

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

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In the galleries: These are not your usual travel pictures

By **Mark Jenkins**
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“Silence Remains,” from Fred Zafran’s “Stranger in My Home,” a photo essay on view in “Mirror to the World 2017” at Photoworks. (Fred Zafran)

For nine years, Frank Van Riper has curated Photoworks’ annual surveys of recent documentary photography. “Mirror to the World 2017” is the last installment to be selected by Van Riper, a former photography columnist for The Washington Post, and it’s ambitious and far-reaching.

Three of the five sets of images document journeys. Valerie Makepeace prowled the American Southwest with an eye for the battered, rusted and abandoned. Motels, autos and roadside cafes decay; the desert endures. Christine Pearl's black-and-white images document a trip along rural thoroughfares from Maine to Missouri. These small glimpses have an intimate feel. There's also a series about Civita di Bagnoregio, an Italian mountain town built on now-crumbling limestone. This is the work of seven people who went to Umbria for a workshop run by Van Riper and Judith Goodman, his wife and fellow photographer. With its vertiginous angles, picturesque buildings and view-framing archways, the precarious hamlet is almost too photogenic a subject.



"Who's Home," from Fred Zafran's photo essay at Photoworks. (Fred Zafran)

The most evocative essay is Fred Zafran's "A Stranger in My Home," set in and around a remote house cloaked by foliage. Within and without appear to merge in a shot of leaves that nearly blend into a rug's pattern, and human figures seem no more tangible than the shadows they cast. This is a realm of concealment and isolation, with hints of possible transformation.

The most urban and obviously local series is by Darrow Montgomery, who has worked for Washington City Paper for three decades. (For the record, Montgomery and I were colleagues for much of that time.) These square

iPhone pictures, billed as “an accidental archive” of Washington, often employ muted color and narrow depth of field, making them almost as dreamlike as Zafran’s photos. But they’re grounded by familiar visual elements — we can thank Metro master architect Harry Weese for many of them — and moments of wit. In one wry vignette, a U.S. Park Police officer uses a chess table to mount his horse, proving that the game of kings has practical applications for the modern-day knight.

Mirror to the World 2017 On view through May 14 at Photoworks, Glen Echo Park, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., Glen Echo. 301-634-2274. glenechophotoworks.org.