

Surrealist Photographer Michael Borek Comes to VPS in March

Michael Borek, the surrealist photographer known for his edgy, provocative images of the urban landscape, is the VPS guest speaker in March. Michael exhibits nationally, most recently in solo shows at the Multiple Exposures Gallery, Alexandria, Va., and Photoworks, Glen Echo, Md. In 2009, his work also appeared at the Lyceum Theater Gallery, San Diego, Calif., ArtSpace, Richmond, Va., and other venues in San Francisco and Richmond.

A 2008 review of his work in Washington's "Express" referred to his "mysterious, brooding photographs," and Michael said he has "always felt a deep connection to Surrealism as a genre." His portfolio, "Wide Asleep (Day)" comprises 11 photographs including "Homage to Kamil Lhoták," a muted, shadowy vision of a hot air balloon wafting over Prague; and "Sunrise in Roswell," centered on flame red trees viewed through a frosted window pane in Roswell, New Mexico.

From an early age, Michael was drawn to the works of artists such as Rene Magritte and Max Ernst. "As I was born and grew up in Prague," said Michael, "I also loved the art of the Czech Surrealists Jindrich Styrsky, Karel Teige and Jindrich Heisler, among many others." His art is in part a product of his youth – "growing up in a country governed by a very bizarre system called Communism, during which I and my fellow citizens lacked basic freedoms and lived in newly created, cheerless urban landscapes . . . these new constructions depressed me and I was drawn instead to the old buildings . . . in which people had cafes, little neighborhood businesses and lived as they wanted."

He moved to the United States in 1992. Here, as in Prague, "it is the old neighborhoods full of randomness and traces of former lives, that invigorate me. In these places, I once again experience the familiar sense of something that seems – at least on the surface – strange and bizarre, but which becomes quite real and authentic when I dig a little deeper."

In Michael's new portfolio, "The Bridges of Montgomery County," the viewer sees the clash of sinuous concrete against surrounding woods dappled in sunlight, all of it cast in serene soft focus. The ample curves of "Bridge #3" disappear into the forest, while "Bridge #5" seems to come speeding out of the trees like a freight train rounding the bend.

"In my photography," he said, "I try to capture scenes that have a life of their own in their (often improbable) surroundings and show that they are beautifully absurd and unintentional byproducts of human aspirations, with time adding the finishing touches."

Several of Michael's portfolios are posted on his website, michaelborek.com, and many of his images are available at the Multiple Exposures Gallery in the Torpedo Factory Art Center, Alexandria, Va.

Michael will discuss his approach to photography with VPS on March 3.