



A CHAT WITH THE ARTIST

## The Ghosts Of Small Town America

By AILEEN TORRES

The images in Dave Anderson's photographic series "Roadside Ghosts," showing at Staten Island's Alice Austen House Museum through July 16, are undeniably arresting. But that's not due to shock factor: Mr. Anderson's technique and subject matter are what create poetic beauty on film.

His black-and-white images are sharp and crisp, yet dream-like and meditative. "I like very simple, quiet moments," Mr. Anderson, a former New Yorker who now resides in Little Rock, Ark., with his wife, said. "I'm neither quiet nor meditative, and yet that's exactly what my work [is]."

Born in Michigan in 1970, Mr. Anderson grew up in a Quaker family. "The only quiet, meditative thing I have had over a long period of time is the expo-

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sure to Quakerism," he said. "There's this idea that there's that of God in everyone. I think that carries through a bit in how I try to find something beautiful in these left-behind objects, or isolated things, or things in a moment [when] most people wouldn't pay attention to them."

Mr. Anderson is not a practicing Quaker these days. He operates primarily from his secular, somewhat rebellious streak. "I've always been kind of contrarian," he said. "I like unpredictability. Showing people something they didn't expect to see. I like messing with expectations."

That's evident in the "Roadside Ghosts" pictures, many of which were shot from unconventional angles. A dislocated head of a cowboy statue he discovered lying several feet from its body was shot from an angle close to the ground. The tail end of an airplane looms large in another photo, while a bird taking flight from the wing of the plane makes it distinctive.

"In some of the images, the unpredictability is just in an odd perspective," Mr. Anderson said. "You sort of have to look twice. In some of the pictures, peo-

ple ask me whether they're aerial shots because the way that I photograph them, it completely messes with your sense of scale."

Despite being a relative newcomer to the world of photography, Mr. Anderson has risen quickly since he first came to the craft about three years ago. "Photo District News" — whose senior editor, Anthony LaSala, co-curated the show at Alice Austen — has named Mr. Anderson on its annual list of the 30 emerging photographers to watch.

Mr. Anderson's professional life has not been exclusively devoted to art. He worked on President Clinton's 1992 campaign, then in the White House press office. For MTV's "Choose or Lose" program, he toured the country and registered voters. After working on Al Gore's presidential campaign, he joined a start-up independent film production company in New York.

When his interest in photography deepened, he quit his job at the film company and hit the road, intending to see the obscure parts of America that had eluded him while he had been traveling cross-country for MTV. He had only one rule on his road trip: No driving on any road with more than two lanes. The ongoing series "Roadside Ghosts" began during that sojourn.

"There's nothing I like better than getting lost," Mr. Anderson said. It's part of his creative process: "I get lost, I take two-lane roads, and then I make a turn when I haven't seen anything for a while."

He's driven through more than 20 states so far and takes three or four road trips a year, during which he continues to work on "Roadside Ghosts." "I like to go through towns because it's always the human elements or reminders that I respond to most. I don't like roads that take me through a lot of wilderness and being completely isolated from people," Mr. Anderson said.

Those out-of-the-way places in the American landscape continue to intrigue him. His first book, "Rough Beauty," coming out this fall, explores life in Vidor, Texas, a small town with a dark history. There will be a show at Clamp Art, 531 W. 25th Street, in November to coincide with its publication.

"Roadside Ghosts" through July 16 at Alice Austen House Museum, 2 Hylan Boulevard at Edgewater Street, Staten Island, 718-816-4506.