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RETHINKING WATER, PLACE & COMMUNITY

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from multiple perspectives within and beyond the academy.

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The cover image is of Pike Island at Fort Snelling State Park in Minnesota, looking west, showing the Mississippi River. Photographer Brett Whaley. (CC BY-NC 2.0)

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PERSPECTIVES

RIVER REVEAL: PHOTOGRAPHING THE MISSISSIPPI

By Angie Tillges

Official city images of our public lands and parks are often more aspirational than actual. Saint Paul shares this image challenge with cities across the country. Our archives tend heavily toward beautiful images of parks and projects on ribbon cutting day, scenes in best weather, and people recreating in ways considered correct

and appropriate by gatekeepers of those spaces. These are images of public lands as city officials want them to be seen. Like dressing the kids up in coordinated outfits for the family photo—these images only capture partial truths. What about the truth of the litter that materializes in public lands on the heels of winter? What about the



Lilydale to St. Paul. Photographer Chris Juhn.

truth of the cracks in the trail staircase due to underfunded maintenance of our park infrastructure? What about the truth of a carload of teenagers communing with nature by circling parking lots and public rounds?

Image control is a promotional impulse. We think images depicting us at our best will draw people in. But for those of us who work in the public, natural spaces of the city, we know just how little control exists there. Further, it is the potent, unexpected, and living aspects of a public place that define it and create relationships to it.

This challenge is exacerbated when it comes to our rivers. We attempt to capture their epic scale as they flow frame by frame out of reach and onto the next city or town. With the lens and shutter we resist the ephemeral character of a river.

I muse on this as an artist turned city employee working on the Great River Passage initiative. The Great River Passage is the 17 miles of the Mississippi River that flows through and defines Saint Paul, and a city-led initiative to enhance, better connect to, and steward one of the three great rivers of the world and its surrounding natural and built environments.

In an effort to interpret the broad mission of the Great River Passage for the public, I turn to artists. Great River Passage has established a photographers' residency at the river to engage artists in a way that liberates them and us from the image control impulse of city work. The goal is to bring the Mississippi River into the public's psyche through images that reveal the authentic, interminable experience of the river.

Three photographers, Monica Bryand, Erin Carter, and Chris Juhn, were selected for the residency based on their diverse backgrounds, high-quality portfolios, and unique strengths and styles that bring together the best in photojournalism and wildlife photography. The eight-month residency is as much about the photographers building a body of artistic work as it is about the city building an archive of river images.

Personally, I am excited to be working with photographers who each have a distinct artistic point of view offering a fresh, compelling approach to photographing the experience of the river.

Monica Bryand

Monica Bryand has been a professional photographer for two years and works part-time for a community bike shop, Cycles for Change. Mixing her passion for the environment and birds, she is currently working on a special project for Audubon Minnesota and has taken on many other consulting jobs. Prior to becoming a professional photographer, Monica was a program officer at Headwaters Foundation for Justice for more than 16 years and an accountant and employee involvement manager for The St. Paul Companies.

Monica believes in community service and has served on many boards and committees for the

past 25 years. She currently volunteers with her local District Council, the West Side Community Council, and Audubon Saint Paul's Conservation Committee. Monica is a Latina who believes that it is critical to work across issues that affect everyone and to work for systems change at the same time. Monica's passions include environmental, women's, people of color, and GLBT issues. She feels extremely fortunate to pursue her passions for both people and the birds.

What I see in Monica's approach is a relationship to the sights unseen, and the abundant wildlife on our river.



Raspberry Island. Photographer Monica Bryand.



Pig's Eye. Photographer Monica Bryand.



Pig's Eye. Photographer Monica Bryand.



Pig's Eye. Photographer Monica Bryand.



Pig's Eye. Photographer Monica Bryand.

Monica takes most of her photos from her kayak on the river. She knows the art of silence and deep observation, and that the reward is presence of wildlife. The animals seem to present themselves to Monica. She captures their personalities, majestic, playful, or at peace, in the places no

one else is looking. What makes her work more than just wildlife photography is the way she brings in the built world. Her images document the coexistence of the urban and the wild. The juxtaposition is the truth of our Saint Paul stretch of the Mississippi.

Erin D. Carter

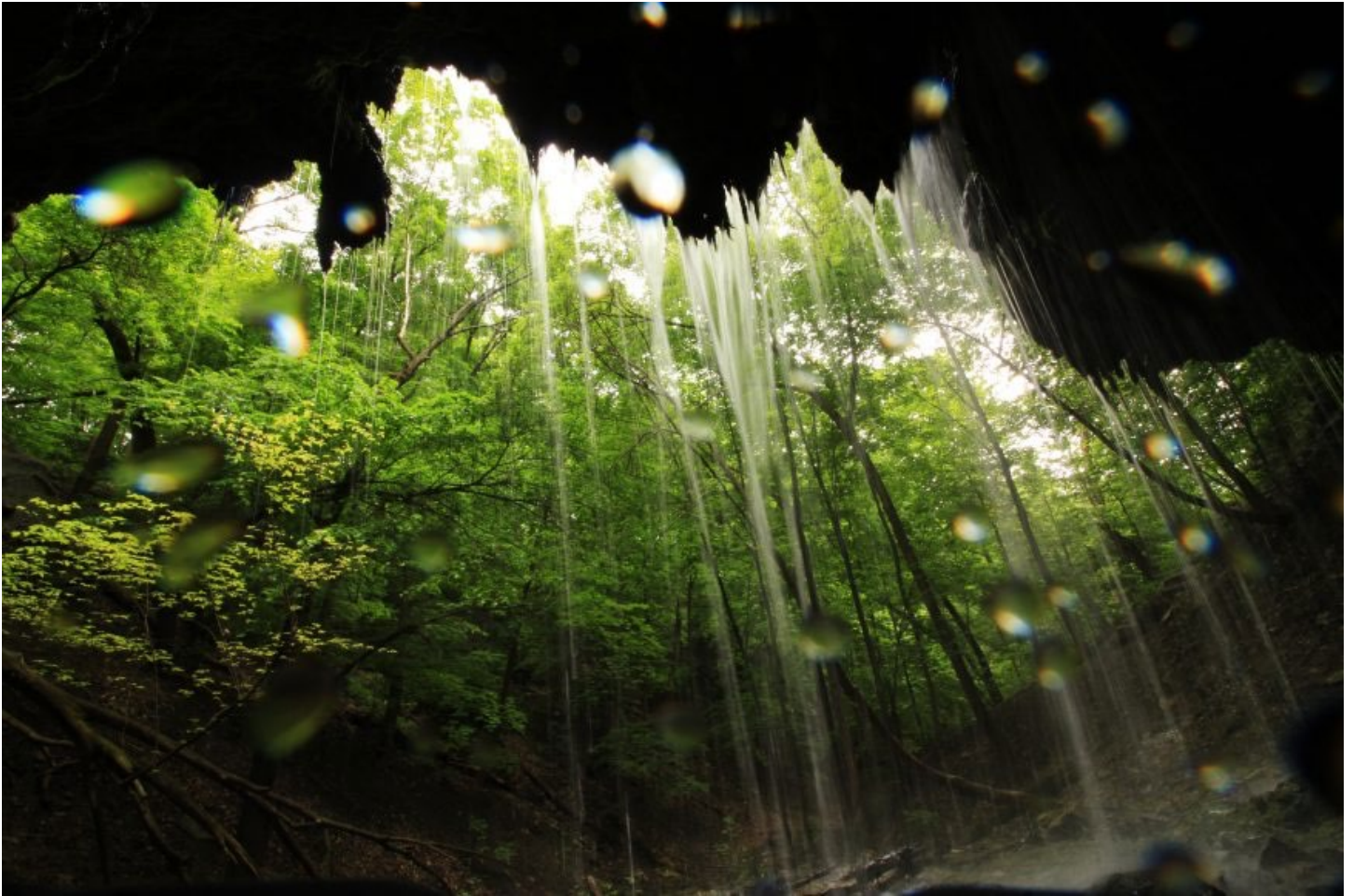
Originally from San Francisco, Erin Carter grew up venturing out to the street fairs, parades, and protests of the city with her father's 35-mm camera and spending hours in the Harvey Milk Photo Center darkroom. The year after graduating from San Francisco State University with a bachelor's degree in geography, she moved to New York's Adirondack Park to work on a backcountry AmeriCorps trail crew. It was there that Erin joined her love for the outdoors with her passion for photography, taking pictures when she wasn't

wielding a crosscut saw. For the last three years, she has been volunteering seasonally with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation's Natural Resources division to battle invasive plant species and photograph volunteer events. Erin enjoys using photography to explore people's relationship with the natural environment.

What I see in Erin's approach is an unveiling of the human hand in natural landscapes.



Hidden Falls Regional Park. Photographer Erin D. Carter.



Shadow Falls Park. Photographer Erin D. Carter.



Hidden Falls Regional Park. Photographer Erin D. Carter.



Hidden Falls Regional Park. Photographer Erin D. Carter.



Hidden Falls Regional Park. Photographer Erin D. Carter.

Erin is a conservationist. She knows that caring for the land comes only from our relationship with it. Her camera captures this connection. Her photographs at first glance may seem to display the magic of a mid-spring floodplain forest. Look closer, and you will see reverence for the craft of trail building equal to the reverence for the

Cottonwoods that the trail wanders through. She shows us the ways people make in and take in the riverbanks. The couple in hammocks. The young people socializing. The fort left behind. Her photos expose the imprint that humans make on the river and that the river makes on them.

Chris Juhn

Chris Juhn specializes in photojournalism and sports photography. He got his start in photography when he bought a point and shoot camera, photographing every day and everywhere. Photojournalism for him is a way to tell stories of the subjects he captures in a way that can help others have a deeper understanding of what someone else experiences. It's also a way for him to participate in moments that he wouldn't be able to have without photography. Through images much can be told, and through the human experience we understand emotions, struggles, and many other things.

Chris currently attends Dakota County Technical College in Rosemount, Minnesota, where he studies photography. In addition, he freelances for Minnesota Public Radio, the Minneapolis Spokesman-Recorder, and Sport Ngin. He is connected to contemporary social justice movements documenting the Black Lives Matter movement in Minnesota and Standing Rock in North Dakota. His long-term goals are to do photography projects locally, nationally, and internationally, covering issues and stories around the globe.

What I see in Chris's approach is the consideration of the river as an emotional and epic place.



Ford Dam. Photographer Chris Juhn.



Lilydale to St. Paul. Photographer Chris Juhn.



Lilydale to St. Paul. Photographer Chris Juhn.



Lilydale. Photographer Chris Juhn.



Pickerel Lake. Photographer Chris Juhn.

Chris brings a photojournalistic technique to the river. The results are candid honest images of the river's various personalities. The river becomes almost human in his compositions. Rushing, tidal, or smooth in the light of the city skyline, his photographs draw emotion from water. His

images present the river as an epic and constantly shifting place. Viewing Chris's work reminds us that the river we commute along or across daily is majestic, compelling, and not to be taken for granted.

#STPriver

In addition to our resident photographers, we have called the public to join us in documenting the river by using [#STPriver](#). We are encouraging a four-season, four-category framework of:

The Natural River

- wildlife, landscapes, water, etc.

The Working River

- industrial, barges, boats, public works, etc.

The Urban River

- city, architecture, infrastructure, etc.

The People's River

- all ages, all activities— recreation, event, social, etc.

What I see in the public's approach is the river as a marker of time, place, and context for our lives. Graduation, engagements, or post-marathon selfies, some people mark life occasions through river photography. Others use it as a study in beauty, directing the camera's frame on a sunset, the foggy morning, or the rare moments when the river seems still and perfectly reflects the sky. And, there are still others who click their shutters as an attempt to freeze time and place, though the river defies it.

We are only a month into the residency and already the work is drawing us to the river in a new way. Watch the work unfold at <http://greatriverpassage.org>.

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About the Author

Angie Tillges is the Great River Passage Fellow. She is a public space artist and educator who is skilled at working with public institutions and community organizations on projects of social, artistic, and ecological importance. She leads projects that provide people the opportunity to make personal and lasting connections with public spaces in their communities.