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ART REVIEW

Berkowitz photos frame scenery with formal expertise

Two Yellow Lines at
ArtCraft Showcase
through Aug. 21

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DRIFTWOOD STAFF

A series of photographs by Seth Berkowitz called Two Yellow Lines forms the penultimate ArtCraft showcase exhibition of the 2014 season, encouraging viewers to slow down and contemplate some not-too-distant scenery before the summer's end.

As Berkowitz explains on his website, "Two Yellow Lines refers to the yellow painted lines that run down the middle of most of the Oceanside Route — Highway 19A — on Vancouver Island. This long line is both graphic and colourful.

"On another level these yellow lines also serve to both connect and divide the communities it runs between and through."

Travelling the 19A, as most Salt Springers know, is best done when you're not in a hurry. The former island highway has now become the scenic route, but offers more than just glimpses of the ocean. The road passes through the core of tiny communities like Oyster River and



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Two Yellow Lines #1 encapsulates photographer Seth Berkowitz's eye for formal composition.

Bowser, places the newer Highway 19 circumvents without notice.

Berkowitz's photos are the result of careful observation of his surroundings, and capture views and structures that can only be fully taken in if one's car is stopped. In contrast to what the series' title might suggest, the highway itself doesn't take up

much ink, with grey asphalt and yellow paint providing a counterpoint to the scenery rather than being the focus (except in two notable cases).

Using the highest resolution and focus, and archival printing, Berkowitz provides images that are so sharp the viewer can pick out tiny details even from across the room.

The super-high definition emphasizes formality through the integral lines and texture found in the original subjects. This is further emphasized through the photographer's consistently geometric framing of the scene.

For example, one photograph captures the side of an industrial-type building with blue metal siding in a close view that entirely leaves out the chaos of background. The photo's rectangular frame is echoed in the building's window (located nearly at the centre of the frame), the door and the vertical siding slats. The window offers a reflection of golden burnt grass and green bush in contrast to the straight edges and the blue siding. A small strip of nubbly grass with weedy flowers offers more organic contrast.

The geometric framing technique appears again in a long view with horizontal strips of sky, mountains, ocean and highway. The white and yellow painted lines are perfectly straight threads in the pattern. A set of mailboxes is located at the exact centre of this scene, with the effect of making the vista behind more noticeable precisely because it is being blocked.

In another view, a manmade

structure becomes the vehicle for seeing the beauty found off the side of the road. Again taking the shot squarely in front of the scene, Berkowitz transforms a steel-and-glass bus shelter into a Japanese garden arch. The vanishing point suggested by the shelter's concrete floor brings the eye to a centre of blue ocean divided by distant islands at the horizon and framed by the delicate movement of clouds.

Berkowitz takes formal considerations to a further level in two photographs by eliminating the roadside scenery of old houses, industrial offices and motels. A shot looking down the highway from the centre line includes almost nothing but asphalt and paint. This image is less geometric feeling and has movement through the curve of the road and the diagonal lines in the widened lane separation.

In counterpoint is a shot of open metal gates across an abandoned parking lot. The gates' vivid yellow lines cut across the horizontal line, while thin black shadows and an edging of winter brush provide a slight softening.

The showcase exhibition can be viewed at Mahon Hall daily during ArtCraft hours, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., until Aug. 22.