

Find Refuge At Parrish

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Sunset. Independent/Thomas Joshua Cooper

After an extensive 50-year career, San Francisco born photographer Thomas Joshua Cooper ventures on his first solo exhibition in an American museum at Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill. The exhibit, "Refuge," on view now through July 28, with 49 photographs, 21 images made on the East End, explores the concept of refuge and place.

The self-described "expeditionary artist" focuses on the coastal and inland waterways, those that flow with historic significance. His study of art, philosophy, and literature at Humboldt State University in California, followed by a Master of Art degree in Photography at the University of New Mexico, brought about Cooper's affinity for the convergence of art, history, and imagery. Over the course of his career, Cooper has been the focus of nearly 100 solo exhibitions worldwide. He has been awarded several accolades including a John Simon Guggenheim Award in 2009.

Each still seen in "Refuge" was made between 1998 and 2018, with views of the Eastern seaboard and Hudson River. What will resonate with Long Islanders are the images taken of the East End during his time spent in 2016, an exploratory commission with Parrish sponsored by the Lannan Foundation, which named Cooper its first recipient of the Lannan Visual Arts Award six years prior.

Cooper's inspiration is derived from the traditional late 19th and early 20th Century landscape photographers of Timothy H. O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins, and Edward Weston. The camera he chooses aids the granularly detailed imagery he conveys, using a 19th-Century large format, 1898 AGFA field camera, a medium he's used since 1968. The hand prints are selenium-toned gelatin silver, which complement the texture of pebbles and shells found in his images of Gardiners Bay, Orient Point, and again in the sea spray in "Incoming tide— Looking East, The North Atlantic Ocean, Montauk Point."

Striving for a personal connection with his work, Cooper immerses himself in site-specific projects as to become rooted to the land and its history. Beyond simply arriving, the artist researches, explores, and travels far and wide for his environments. Each location is chosen for its weather and lighting conditions. Throughout, they all are devoid of any trace of identifying elements. The only indicator lies within the name, such as "Noontime — The Shinnecock Canal." In these titles Cooper uncovers the anonymous.

Parrish Director and exhibition curator Terrie Sultan noted of Cooper's work, "The relationship between history and ecology holds great personal significance as a visual and emotional continuum of his sense of place in the world. From the Hudson River's fresh water arterial to Long Island's diverse waterways, these places are of specific importance to both Native Americans and successful waves of immigrants." Each location is an anchor as a "socio-economic driver for trade, manufacture, and shipping."

From South America to the Arctic, Cooper has traveled along the Atlantic to find meaning in escapism on a migrant level. His photographs have been featured in over 50 worldwide public collections; The Art Institute of Chicago, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, The Tate Gallery London, and many others.

Learn more at www.parrishart.org.

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