



Phillip Graybill's "Horse by Sea" Capture a Changing Montauk

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

A camera destined for the trash in New York City first led photographer Phillip Graybill to a new way of seeing, and then to a mesmerizing, elegant series of photos capturing something lost to Montauk and phantom images at the shore.

Graybill's elegiac photos of equines and seascapes in Montauk are on view through August 12 in "Horse by Sea" at Outeast Gallery in Montauk, N.Y. A while back, the photographer was approached on the street by a man who gave him a Mamiya C220 twin lens film camera from the late '70s. The man said he had held on to the unused camera for decades and was going to throw it away but saw Graybill taking photos on the street and thought he could use it, recalled Graybill.

Once Graybill started using the camera, the square framing and topside viewfinder gave him a whole new perspective, he said, particularly on the horses at Montauk's Deep Hollow Ranch, a place to which he had been given full access to by the owners.

Because he chose to shoot on overcast days, the background disappears into gray scale and whiteout, and the stark framing of the horses makes the images look like portraits shot by Richard Avedon in a studio, calling to mind Avedon's cowboys and bald beekeepers.

Capturing just an arched wedge of neck as in *White Horse II* or slices of gangly legs in *Horse L Maisonette*, the forms take on a kind of sculptural spirit.

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"White Horse II" by Phillip Graybill.

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"Horse L Maisonette" by Phillip Graybill.

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Risky looms from top to bottom of the frame, a ghost horse with a pink and black snout, nostrils flaring as wide as his ears.

A shot of just a black spotted back in *Mongo II* becomes an entire landscape that fills the horizon, the eye sliding across the haunches, making meaning out of the ink blot patterns. Graybill stated that he was taking actual “portraits” of the horses, whose gentle eyes and shuffling muscular gaits both reveal and conceal what lies beneath.



“Risky” by Phillip Graybill.



“Mongo II” by Phillip Graybill.

Graybill find the timing of his discovery intriguing; just as the castoff camera gave him a new way to capture the horses, the ranch was sold a year later and most of the horses were sent away.

As horses will gallop, waves will roll.

Graybill’s surfers and swimmers photographed in the frigid waters at Ditch Plains look like small ants battling the elements compared to the frame filling Zen steadfastness of the horses. The enormity of the sea and sky dominates the photos. Moody, dark and misty, the sky and sand bear witness as the sea crashes, swirls and roils.

Sometimes the people look like diaphanous ghosts, spooky specter swimmers making their way between worlds of clouds and restless water. Graybill renders the slightly haunted quality of Montauk’s ominous cliffs and rocky shores in these chilly scenes of winter.



“Ditch Plains I” by Phillip Graybill.



“Montauk” by Phillip Graybill.

The works on view in this show are made more striking by the deeply resined finish Graybill puts

over his museum quality Giclee canvas prints, mounted on custom-built birch wood panels. The presentation gives the images a rich, sheen that reflects both light and shadow.

The gallery is a weathered shack of a building, low slung and clinging to the pebbled shores of Fort Pond Bay. The gallery walls and the rough-hewn wide plank floors make a creaking sound from the wind that constantly buffets the exterior.

The seascapes of this show are hung on a wall that faces the water, with a window in between, making for an absolutely surreal moment of awe. There is no exhibition space anywhere that can create – or rival – this kind of viewing experience.



Window to the sea with Graybill's seascape photos.



Sea photos installation at Outeast Gallery.



Installation view, Outeast Gallery.

"As I've watched the landscape and the town change over the past decade," Graybill said in an exhibition statement, "I am grateful I was able to capture the passing beauty of this ranch, those horses, and the surrounding sea."

Based in New York City, Graybill was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, where he studied photography at the Creative Circus. He moved to New York in 1996 and has a photo studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

He's done work for magazines and the fashion industry, including the Buckler men's fashion line and Converse sneakers. He has also created album covers, art books and other work for SigurRos, Nine Inch Nails, and Underworld, among others.

BASIC INFO: "Phillip Graybill: Horse by Sea" remains on view through August 12, 2014. Outeast Gallery is located at 65 Tuthill Road, Montauk, NY. 631-668-2376. www.outeastmontauk.blogspot.com.