

Artillery Magazine

Mark Ruwedel: Rivers Run Through It Review

Jody Zellen

May 8, 2018

In today's media saturated world, exhibitions of beautifully printed, small-scale, black and white photographs tend to fall through the cracks. As Mark Ruwedel proves in "Rivers Run Through It," quiet and subtle pictures of nature can be more seductive and meaningful than bombastic and over-mediated representations. There is something empowering in the framing of that which is carefully observed. Ruwedel makes intimate photographs in the natural environment documenting isolated moments in time, contrasting graceful animals in situ with the detritus indicative of human presence. In these pictures, he also captures variations along the L.A. River, ranging from dry beds cluttered with debris to active river flows.

Arroyo Seco #10 and *Arroyo Seco #8* (both 2015) allude to the tensions between the natural and manmade. In *Arroyo Seco #10*, as a concrete embankment recedes into the distance, it becomes obscured with a mélange of tangled trees and brush. *LA River/Glendale Narrows #24* (2017) depicts a man on horseback riding into the distance along the river's edge at the side of a freeway. There is something incongruous about this image of an urban cowboy, and that quality is echoed in many of Ruwedel's black and white photographs. He is interested in capturing what is hidden and unexpected to call attention to both the beauty of the landscape and the issues surrounding the revitalization of the L.A. River.

It is hard not to focus on the dilapidated cloth caught on mangled palm fronds at the base of a large tree in *LA River/Glendale Narrows #42* (2016), or the bits of torn clothing clinging to branches in what could possibly be the remains of an encampment in *A River/Glendale Narrows #55* (2017). Framed through an opening in the foliage, Ruwedel captures a duck floating in the river. The photograph suggests that life and death, growth and decay are simultaneous occurrences in this ever-changing environment. In *LA River/Glendale Narrows #31* (2017) and *A River/Glendale Narrows #39* (2016), Ruwedel has captured a lone bird, possibly a great blue heron, peacefully perched on a rock in the river. These birds seem at home in their natural habitat, depicted here more as an oasis than a concrete jungle.