

What is photography now? And what is landscape?

New Mexico Museum of Art collection ponders these questions



nationally paint a stark and textured vision of familiar New Mexico locales. A grouping of 16 photos of grave sites by Santa Fe's Richard Baron ties the experience of humans, living and dead, to the land. (Baron will give a gallery talk about his work on July 11 at 5:30 p.m.)

I was lucky enough to speak by phone with the talented Joan Myers about her body of work in this exhibit, called "Beneath our Feet."

"I was trying to find a title that brought all these early and late images together," she said. "By looking closely at what we walk on indicates the human presence on the landscape." She emphasized the show is not a retrospective of her 40 years as a photographer, but rather a survey of landscape-related images.

As an artist, she hopes to bring attention to climate change subtly, something viewers may need to look closely for with these images.

"There isn't any pure landscape anymore," Myers said. "This show is about how we're interacting with our planet and it seems we're not doing a terribly good job with that."

One of her nine books, *Along the Santa Fe Trail*, was born from photos taken in the 1980s as part of an NEA-funded project with 13 photographers representing different areas of the country. Some of these black-and-white prints from New Mexico sites like Tecolote and Fort

We're all photographers these days. The iPhone is far and above the most popular camera in the world. You probably have one in your pocket right now and can share shots of your dinner, the sunset from your drive home or the latest antics of your dog.

Let's take a step back, though, and think about the techniques behind photography and then ponder what we take photos of. Then visit the latest exhibit upstairs in the New Mexico Museum of Art. (Go on Sunday and admission is free for New Mexico residents.)

Focus on Photography is a year-long series with rotating exhibits from the museum's permanent collection of more than 8,000 photos and featuring different solo photographers. A third part of the exhibit is called Photo Lab, an evolving educational and interactive space

showcasing historic camera equipment and information detailing the photographic processes. The comment board encourages visitors to add their voices to questions such as: Are a print and an image on a screen both photographs? (Overwhelmingly, "yes" litters the board.)

I joined the multitude of tourists and locals recently. The group exhibit, "Grounded," struck me with its unique views from artists portraying "landscape" in non-traditional ways. Katherine Ware, the museum's curator of photography, said that is a goal of the show, among others.

"We're interested in what makes New Mexico special, and why it's such a draw for artists and photographers," Ware explained. "A lot of art features landscape, which is central



Top: Joan Myers, "Chief Yellowhorse Trading Post, New Mexico," 2013, pigment print, courtesy of the artist.
Joan Myers, "Kilauea, Hawaii (Halema'uma'u Crater)," 2008, pigment print, courtesy of the artist.

to the collection here. It's also something visitors can connect to while they're out hiking and taking their own pictures."

A selfie shadow by Lee Friedlander, a line of black horizon in a white salt bed by Mary Peck and the moonscape of the Bisti Badlands by David Scheinbaum are a few examples of the unusual perspectives viewers can explore.

"We're all familiar with Ansel Adams's dramatic vistas of the American landscape, so as a counterpoint we wanted to look at the polar opposite," Ware said. "Who takes a picture of the ground? In the museum's collection, people were doing that."

Big names in historical photography from this state and

Union are included in the exhibit, as well as southwest scenes from her recent "Cowboys and Indians" series.

Some early work shot in California include hand-colored platinum prints. These archaic techniques contrast nicely with Myers' recent large-scale digital work while supporting the Photo Lab's historical arc.

"I can make more beautiful prints today than I ever could with film, but I still highly control color," she said. She still shoots some film panorama, as some of the landscapes in the show demonstrate.

Although Myers says her home in New Mexico is her favorite place to photograph, she's included prints from her Antarctic series, "Wondrous Cold" and volcanoes from the "Fire and Ice" series.

She said there is no shortage of wonderful places for her to visit and photograph, and mentions a desire to visit Micronesia, the Soviet Union and the volcanic chain of Aleutian Islands in Alaska.

She's sticking around Santa Fe until her gallery talk on April 4, so come chat about her firsthand experiences in Iceland and Indonesia. While you're there, join the Photo Lab community conversation about the evolving medium of photography.

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--Cristina Olds just took a digital camera class to learn about all those mysterious settings on her fancy new Cannon Powershot SL50. She'll be taking it to Thailand this month to shoot elephants and shrines.