



Absolute latitude



Laconia Gallery displays the beauty of random locales

By D'lynn Plummer

It is common to speak of destinations as *relative locations*, pinpointing a place in relation to other places. The closest Starbucks is three blocks from the post office. The next closest Starbucks is near the intersection. *Absolute location*, however, is the definitive location of a place using a worldwide coordinated system. The most common: longitude and latitude. Marked as degrees and minutes, such information doesn't do us much good on a day to day basis without a navigation system. As global positioning systems become more common, however, it may be likely that someday soon you'll pinpoint the closest Frappacino at N 40° W 81°.

If you were to visit N 40° W 81° today, however, you might get shot instead. Because as it stands right now this absolute location in Ohio is found next to a hay bale and a woman with a rifle. When photographer Bruce Myren was traversing the 40th parallel and its intersections with the meridians, he was, for the most part, well informed of what he might find there, thanks to global positioning websites. Then again, a woman in Ohio protecting her farmland with a shotgun was not exactly on his itinerary.

"I explained to her that I was a photographer taking pictures along the 40th parallel and she said 'sounds suspicious,'" recapped Myren with a laugh. Eventually he made great friends with the property owner and even sent her a print of the final photograph. Its subject matter? The serendipitous hay bale sitting squarely at the absolute intersection of W 81°.

The 40th parallel traverses the United States from the coast of New Jersey, through the suburbs of Philadelphia, across the farm lands and urban centers of Ohio, spans the mountains of Colorado and the high desert of Utah and Nevada, and finally reaches the sea on the Northern California coast. The exact intersections of lines of

longitude with those of latitude cross the 40th on land plus two coastal points for a total of 52 intersections across the country.

Otherwise random locales that may not warrant or even be worthy of photography are now captured on film and on view at the Laconia Gallery in the lovely South End loft building. The convergences are locations made important by the mathematical intersection of two lines, nothing more. The panorama that accompanies the meeting of longitude and latitude is arbitrary. In art, however, nothing is arbitrary. And if there is a way to make a stretch of highway at least as meaningful as the coordinate it defines, Myren will find it.

Each distinct panorama is captured in a supersized strip of contact sheet and divided as a triptych. Three photographs grab separate instances of a panorama and pivot off of one precise junction of measurements. What they capture might run the risk of being entirely unremarkable were it not for the artist behind the tripod seeking the three most desirable, contiguous slices out of 360° degrees. His technique is neurotically precise and the medium clearly film—Myren insists upon the film's recognizability. Yet to de-litter the Jersey coastline, where his journey begins, requires the use of digital technology. After scanning and perfecting his photographs, the resulting long, horizontal prints immediately mimic the latitude they chase.

In Gap, Pennsylvania, the details of farms fall almost exclusively in a narrow band moving laterally across the picture plane. In Zanesville, Ohio, an otherwise dull cul de sac in harsh light becomes an experiment in symmetry.

"The bigger point is that pictures can happen anywhere," says the artist. In the case of this work in progress, only one picture happened to occur in an urban area—a driveway in Columbus, Ohio. Because the points of convergence act as constraints, Myren goes where the coordinates tell him. Fortunately, it is often the case that the best results in art, be they culinary, architectural or two-dimensional endeavors, are not born from unbridled

poetic license.

"When I do photography, I like to work with some sort of constraint. I have to think harder, and it makes the work better, more creative," affirmed Myren.

When the photographer first conceived of the project, constraints were even greater. GPS systems were expensive, cumbersome, and limited by "selective availability"—a function of governmental control that scrambled signals, making GPS a more powerful tool for the military. Clinton's administration turned selective availability off, and ever since civilian GPS users around the world no longer experience the random errors. Myren is free to find each and every point of convergence, whereabouts he may choose to capture the grass patterns on a golf course, cow paths in Colorado, or the passing of time between each turn of the camera, marked by the shifting of clouds or the transition of traffic on a long stretch of highway.

"I've known of Bruce's work for years," said the show's curator, David Binder, "and his 40th Parallel project is simply magnificent. . . It's great to see the fruition of his years of hard work exhibited." Binder has officially presented the artist's very first solo exhibition, and is clearly thrilled to have done so. The gallery itself, which is an emerging presence on the Boston gallery scene, is equally fortunate for the attendance and attention incited by the exhibit, which runs through November 19.

In the case of Myren, latitude has a double intention. Figuratively, it is the scope and range by which an artist's vision roams the fixed line that has spanned his imagination for over 20 years. In *40th Parallel*, a show dedicated to his father, Myren reconciles his fascination with the coordinates first brought to his attention by his dad on road trips, as well as his curiosity with arbitrary human measurements-- the 40th parallel was once the baseline for creating townships and homesteads, and served as a key marker in the settlement of the West. At the Laconia Gallery, the baseline now marks a new experiment in photography, one we hope to see more of. Luckily, Myren promises more trips and more photographs.