

DAVE ANDERSON



AGE: 34

BIRTHPLACE: East Lansing, MI

RESIDENCE: Little Rock, AK

EDUCATION: Oberlin College, Oberlin, OH

CLIENTS: Clinton Presidential Library, TSD Associates



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"THE TEST OF A FIRST-RATE INTELLIGENCE," F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote, "is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." The power of Dave Anderson's photography is born of a similar tension: the idea that a photograph might be esthetically seductive and vaguely disturbing, all in the same frame.

After leaving the field of broadcast media and politics (including associations with Bill Clinton and MTV), Anderson studied under various teachers at several schools, including Michael Kenna at ICP and Keith Carter at Lamar University in Texas. He has shot a handful of series which, when he showed them to curators and editors at the 2004 Fotofest in Houston, became a huge hit, helping him earn image sales and the attention of galleries.

One series, titled "Rough Beauty," is his study of the Texas town of Vidor, a small community tainted by its association with the Ku Klux Klan. In the project, Anderson merges banality and decay with moments of unexpected beauty: The cloudy water from a town drain culvert trails off into a nebulous wilderness, or an abandoned baby carriage and junked car sit in elegiac repose in dense forest growth. Anderson's portraits of the town's residents seem, on first glance, eerily evocative of the social documentary work of the 1930s—one is called "Depression Modern," and its gaunt, worn subject could be a Dust Bowl Okie—except that they seem motivated by no overt ideology or program.

"If you tell someone what the town is like, it sets you up to have a reaction to the place as a dark and dangerous Klan town," says Anderson. "But then I started really liking the people there, so my pictures are quite affectionate towards them. You set up a story that seems to be one thing, but the pictures hint at something different, and in the end I haven't allowed the viewer to draw a conclusion. That's what I really like."

In another series, "Roadside Ghosts," drawn from travels through 20 states, Anderson finds metaphors for loss and absence in the everyday landscape—roads that trail into nothingness, bridges obscured in vaporous fog, the elegant skeletal carcass of a dead cow. Many are framed by a dark circle (an effect Anderson discovered accidentally by using a too-large lens shade), as if the viewer were gazing through some portal into another time and place. This is exactly what Anderson has in mind. "The most exciting part of photography," he says, "is the question marks you can leave behind."
—TOM VANDERBILT

