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Art in abandonment



PHOTO/ERIN HATFIELD

Photographer Mark Coatsworth's exhibit Abandon is a photo story about what's left behind after ecological collapse. It shows at Impressions Art Gallery in Yorkville as part of the Contact Festival.

Photographer shows desertion at Contact Festival

BY ERIN HATFIELD
MAY 14, 2008 11:00 AM

From the decline of Atlantic Canada's fisheries to the floods in New Orleans and the resource rush in the north, Abandon, by Mark Coatsworth, is a photo story about what's left behind after ecological collapse.

Coatsworth, who lives in Toronto's west end at Queen Street and Dovercourt Road, is immensely interested in historical societies that collapse under their own weight, like Easter Island, he said.

"They just exploited and exploited their resources until ultimately they just had nothing left," Coatsworth said. "I am trying to examine little microcosms of what happened there and what is happening to the world as a whole right now."

With a keen interest in anthropology, Coatsworth said the exhibit was

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born out of a camping trip to the Arctic.

"The Arctic is a crazy place right now," Coatsworth said. "All this climate change is really noticeable there."

Hunting has become harder, the sea ice used to hunt seal is forming later and melting earlier and migration patterns are shifting, he said. Where once it was impractical to access the natural resources in the north, that isn't the case any more.

"There is more and more infiltration of southern companies and culture that are going to mine and exploit," Coatsworth said. "The North is in a really weird transition right now."

Abandoned mines, villages and massive garbage piles litter what one might picture as a pristine, untouched north.

East coast Canada is another example, he said, describing it as somewhat deserted now.

"There is a stretch of highway in Newfoundland that is just ghost town after ghost town," Coatsworth said. "It was beautiful and it was so depressing."

Coatsworth has been shooting photographs for six years, but it started entirely as a hobby. He doesn't have any formal education in photography, but got into it by shooting metal concerts. For the past five years he has been shooting the night-life scene.

"Along the way I started setting myself up more showing my book to more people and getting more commercial work here and there," Coatsworth said.

Abandon is showing at Impressions Art Gallery in Yorkville as part of Contact Festival. Coatsworth said he has never shown in a gallery this big before.

His previous shows were in much smaller galleries or in restaurants, so this is the first time the 26-year-old photographer will get the exposure that comes with the Contact Festival.

"It's the biggest photography festival in the world and people come from all over the world to Toronto to see it," Coatsworth said. "I've got a very centrally located exhibit, there is going to be a lot of traffic through there and that has never really happened before for me."

Abandon is curated by Sofia Damil and runs until June 7.

Impressions Art Gallery, at 102 Yorkville Ave., is open from 3 to 7 p.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Thursday through Saturday and noon to 6 p.m. on Sundays.

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