectacular Alpine views captured by New Catalogue (Luke Batten and Jonathan Sadler) suggest that Berchtesgaden's terrible connotations have already been forgotten: We may think that these images tell us everything about a place, but "Loaded Landscapes" demonstrates that their human element is both critical and elusive.



Paul Shambroom, *Police SWAT, Camouflage*, 2005.

Like New Catalogue's project, Joel Sternfeld's photographs are incomplete without their accompanying text. Sternfeld's matter-of-fact images of the parking lot where the Kent State shootings occurred, the intersection where Reginald Denny was beaten during the 1992 L.A. riots and other infamous locations bear no traces of their tragic history: It's up to the viewer to remember. Other artists in the exhibition deliberately imbue their landscapes with menace. Alan Cohen's 2001 "NOW" series depicts Cambodia's "killing fields," literally: Cohen pointed his camera at the ground where the Khmer Rouge murdered hundreds of thousands of civilians in the 1970s. His black-and-white images are haunted by shadows of trees and the strange shapes of earth mounds covering mass graves.

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Violence is also implicit in Simon Norfolk's color photographs of the U.S.-Mexican border, which portray the desert between southern Arizona and Mexico as a floodlit nightmare world of blank metal fences. Questions about who owns our landscapes—and who has access to them—likewise shape the work of Israeli photographer Shai Kremer and Palestinian artist Ayreen Anastas. In Kremer's *Shooting Defense Wall, Gilon Neighborhood, Jerusalem* (2004), two young men use a concrete military barrier as a private hangout, where they can smoke, drink and gaze out at the hills in apparent peace. Anastas's video *m* of Bethlehem* (2003) takes the viewer through the ancient city as church bells ring in the background and the artist reads made-up definitions from an imaginary version of

the OED: "Palestine" means, she says, "[to] remove, get rid of, do away with, cause to exist no longer."

Fictional places also make an appearance, challenging our assumptions about the reality of landscapes themselves. Some of the most chilling pictures in the exhibition are Paul Shambroom's portraits from "Disaster City" in College Station, Texas, and "Terror Town," in Playas, New Mexico—models set up to train employees of the Department of Homeland Security.

In the end, perhaps our interventions in the landscape—material, chemical and otherwise—won't matter and all that will be left is a place without a caption. Atta Kim's *ON-AIR Project, DMZ Series ...* (2003) and *The Central Front, 8 Hours* (2004) portray the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea as a sea of lush green vegetation beneath a vaporous blue sky. The DMZ has become a thriving habitat for wild animals because humans are barred from the site. Kim's photographs suggest that they will remain long after human struggles over the land have ceased.

"Loaded Landscapes" is at the Museum of Contemporary Photography through October 13.

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