

Tap



Scenic route

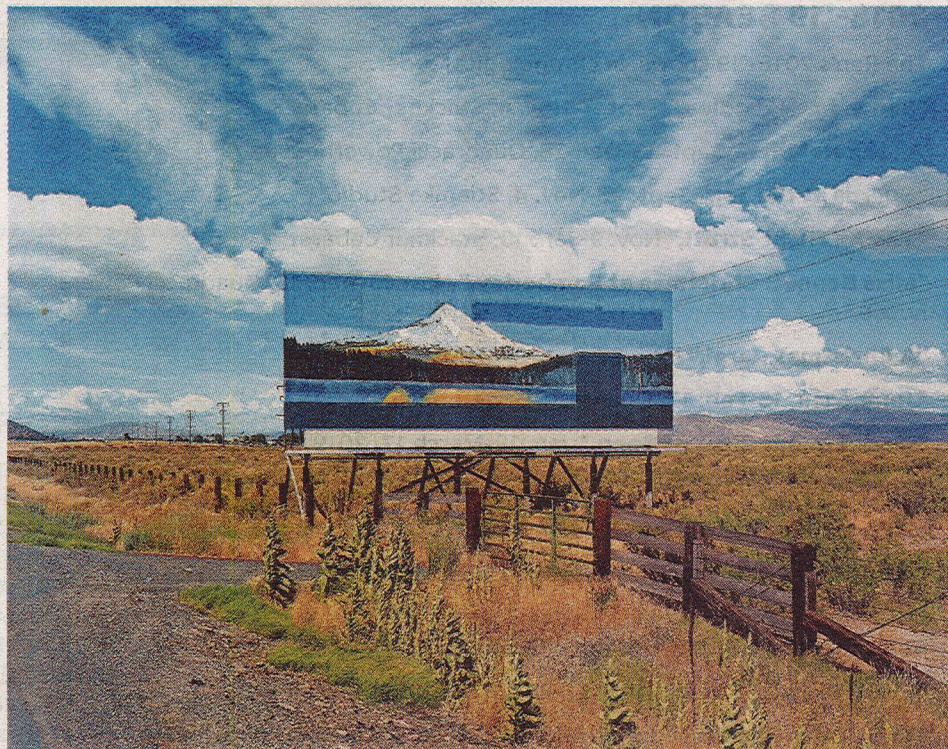
'Open Road' at art museum takes photographic trip through America

Rafael Francisco Salas Special to Milwaukee Journal Sentinel | USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

The road trip remains the most romantic journey of the American imagination. Howling forth, we head for the horizons of this country, seeking freedom, redemption and transformation. ■ "The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip" is a traveling exhibit of 19 renowned photographers who have used their own journeys on the road for inspiration. It is an exhilarating ride, reflecting faces of an unsung America, filled with hope, longing, and at times, anguish. Their work is on view through April 22 at the Milwaukee Art Museum. **See OPEN ROAD, Page 4E**

Above: Ryan McGinley's "Dakota Hair" (2004) is part of "The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip" at Milwaukee Art Museum.

RYAN MCGINLEY



Steven Shore's "U.S. 97, South of Klamath Falls, Oregon, July 21, 1973" is part of "The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip" at the Milwaukee Art Museum. STEVEN SHORE

Open Road

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Beginning in the 1950s, the exhibit is organized chronologically. Robert Frank's stark, black and white photos are iconoclastic and skeptical, revealing a country emerging into a deeper and darker place in the post-war years. Jack Kerouac wrote the introduction to "The Americans," an anthology of Frank's photos, and indeed, an essence of Beat culture resounds. At a parade in Hoboken, we see a fluttering American flag draped across a brick building. Inside the windows are two figures, their faces obscured in darkness and shadows.

Another image displays the aftermath of a car accident in Arizona. A canvas shroud hides the unknowable shapes on the ground and gives the viewer a foreboding sense of what oc-

curred. Four figures stand behind, smoking or quietly looking on, their shoulders hunched against a bitter wind that blows snowflakes past the camera lens.

Not all of the imagery in this exhibit is this grim, but there is a gravity, a potential for loss, that pervades. It feels timely, as American citizens face disparity, prejudice, and bald grabs for power and wealth. The photos in the exhibit seem to express these anxieties in clear focus. A road trip through the America of today might look very similar.

William Eggleston photographed a young grocery boy in Los Alamos as he collected shopping carts in a parking lot in the late 1960s. His hair is coiffed like a greasy replica of Elvis Presley. The photograph demonstrates a poignant contrast of youthful aspiration and the constraints of the working class.

A photo by Inge Morath from 1960 also shows a boy, here in a white T-shirt



Justine Kurland's captures fleeting beauty in her photos, including "Claire, 8th Ward" (2012), part of the "Open Road" exhibit. JUSTINE KURLAND

and cowboy hat, his pose a perfect imitation of a TV cowboy. Behind him stands a ramshackle house in the Nevada desert, casting him in a half light. The photo seems to capture the contradiction of the boy's bravado in contrast to his circumstance, or perhaps a bold response to it.

In the Midwest, Alec Soth examines life along the mythological Mississippi River, which seems to carry away as many dreams as those it fulfills. "Peter's Houseboat, Winona, Minnesota" shows a tired and tiny dwelling with the bleak, wintry background of the frozen river behind. Various bones decorate the weathered, wood exterior. A rope of colorful clothes are hung icily out to dry. The scene is domestic but alludes to a quiet, if not solitary existence along the river in the dead of winter.

Though many of the images carry a psychological burden, others have a levity, a spirited overture to rejoice in the landscape, its light, the journey itself.

Justine Kurland's photos display life on the road with her young son with a bohemian toughness, full of happenstance and fleeting beauty. We see the boy playing with his toy trains at a table on the side of the road. His head whips

around to see, beyond an expanse of scrubby high desert fauna, a mammoth freight train churning past into the distance. The juxtaposition is a delightful examination of landscape and scale. It illuminates the poetry of alternative lifestyles and the scrappy wonder that life with fewer borders can contain.

Youth, and its reckless and hopeful beauty, encompasses our desire for the road. "Dakota (Hair)," by Ryan McGinley depicts a girl in the bed of a pickup truck, her naked back bending to the wind, hair cascading in waves over her head. She nonchalantly leans in to sip from an oversized Styrofoam cup as mountains and blue sky fly by. McGinley's photo is an American dream in total - beautiful and young, full of erotic charge, a firecracker on a journey with no end in sight.

"The Open Road: Photography and the American Road Trip," is on view through April 22 at the Milwaukee Art Museum. For more information visit mam.org.

Rafael Francisco Salas is an artist, an associate professor of art at Ripon College and a regular Art City contributor.