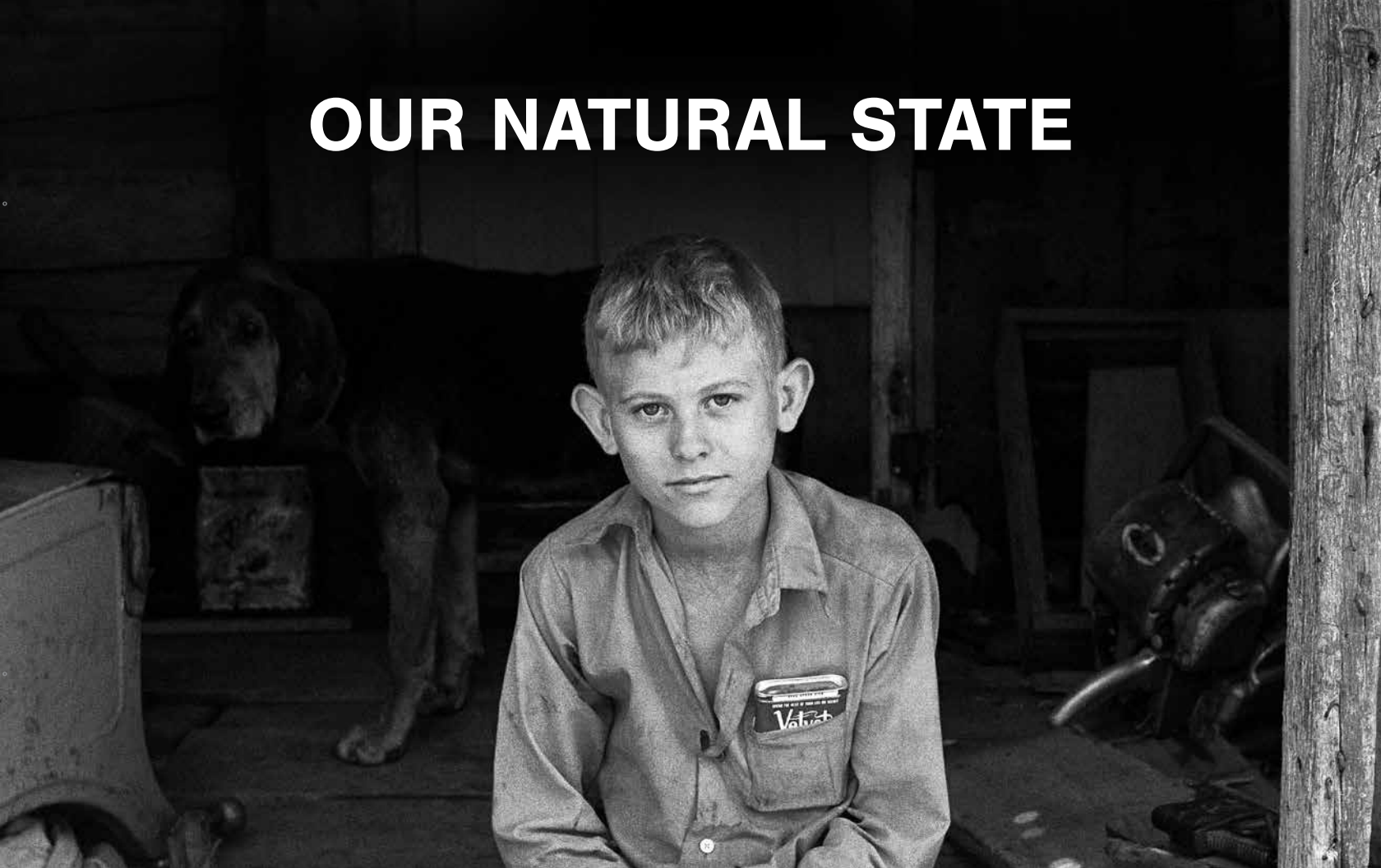
OUR NATURAL STATE



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Front cover: *Boy With Velvet Tobacco Can* by Jim Simmons
Back cover: *Alex* by Margaret LeJeune

OUR NATURAL STATE

How do you define the mindset, culture and values of Arkansans? "Our Natural State" exhibit seeks to answer this question by exploring the historical and contemporary landscape of Arkansas residents – from recent transplants to generational Ozark families.

Take for example a famous Arkansas photographer, who is also one of the state's most curious personalities – **Mike Disfarmer**, born Mike Meyer. Changing his name to remove any association to farming and his family, Disfarmer became known as one of the world's greatest portrait photographers. From Heber Springs, the photographer set off an international firestorm upon discovery of his work, posthumously. His images speak volumes about the social fabric of Arkansans, and the values they hold dear.

Photographers working decades after Disfarmer: **Beverly Conley, Ron Evans, Don House, Jim Simmons**, and **Geoff Winningham** – similarly trace traditions to life in the Ozarks. While **Maxine Payne** captures present day residents with an uncommon humanity, elevating rural people to heroic stature.

By contrast **Rebecca Drolen** focuses on "transplants", those who have come to Arkansas to live. Likewise, **Donna Pinckley** chooses diversity and inclusion as her subject, observing resident reactions to interracial couples. Intolerance is too often a response to alternative lifestyle.

And the desire to escape responsibilities, to *"head to the hills"* is a mindset skillfully portrayed by **Matthew Genitempo** and **Alec Soth**. The exhibit will contain images from Genitempo's upcoming book, *"Jasper"*. Similarly, Soth is an accomplished author, and one of the most celebrated artists today with images in many major museums.

Jim Dow and **Tim Hursley** capture places which people inhabit, yet these environments are temporarily vacant – sometimes permanently. **Sabine Schmidt** creates constructed houses, and then photographs them as a metaphor for her Arkansas home. And the concept of "place" is the subject of **Gary Cawood** and **Kris Johnson**, who often photograph at night.

One of the most fascinating depictions of social values and mindset is by **Margaret LeJeune**, whose *"Modern Day Diana"* reverses roles in a classic Ozark motive, hunting.

In *"Our Natural State"* is an exhibit to convey the state's vortex of transitioning values, told from the point of view of the artist and their subjects. From a game of dominoes in New Hope, to a portrait on interracial marriage in Jonesboro, and on to a funeral home in Malvern – these visual vignettes can only begin to describe the collective unconscious of Arkansas. As described by Matthew Genitempo, *"I made my way through the capricious woods of the Ozarks, and the deeper I went, the closer I came to this spot... a spot equidistant from heaven and hell... I am indebted to this land and its people for letting me make this discovery."*

The photographers curated for the exhibit are among the best to ever photograph in the Natural State. As you view the exhibit or read the catalog, please join us by adding to the discussion on the people of Arkansas. Bring your own definitions and help discover the spot where mindset, culture and values begin to define the experience of being an Arkansan.

-Curator Chuck Davis, July 2018

List of artists in the exhibition:

Gary Cawood

Beverly Conley

Mike Disfarmer (exhibition prints made available by the Disfarmer Project)

Jim Dow

Rebecca Drolen

Ron Evans

Matthew Genitempo

Don House

Tim Hursley

Kris Johnson

Margaret LeJeune

Maxine Payne

Donna Pinckley

Sabine Schmidt

Jim Simmons (images on loan from Shiloh Museum)

Alec Soth (images on loan from Steve LaFontaine)

Geoff Winningham (images on loan from Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries)

Gary Cawood

Night Patrol

Our Natural State is one of great diversity, in terms of both terrain and population. I've lived in Little Rock since 1985 and seen it thrive. However, for the Night Patrol series shown here (1999-2004), I traveled to many of the smaller communities that have not fared so well. The photographs, absent people and sunlight, are evocations.

What I wanted to evoke is the mystery of an empty street at night. There's an implicit narrative in a place with more past than purposeful present. I don't believe pictures tell a story in any substantive way, but rather they can pose questions and suggest a range of possibilities. Here, scenes from the real world mingle with the imagination, like stage sets for a drama yet to be invented.

Hazen

Mayflower

Waldenburg

Fordyce

Beverly Conley

Life in the Ozarks: An Arkansas Portrait

My ongoing project began in 2003 with a drive down a rural country road. I had recently moved to Fayetteville and was anxious to explore my new surroundings. The resulting images tell the stories of people, events and everyday life in and around small towns in the rugged Ozark Mountains. They represent different aspects of these communities – young and old, recent immigrants, preachers, cowboys, farmers and those whose families have lived in the Ozarks for generations.

I am interested in documenting the vestiges of an older Ozarks. There is a sense of timelessness that I want to convey in my work. I am drawn to the less travelled back roads where catfish are caught bare-handed, folks gather on porches to play bluegrass and subsistence farming is still in existence.

Living and photographing in the same place gave me the opportunity to observe the changes of a region in transition. Northwest Arkansas experienced tremendous growth in the last decade with rural communities inching closer and closer to cities. I really imagined this unique Arkansas heritage would be lost. What I have since discovered is the resilience and self-sufficiency of a complex culture that stands with one foot in the present and the other in the past. An individual might have a day job at a Walmart but returns to a hand built home and the traditions of the ‘holler’ at night.

Through these photographs and words it is my intention to preserve and share the richness of this Southern way of life with a broader audience.

Woman Plucking A Chicken

Trapper

Hmong Community Farmer


ARKANSAS
WOMEN'S
TENNIS
66

Hauling Timber

Feeding Time

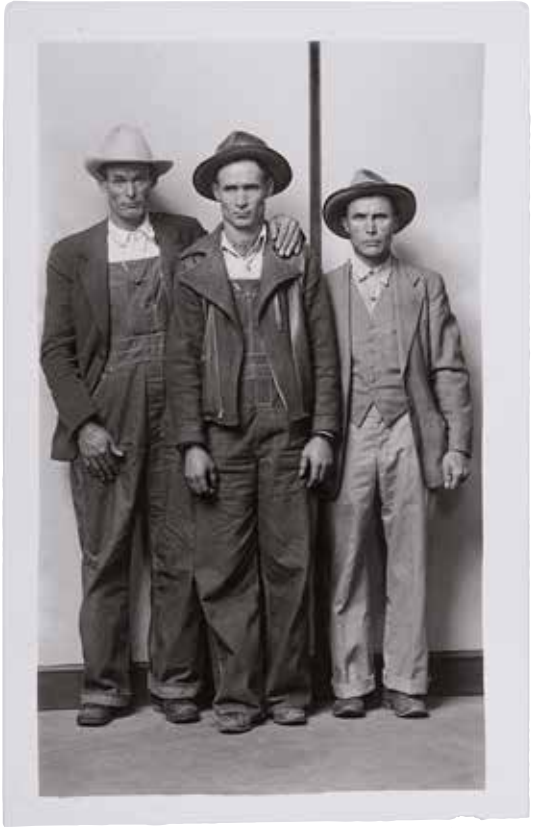
Mike Disfarmer

The Disfarmer Project

The legendary Mike Disfarmer is considered one of the great portraitists in the history of photography. As the resident studio photographer in Heber Springs, Arkansas, he captured the faces of the American heartland at a defining time in history in which the Great Depression yielded to World War II, and the sons of the farm donned their country's uniform and headed off to foreign shores. He was also a true American eccentric: born Mike Meyer in 1884, he legally changed his name to Disfarmer to disassociate himself, not only from the farming community in which he plied his trade, but from his own kinfolk – claiming that a tornado had accidentally blown him onto the Meyer family farm as a baby.

The Disfarmer Project is devoted to the reconstitution and study of Disfarmer's life and work.

These exhibition prints for "Our Natural State" were printed from scans made from original prints, collected by the Disfarmer Project.



Jim Dow

A name can inform our perception of a place.

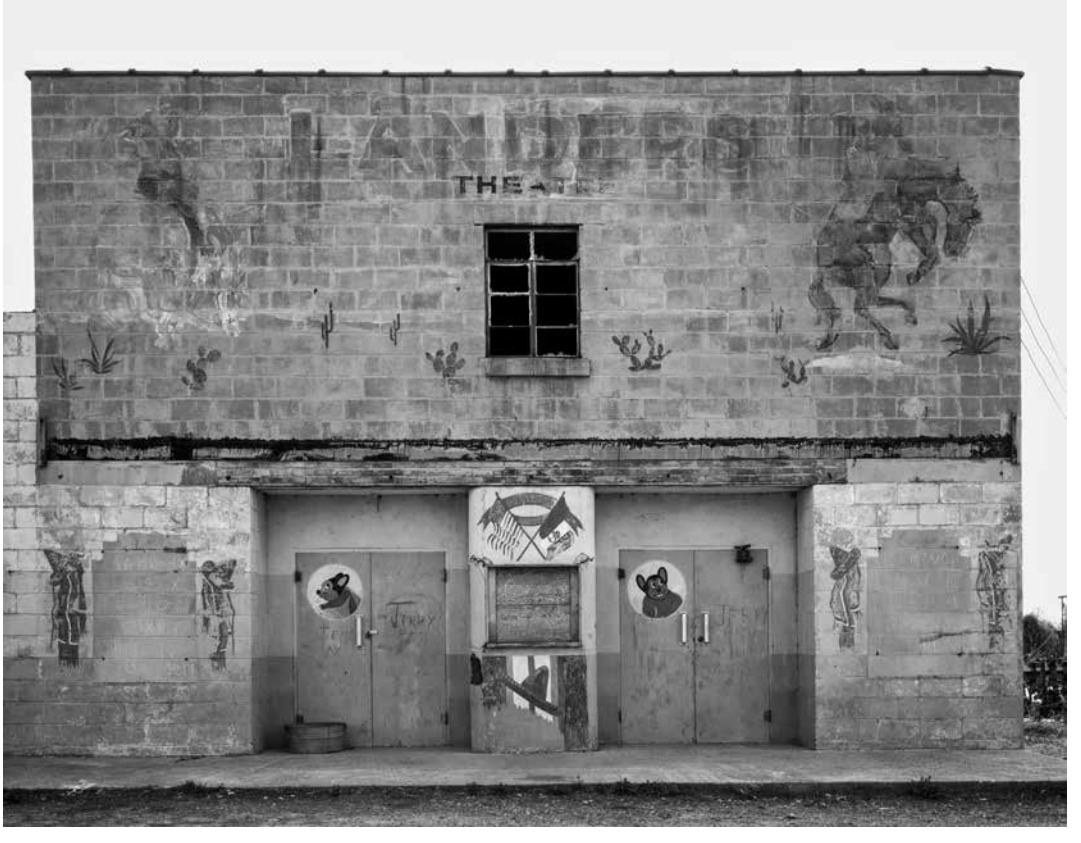
To test the theory, try reading the following names aloud: Artist Point, Flippin, Marked Tree, Number Nine, Pea Ridge, Piggot, Smackover, Stamps, Star City, Texarkana, Waldo, Umpire, Y City, Yellville, and, of course, Hope.

You got it. These are all hamlets, towns, cities and villages in a place called Arkansas.

I constantly look at road maps, scanning across the paper or screen, pronouncing the place names with gusto, an experience that always proves alliterative, evocative and vivid; akin to reciting a poem or carefully looking at photographs. Individually the words offer suggestions, taken together they knit a fabric that can link directly to an extensive range of histories; some positive, others negative, always thought-provoking.

In my photographs, taken all over the United States and beyond, the titles and locations play an important role in the way that viewers “read” the pictures. I hope that proves to be true with these four from The Natural State.

Interior, Brown's Taxidermy. US 82, El Dorado, Arkansas. 1995



Façade of the Mighty Mouse movie theater for migrant workers. AR 14, Weona, Arkansas. 1973

Detail of motel swimming pool furniture. US 70B, De Queen, Arkansas. 1977


BUD LIGHT
ONE BANK

4 panel panorama of Ray Winder Field from behind home plate. Little Rock, Arkansas. 1995

Rebecca Drolen

Transplants: Portraits of the non-native South

Transplants explores questions of how regional culture, specifically that which constructs a “Southern identity,” is adjusted or reassembled by the influence of outsiders. The “outsiders” depicted in the work are people who have moved to a large, Southern city from elsewhere. The project serves as a demographic study describing the appearance of these people within the local landscape.

As contemporary populations become increasingly migratory, influences from throughout the country and world appear to be absorbed within urban spaces of the South, adjusting our expectations of culture, heritage and commerce. Those who transition to the new space may both affect and be affected by their chosen landscape. The result challenges our assumptions of regional identity and points to the modern American cityscape as a multi-dimensional space fraught with the challenges of preserving heritage while embracing the benefits of broadened perspectives.

Exhibited images portray transplants to Arkansas.

Alexis, Fayetteville, 2018

Ron Evans

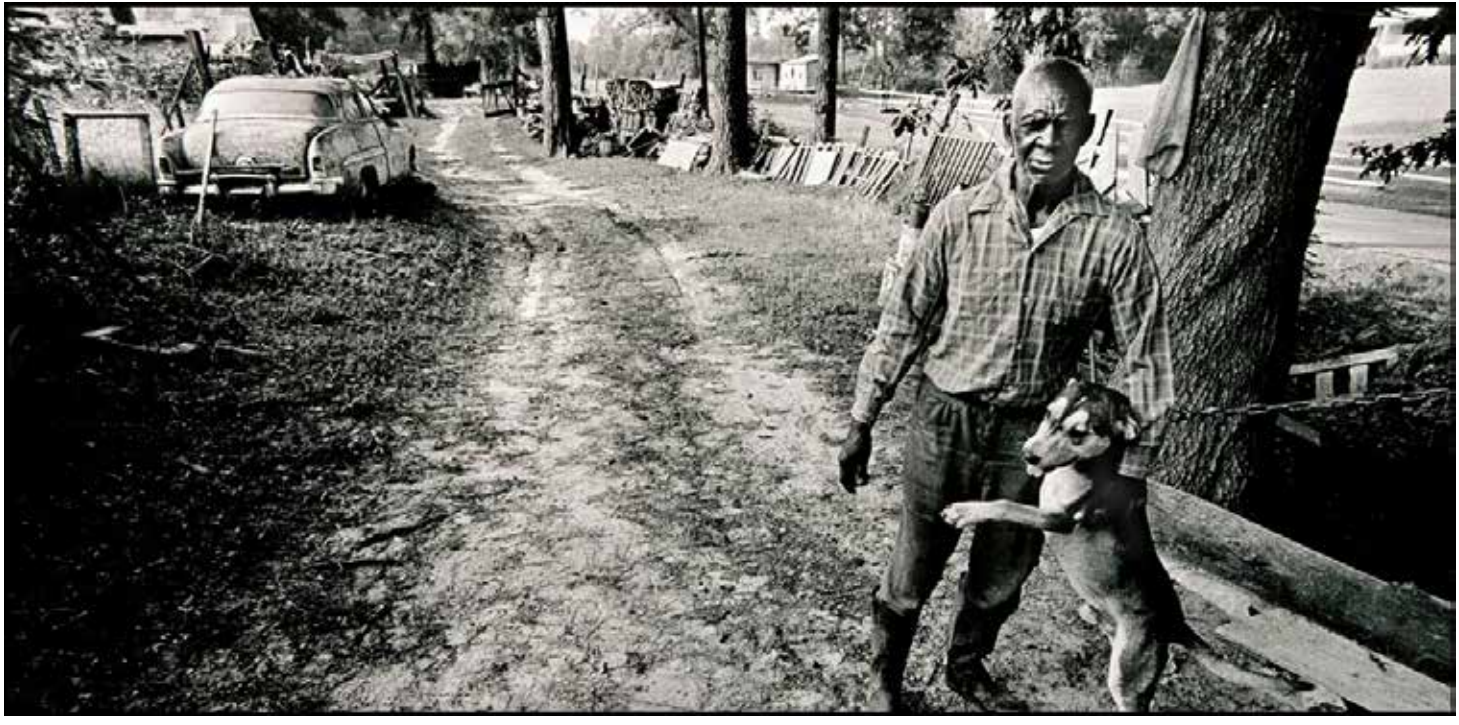
Having been born in Little Rock in 1943, then leaving the state when I was twenty-five years of age to work in Dallas, I came to know all the familiar lairs and pathways in the city of my birth. Now 75 years of age, I remain proud to call Arkansas ‘the place I came from.’ Home!

Early memories of Little Rock are of southern music, especially the blues. When I was sixteen I walked across the Broadway Bridge one evening spanning the Arkansas River from North Little Rock into Little Rock, where just to the left sat the looming Robinson Auditorium. Elvis Presley from Memphis was performing there and I wanted to see him.

Another time Chuck Berry played there, as well as the Beach Boys. It was announced to the audience before the show began that the guitarist of the Beach Boys was sick that evening and sitting in with the band was a guitarist from Delight, Arkansas named Glen Campbell. That was the first time I had ever heard his name.

I got into music, and two years later was playing rhythm guitar in a Little Rock band called the Corvairs. It was the first of many Little Rock bands for me, until I was involved in a bad accident – breaking two fingers on my left hand, twisting them upside down at the knuckle joints. Steel pins were placed into these two fingers to hold them straight, and a cast was put on for the next 4 months.

Temporarily disabled as a musician, I decided why not give photography a go? It’s a lot like music. A way to express feelings about the places and people living around me in those early days in Arkansas. I have those same feelings today, fifty years later.



James with hunting dog - Redfield, Arkansas 1971

‘Gravedigger’, Scott, Arkansas - 1971

Farm Dog - Denmark, Arkansas

Renee and the crop duster incident, Arkansas 1978

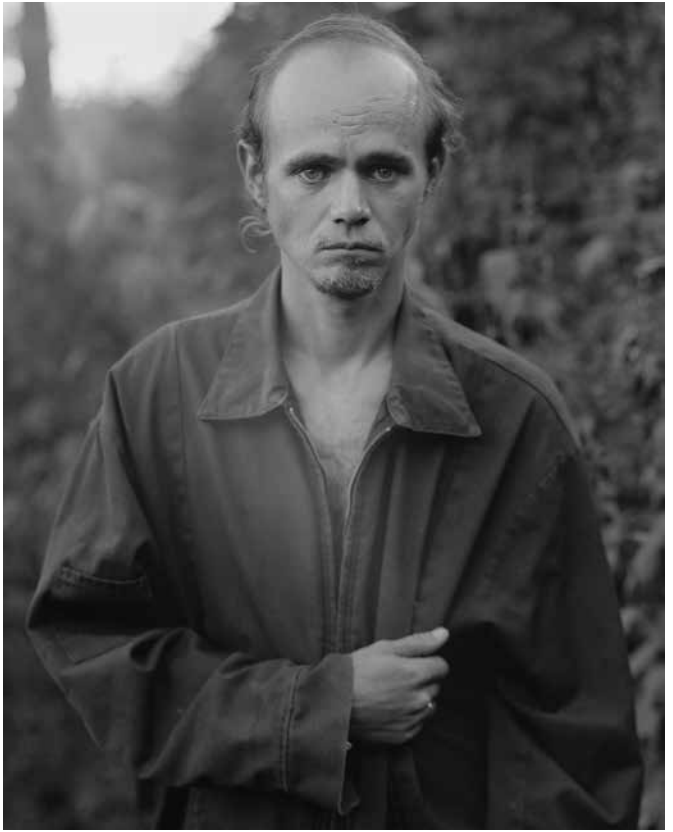
Matthew Genitempo

Jasper

In the introduction of Frank Stanford's, The Light the Dead See, Leon Stokesbury describes Stanford's poems as *"photographs of hallucinations"* and then goes on to tell us that *"he (Stanford) showed us his poems as a kind of evidence, as if, on some ordinate survey of Arkansas or the soul, he'd located a spot equidistant from heaven and hell."*

For nearly a year and a half I kept these words with me as I made my way through the capricious woods of the Ozarks, and the deeper I went, the closer I came to this spot. I am indebted to this land and its people for letting me make this discovery.

Untitled



Untitled


January 1 2014 Golden Eagle on a Pygmy Tree
Golden Eagle
1-27-14
rattlesnake
bite
behind
left car
on rock
Chief
Coben nearby
Darrel

Untitled

Don House

Swimming Hole

There is *city* summer and there is *country* summer, and this is about the latter. It is about the upper reaches of the Middle Fork of the White River and about a small swimming hole.

And an old-school photographer with an expensive camera, neck-deep in water, begging a young boy, “Please don’t splash me, please don’t splash me,” as he looks through the viewfinder and sees – just as he squeezes the shutter - *life,* the whole damned thing, summarized in a face and a river.

A person has to be careful here. There is magic. Bring someone with you, and you will fall in love. Bring children, and they will go feral right before your eyes. Come alone, and you may just wake up twenty years later, hair down to your waist, your friends all gone, your film fogged and useless.

Swimming Hole, Hazel Valley, Arkansas

The Visit, #4

Rayla and Jason, Swimming Hole, Hazel Valley, Arkansas

Katie, Swimming Hole, Hazel Valley, Arkansas

Mary and Rayla, Swimming Hole, Hazel Valley, Arkansas

Tim Hursley

Funeral Homes - South USA

Some of Tim Hursley's images depict environments that, while at very different ends of very different spectrums, represent some of the most intimate actions a person can experience in life—and after.

In each, many people have passed through, and the imprints they've left are no less fleeting. Some depict a layover of sorts, but the funeral homes have a gravitas that accompanies the realization that the footprints people leave are of a different nature. After that point, not even the footprints are left.

Words adapted from *Arkansas Life* – February 2018.

Funeral home in Malvern, Arkansas

Kristoffer Johnson

Nocturnum

Northwest Arkansas has experienced rapid growth throughout my life. And as a life-long resident, my work focuses on the everyday places I interact with. Places that are familiar to locals.

Like me.

My attraction to these places has occurred largely at night walking around downtown Fayetteville or Bentonville. Shadows of the night frame and turn foreign familiar locations, yet the light of the structures soothes me with an inviting warmth in this series, called “Nocturnum”.

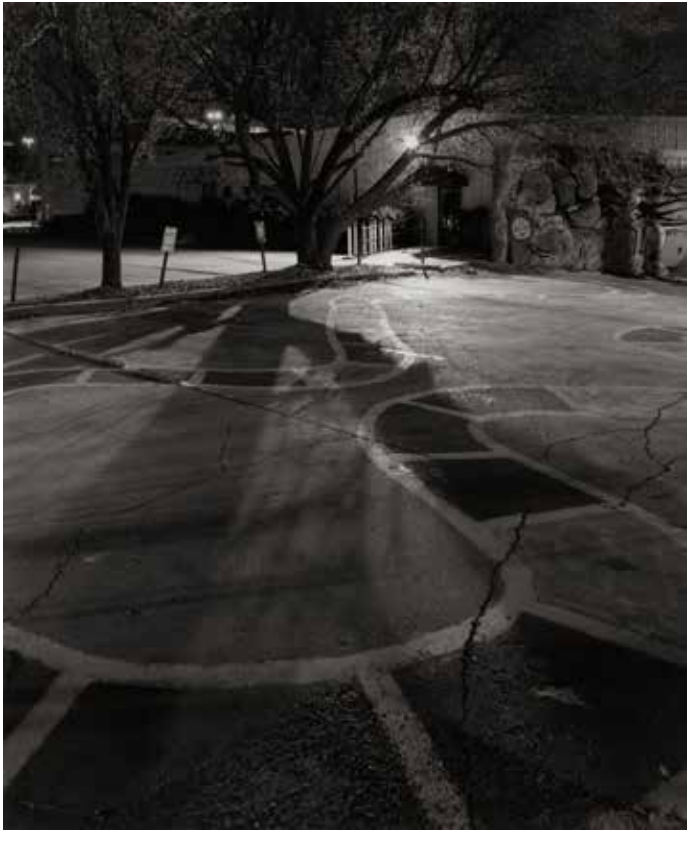
The warmth reminds me of days past, and the small-town atmosphere of Northwest Arkansas, today as it grows into a sprawling urbanized metroplex.

Wilson Park Fayetteville

SW A Street Bentonville

Meadow Street Fayetteville

Gregg Ave Fayetteville



Bentonville Alleyway

Margaret LeJeune

Modern Day Diana

Diana was the Roman goddess of the hunt. She was praised for her strength, athletic grace, beauty, and hunting skills. Her vigor, health, and strength were admired, and her protection was sought for young children and women in childbirth.

This series explores the modern notions of women hunters and the issues of gender, power, and representation. By photographing in each woman's home or hunting lodge I create a dynamic that questions the relationship between the domestic sphere, traditionally the women's place, and the hunting world, typically a masculine realm. The attributes of Diana, that of the bow and arrow, hunting dog, stag and animal pelts, further express this dichotomy.

The images in this series were captured across the United States with a large-format 4 x 5 camera. The Images of Alex, Allyn, Charlye, and Cindy were taken in Arkansas.

Alex

Allyn

Charlye

Cindy

Maxine Payne

“The relationship between what we see and what we know is never settled.”
- John Berger

Photographs deceive. Asserting I can define a place based on the images I make of it is naïve. But, I am of this place. I am from here and I choose to stay here. Arkansas. I defensively stand up for it and I recoil in it. It pushes me and pulls me to the soil.

And I bear witness.

I make photographs of people who are part of my everyday Arkansas experience. It would be hard for me to say these are uniquely Arkansas portraits. They could be described as “rural” people, folks who have a relationship to the land – people who know how to do things with their hands.

And I respect all of that.

Jay McDaniel wrote this about my work – “She likes concreteness. She likes particular people in particular circumstance who bring with them particular histories and are situated in particular places. Her aim is not to create “art” but to bear witness to the strength of beauty in their lives.” I think he got this part about me right.

Me and my relationship to the Natural State.

Drasco

Clinton

Donna Pinckley

Sticks and Stones

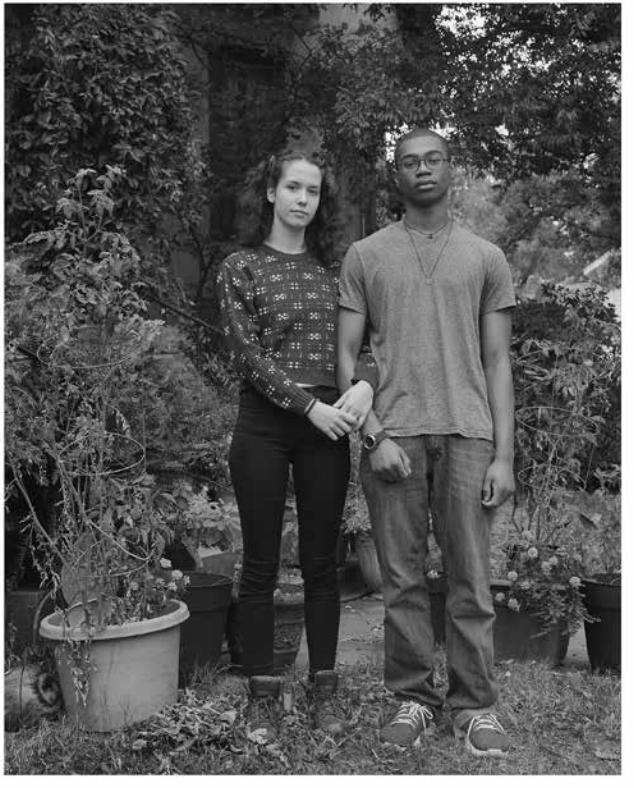
For over twenty years I have photographed a particular social and cultural group of children. Before my eyes and in front of my camera they have passed through adolescence into young adulthood. My goal throughout has been to portray not how the world sees them, but how they see themselves.

I began by working with one child at a time, but as my subjects have grown up and matured, people and relationships have replaced toys and skateboards, both in their lives and in my photographs—siblings and friends, casual acquaintances, and mostly recently, romantic partners.

The "Sticks and Stones" photography series began with an image of one of my frequent subjects and her African-American boyfriend. Her mother and I were catching up when she told me of the cruel taunts hurled at her daughter for dating a boy of another race. As she was speaking I was reminded of another couple many years ago, who had been the object of similar racial slurs. What struck me was the resilience of both couples in the face of derision, their refusal to let others define them.

I began photographing interracial couples of all ages, aiming as always to capture how they see themselves, the world of love and trust they have created despite adversity. In their own handwriting, I added the negative comments they have been subjected to at the bottom of the images as a reminder of how part of society sees them.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me" old English nursery rhyme.



Oh, you like Chocolate?

Look at you taking another one of our Good Black Men

"Don't you want it have white babies?"

you sellout. you married a white dog.

Are you allowed in the house ?

I hope he's born with a turban on.
I hope he's born with STDs.

Sabine Schmidt

Paper House Series

My visual and written work is centered on understandings of house and home, walking and wandering, and rootedness. I photograph mainly in color, with an emphasis on formal compositions of landscapes, buildings, and staged scenes. To me, walking is the best way to experience places shaped by human actions, which is what I'm mainly interested in, whether it's in a city or in the Ozarks.

Being from Germany and having lived in the South for most of twenty years in the U.S., I am influenced by two different photographic aesthetics. I try to blend the geometrical, almost abstract interpretations of space by artists such as Bernd and Hilla Becher or Thomas Demand with the stylized southern realism of William Christenberry and others. I am drawn to simple, utilitarian structures that have lost their purpose. In the Ozarks (and beyond), they are everywhere: rural schools, community churches, forgotten cafés, shuttered stores, and empty homes.

The paper house series grew out of research into the relationship between space, place, and memory. It features handmade miniatures, objects I create to symbolize "home" as the main location of both place and memory. With details and individual features removed from the design, the paper houses become placeholders. I set them in environments that carry historical or emotional meaning. Some of the houses seem protected by their environment; others are isolated or damaged. Most are photographed using only natural light. Viewers are invited to let the photographs remind them of real or imagined places they know and to respond with their own thoughts on place, home, and belonging.

Johnson Vernacular

Signal Tree House

Taped House, Pine Bluff

Beulah Suitcase

Houses and Homes

Jim Simmons

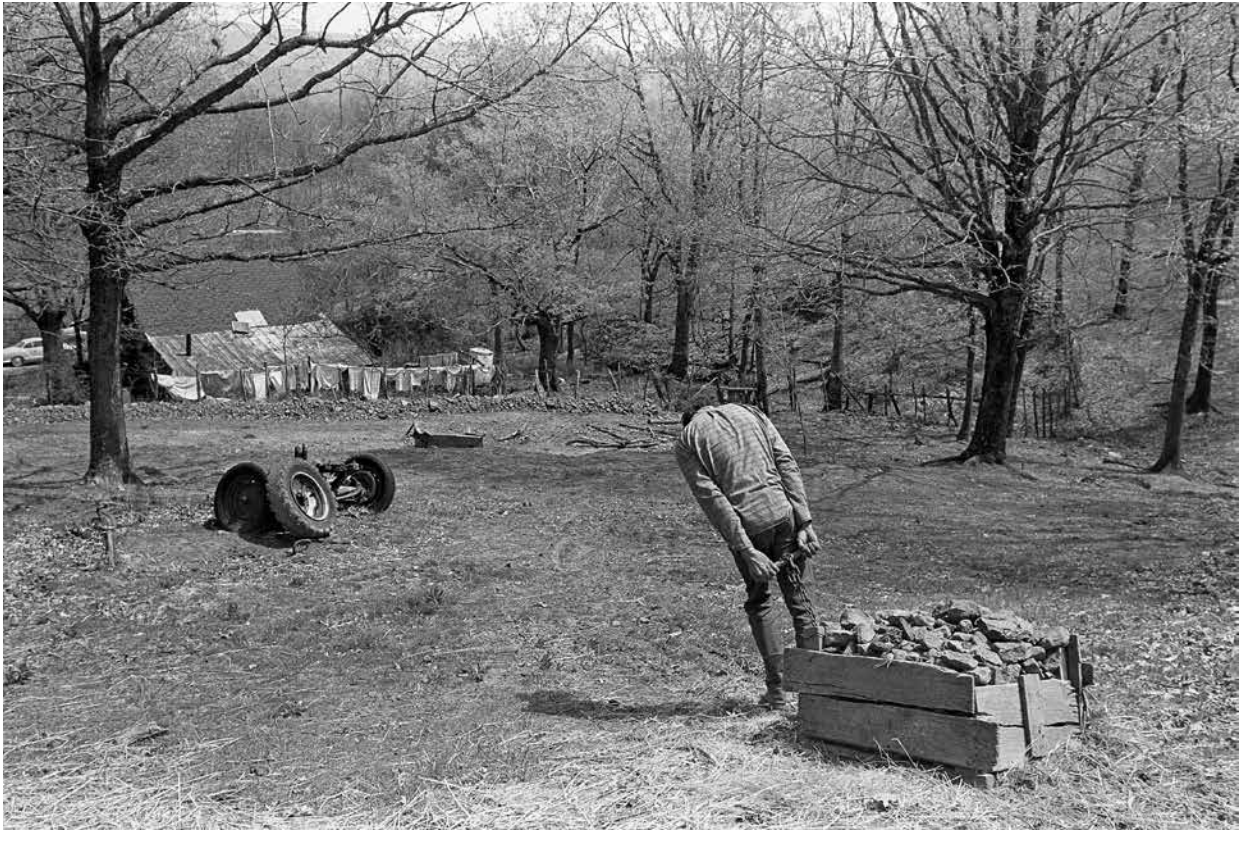
At Home in the Ozarks

I left Fayetteville, Arkansas, in 1973 to attend California Institute of the Arts. The photography portfolio that got me into CalArts may have shown some naïve instinct, but it certainly showed no great skill or well developed aesthetic or knowledge of photography as an art form. It was in my photography history classes that I first began to understand the medium and to find ways to engage with it. An early “eureka!” discovery for me was the Farm Security Administration photographs from the 1930s and 1940s – photographs by Walker Evans in Alabama, Ben Shahn in the Ozarks, John Vachon in the Midwest, and others all across the southern United States. As we studied these slides, one of the students remarked, “Can you believe people used to live like that?” Our teacher Ben Lifson turned and looked at me, pausing and smiling - he knew that I knew that people were still “living like that.”

For the spring semester I proposed an independent study project that I described along the lines of “people living far back in the Ozark Mountains - families who have lived there for generations and the young newcomers moving there to pursue rural lifestyles.” I’m sure I tried to make it sound important and meaningful, but I really just wanted to go home and take pictures that illustrated, “This is where I’m from.”

These photographs are from that 1974 project. The full story of the project, including many of the photographs, is told in my book At Home in the Ozarks, available at the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History.

Images for the exhibit from the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, Jim Simmons Collection.



John Collier Draggng Box of Rocks

Boy With Velvet Tobacco Can

Logger and His Baby

Porch with Stacked Boxes of Canned Food

Steve Hyde on the Porch of his Lean-to

Woman at Well with White Bucket

Geoff Winningham

Photographs of Vernacular Architecture and Stories of Changing Times in Arkansas

In *The Sovereignty of the Individual*, Frank Lloyd Wright wrote:

The true basis for any serious study of the art of Architecture still lies in those indigenous, more humble buildings everywhere that are to architecture what folklore is to literature or folk song to music and with which academic architects were seldom concerned.

These many folk structures are of the soil, natural. Though often slight, their virtue is intimately related to the environment and to the heartlife of the people. Functions are usually truthfully conceived and rendered invariably with natural feeling. Results are often beautiful and always instructive.

Dog trot cabins, country stores, wood frame churches, and one-of-a-kind hog houses: local buildings remembered by local people. Of the Soil is a fusion of architectural photographs and personal stories relating to the culture of the American South.

In the early 1980s, working with a commission from the First Federal Savings and Loan of Arkansas, Winningham traveled extensively throughout the state Arkansas, locating and photographing examples of classic southern American vernacular architecture. Working primarily with an 8x10 view camera and in collaboration with the architect Cyrus Sutherland, he photographed over 3,000 structures, amassing an archive of folk architecture from all parts of the state.

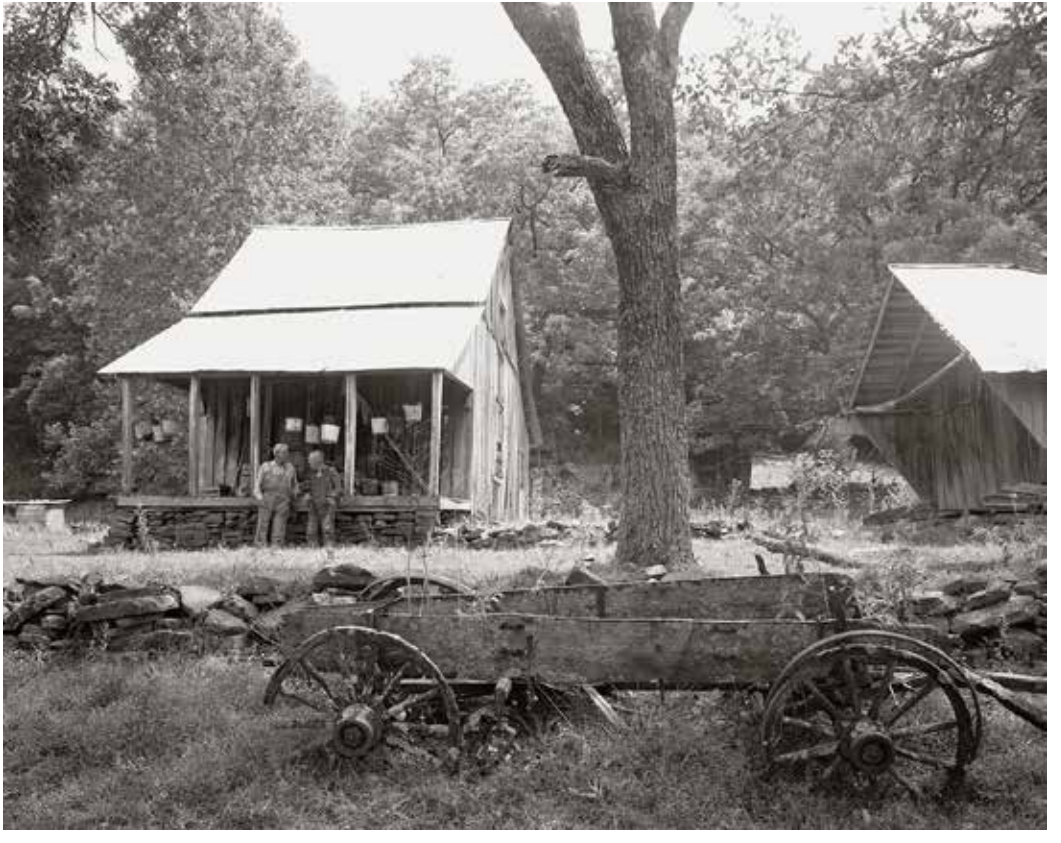
In 2010, almost three decades later, Winningham reopened his archive of Arkansas photographs and began to structure a book. In the summer of the same year, he returned to Arkansas, revisiting the sites of many of the structures he had photographed. Most of the buildings, he discovered, had disappeared, victims of fires, storms, or human neglect. What he found instead were local people who remembered the buildings.

Images for the exhibit from the University of Arkansas Libraries - Special Collections.

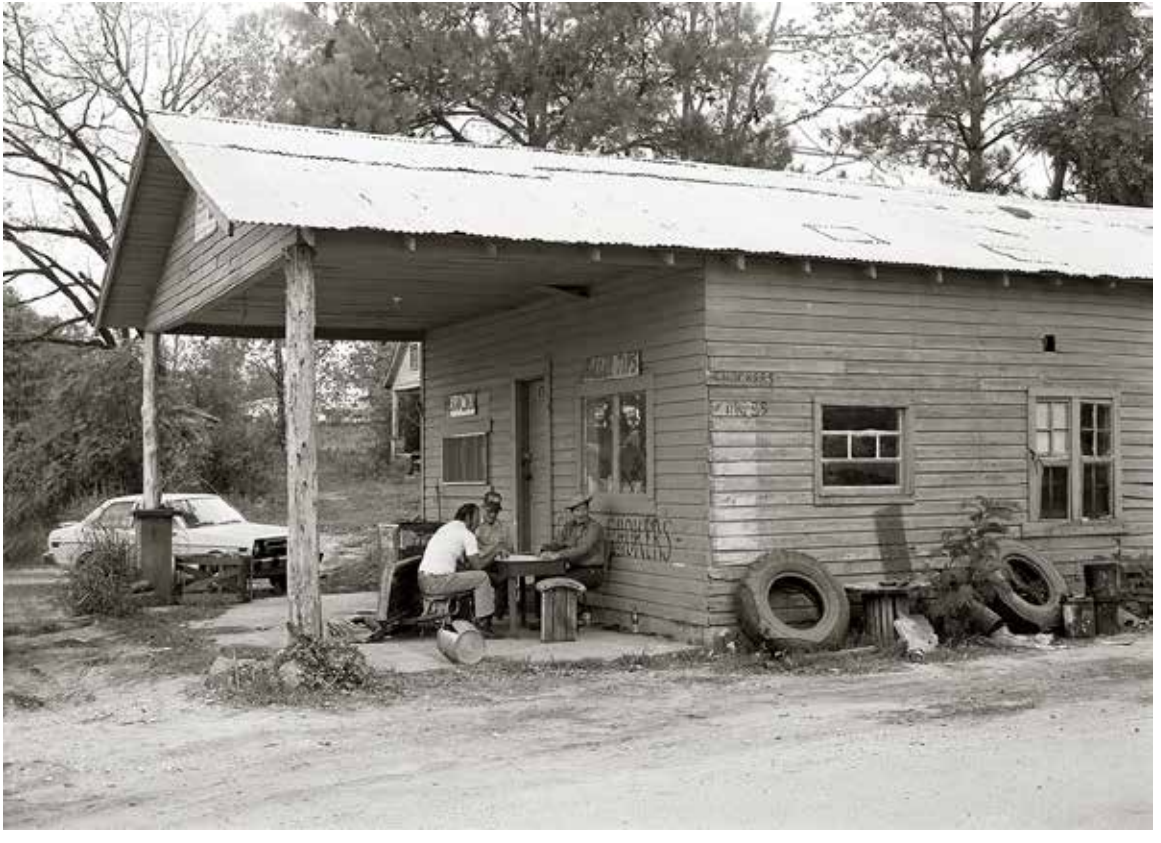
Mineral Springs, Arkansas

Nathan, Arkansas

Old Bigelow, Arkansas



Madison Country, Arkansas



New Hope, Arkansas


LOVE PINK
PEACE
LOVE
Princess