

## Photos speak in sign language

BY MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN

There's not much that's scenic or particularly picturesque in Montgomery College's exhibition of landscape photography. And yet despite the absence of spacious skies, amber waves of grain and purple mountains, the six-artist showcase at the King Street Gallery is among the most thoughtful, smart and stimulating picture shows in recent memory.

"Terraforming" is about the idea of place, seen through the mind's eye more than through the camera lens.

One body of work in particular — Nate Larson and Marni Shindelman's collaborative series "Geolocation" — has been widely shown in the area, and for good reason. The project, which pairs 12 photographs of banal locations — a street corner, a golf course and the like — with captions tweeted from those sites by anonymous Twitter users, is frequently if unintentionally poignant. Larson and Shindelman don't select sites for visual appeal; they're taken from GPS coordinates embedded in the tweets.

But text figures prominently in the other artists' work, too.

For Victoria Crayhon's "Thoughts on Romance From the Road," the artist found seedy old marquees — at decrepit movie theaters and run-down roadside motels — and then posted her own haikulike meditations on dying love in large, black plastic letters.

"Approaching dangerous point" reads the message on one face of a cinema marquee. A second photo, of the marquee's other side, contains the punch line: "of not feeling great about us." Like the old roadside Burma-Shave ads, Crayhon's images contain a kind of poetry, one that positions disappointment and ambivalence as inevitable romantic milestones.

The photographs from Jordan Tate's "On This Site" series work a little differently. Although no actual text appears *in* the pictures, they'd be lost without words. Like news photos, bold, headline-style captions appear below each print. You wouldn't know it from the picture alone, but Tate's photo of a Las Cruces, N.M., water tower, for instance, memorializes the site of a tragic accident. To drive his point home, Tate includes a stack of newspapers in the gallery, featuring a selection of his images and captions.

Go ahead and take one. It's not just art. It's also an effective commentary on how news, like entertainment, is manufactured, consumed and then discarded.

Priscilla Briggs also makes art for the taking. Her installation, "Market," is a rack of free postcards. One, called "Stuffed," features the artist's photo



VICTORIA CRAYHON

In pieces such as "Untitled, Fitchburg, MA," Victoria Crayhon uses seedy old marquees to create poetic images that position disappointment and ambivalence as inevitable romantic milestones.

### THE STORY BEHIND THE WORK

At first glance, the photos in Joshua Greer's "American Histories" series seem to work in the same way as Jordan Tate's "On This Site." Both showcase unremarkable-looking places, accompanied by lengthy captions about historical events supposedly associated with them. (Unlike Tate's, Greer's captions aren't printed directly on the photographs.)

"North Leg, Gateway Arch," for instance, shows the famous St. Louis landmark next to a caption about skydiver Kenneth Swyers, who was killed there in 1980 while performing a stunt.

But hold on. Some of the names in Greer's captions sound a lot less obscure. Wasn't Randle Patrick McMurphy — the asylum inmate described in Greer's caption for "Oregon State Hospital" — the name of a fictional character, played by Jack Nicholson in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"? And what about the parking garage depicted in Greer's "Century Plaza Towers"? Greer's caption describes it as the one where Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward met with his Watergate source, Deep Throat. But that garage was in Northern Virginia, not, as the photo's label states, in Century City, Calif.



JOSHUA GREER

Joshua Greer's "Century Plaza Towers" parking garage is not to be confused with the actual one of Watergate lore. Or is it?

As it turns out, Greer's photo shows where Robert Redford (Woodward in "All the President's Men") filmed his scenes with Hal Holbrook, who played Deep Throat.

Greer's photos play a bit of a head game, mixing real historical sites along with movie locations for films, some of which are entirely fictional and some of which are based on real events. It's a cool trick, meant to remind us of the increasingly blurry line between reality and unreality.

—Michael O'Sullivan

of stuffed-animal toys on the front and statistics about American consumerism on the back. Briggs's more conventional photos are just as pointed. "Celebrity Portrait: Yao Ming" features a large portrait of the Chinese basketball player seemingly plastered on the wall of a building's lobby, along with the words "Welcome to my world."

It's hard to miss Briggs's point, which has to do with branding and the way we've turned places, like sports arenas, into billboards. Her message — along with those of her fellow artists — comes across loud and clear.

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### TERRAFORMING: CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE IN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

Through April 11 at Montgomery College's King Street Gallery, 930 King St., Silver Spring. 301-567-5821.

[www.montgomerycollege.edu/arts-tpss](http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/arts-tpss).

Hours: Open Monday-Friday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Admission: Free.