

AMERICAN CONNECTION

Daniel Coburn's intensely personal work *The Heredity Estate* mixes dark, visceral images with others that appear light and playful. 'I enjoy the psychological dialogue that occurs,' he tells Susan Burnstine.

susanburnstine.com

Daniel Coburn recently released an impressive first monograph entitled *The Heredity Estate* (Kehrer Verlag, 2014). The book is a fascinating assemblage of intensely personal images melded with found vernacular, which collectively challenges the constructs of the traditional family album as a visual representation of the American Dream.

Coburn, from Lawrence, Kansas, landed his first book deal right after graduating with an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) from the University of New Mexico in 2013 and then secured the position of assistant professor of Photo Media at the University of Kansas. But what may appear like an overnight success to outside viewers is far from the reality.

Coburn's professional journey began when he graduated with an Associates Degree in graphic design in his early twenties and landed a job with a major publishing house. Seven years later, he became burnt out by his job so he picked up a camera to document nature and wildlife on



Asphyxiation

hikes around the countryside and fell in love with taking pictures. Soon after, he entered the MFA program at the University of New Mexico and began creating images for what would later become *The Heredity Estate*.

During his late teens, Coburn learned about his family's complex history, which involved domestic violence,

suicide and substance abuse. After these stories of his family's past surfaced it caused him to look inward and suffer a deep loss of faith. 'I was an unruly and rebellious teenager and my parents were controlling and protective,' he says. 'This psychologically violent relationship came from both sides.'

During his early twenties, Coburn regularly attended worship services with a local congregation and says he found himself immersed in faith. 'Ultimately,' he says, 'I was able to step back and take an objective look at the doctrine of the church. I found my personal opinions and views were in direct opposition to their teachings.'

Coburn is now an agnostic, but creating *The Heredity Estate* allowed him to explore the intricate concepts of spirituality and religion as they relate to family and the domestic environment. Rather than approaching this challenging subject matter in a conventional, documentary manner, the images created are often based in metaphor and symbol.

He says, 'I use these images to tell my own version of the story. These are my perceptions of family members, and they are based on events, memories and fantasies I collected on my journey to adulthood. You may



Fare for the Ferryman



Suspension



Lover's Embrace

'I use these images to tell my own version of the story.'

notice that there are images in this series that are not representations of an actual family member. The people in these photographs become icons, symbols, or metaphors for a series of psychological states: lust, psychosis, reverie, contentment, reflection etc. The landscape images also inform the portraits. These are a people

that are shaped by the psychological and geographical landscape they inhabit.'

A notable attribute of Coburn's work is that he uniquely mixes dark, visceral images with others that appear light and playful. 'I enjoy the psychological dialogue that occurs between images that are terrifying, surreal and sometimes whimsical,' he says.

'Some of the strength in this project lies in the fact that some of these images seem disconnected. I like that tension. At times, I use those whimsical images as a respite, a break from the intensity of the dark family narrative.'

Another fascinating characteristic of this work is that it initiates a dialogue about the successes and failures of photography as Coburn is interested in the syntax of the image. 'For instance,' he says, 'how does a snapshot image function when paired with a well-lit, deliberately composed photograph? How can a pristine landscape image inform a very crude portrait? I use these relationships to build a conversation between images and create a complex cadence in the sequencing of images.'

Next month a travelling exhibition of *The Heredity Estate* will launch at the Mulvane Art Museum in Topeka, Kansas, on 9 January and will continue until 14 March, 2015.

danielcoburn.com



Figuration

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EXHIBITIONS USA

CHICAGO

ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Until 4 January

Sarah Charlesworth: Stills

artice.edu

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY

ART CHICAGO

Until 8 March

Anne Collier

mcachicago.org

DENVER

THE GETTY

Until 22 March

Josef Koudelka:

Nationality Doubtful

getty.edu

LOS ANGELES

AMON CARTER MUSEUM

Until 25 January

Meet me at the Trinity: Photographs

by Terry Evans

cartermuseum.org

MILWAUKEE

HAGGERTY MUSEUM OF ART

Until 23 December

Nadav Kander:

Yangtze – The Long River

marquette.edu/haggerty

NEW YORK CITY

INTERNATIONAL CENTER

FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Until 11 January

Sebastião Salgado: Genesis

icp.org

PITTSBURGH

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

Until 16 February

Storyteller: The Photographs of

Duane Michals

cmoa.org

PORTLAND

BLUE SKY GALLERY

Until 31 December

Francine Fleischer: Swim

blueskygallery.org

STANFORD

CANTOR ARTS CENTER

Until 5 January

Robert Frank In America

museum.stanford.edu