

MOWA Downtown Focuses on Humanity’s Environmental ‘Blind Spot’

Michael Muckian – November 12, 2021



Photo courtesy Museum of Wisconsin Art
Suzanne Rose - Broken but Blooming - Cherry Tree

Photographer Suzanne Rose is in love with trees, but not in the environmentalist “tree-hugger” sense. She is more an admirer of their architecture, their stateliness and their ability, she says, to reflect the human condition. But she is disturbed by trees—or any part of nature—that bear the scars of humankind’s environmental recklessness. Such damage, she believes, reflects the carelessness and lack of awareness inside us all which, in turn, is endangering the planet.

“Blind Spot: To Pass Among Them,” her exhibit of 30-plus large format black-and-white photographs that opens Dec. 4 at the Museum of Wisconsin Art’s gallery at Saint Kate-The Arts Hotel in Downtown Milwaukee, shows trees and their surroundings in both their glory and their agony. The images offer abject examples of the detritus and debris

characterizing the midwestern Anthropocene, the geological age during which human activities have had significant and often negative impact on the Earth.

The exhibit's examples are many. A beautifully plumed maple tree of significant age reaches its branches high overhead toward the sunlight, only to have its crown riven by a huge gash that makes way for utility company power lines to pass through. Hunting blinds, also known as deer stands, hide among the branches of other trees, representing another form of natural defilement. Mounds of harvested wood, salt or other commodities exhibit human consumption as well as the dissipation of resources occurring in counterpoint to natural environmental growth.

Feeling the Connection

"I'm not a landscape photographer, but a concept photographer and I have always focused on things relative to my own narrative," says Rose, a Door County resident who walks miles with her dog daily through the local woods, hills and fields in her search for subjects. "I started seeing damaged trees and I found them extraordinarily beautiful. They were cathartic and I started photographing them because I felt connected to them."