

BROKEN LAND

Photography by Eliot Dudik

Exhibition reflection essays by

William A. Cook, Professor of English, College of Arts and Sciences

and

Gregory Cumming, Senior Adjunct Professor of History, College of Arts and Sciences

Irene Carlson Gallery of Photography
April 14 through May 30, 2014

A conversation with the Photographer and Essay Authors will take place at 4:30 p.m. Thursday, May 8, 2014, location to be announced.

A reception will follow in the Irene Carlson Gallery of Photography at 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. Thursday, May 8, 2014.

On the origin of *BROKEN LAND* ...

Personal inspiration for *BROKEN LAND* has gathered increasingly over the course of my life. My earliest memories coming from working and playing in the landscape has led to an awareness of land's intrinsic expressive qualities that can easily transform from something familiar to a place of memory or one that exists only in the subconscious. Also, as a young boy, and progressively more so as I reached the age of someone ripe for war, I was fascinated and terrified, mostly terrified, of the idea of being a soldier. I often tried, but could not imagine holding myself together in combat situations that I saw recreated by Hollywood. It didn't matter which war, each seemed equally impossible.

I moved to Charleston, South Carolina in 2004, where the first shots of the American Civil War were fired in 1861. Immediately, I noticed a large percentage of conversations I had with folks led to the Civil War. Coming from Pennsylvania and Maryland, this was quite out of the ordinary. It brought to my attention and imagination thoughts and visions of war, politics, and cultural divides, in addition to the relation between historical and contemporary perspectives through the screen of cultural memory. The more I studied this phenomenon and through shocking current political events, I became interested in the cyclical nature of history, which led to an examination of the similarities between the polarizing culture and political atmosphere of mid-19th century America and that of the current milieu.

The photographic series, *BROKEN LAND*, depicts American landscapes stained with acts of war. Some are enormous, well known engagements, while others are much smaller, mostly unknown clashes. Mixed into the series are a few images of war, created at reenactments during the 150th Anniversary of the American Civil War. These photographs are intended to help infuse the other landscapes with the vision, sound, and smell of war. I find it most interesting when the imagination can throw upon a photograph something that is not actually there, and what each of us sees, hears, and smells will be significantly varied.

These photographs are an attempt to preserve American history, not to relish it, but recognize its cyclical nature and to derail that seemingly inevitable tendency for repetition.

BROKEN LAND was created using a nearly 100-year-old 8x20 inch view camera, known as a banquet camera. It was most popular during the early 20th century, when it was used to photograph large groups of people, and always on a single black and white sheet of film. For this series, I created a custom apparatus to attach two sheets of 8x10 inch color film together in absolute darkness, then slide them together as one sheet into the 8x20-inch film holder. Both films are exposed in the view camera simultaneously, as one photographic image. Later, the film is separated, developed, drum scanned, and reattached digitally.

-Eliot Dudik
April 10, 2014

About Eliot Dudik...

I am a photographer primarily concerned with the confluence of landscape, culture, and memory.

I was raised on a sheep farm in rural central Pennsylvania, the geographical center of the state, and a place many call Happy Valley. If I wasn't sitting at the dinner table, I was likely outside either playing or working. My attraction to the landscape grew out of this continued absorption.

After borrowing my mother's camera to photograph the landscape, I bought my first camera in 1999. I used it to document everything I did, often causing annoyance amongst my friends and coworkers. In 2004 I moved to Charleston, South Carolina to begin college, and soon thereafter accepted that I was, indeed, a photographer. After my first photography class, I built a darkroom in my apartment, and began making prints. Through school and after graduation, I worked at a local camera shop, a cigar shop, and a photography gallery. Most of my photography at this time was done on an uninhabited barrier island off the coast of South Carolina that required a boat for access. A friend of mine would drop me off, and I would camp for a night or two. I sold my prints in the gallery.

Two years after finishing my undergraduate degree, I decided to go to graduate school for my MFA in photography. I attended the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia. I could not fully leave Charleston as I loved it too much and it was the first place I considered home as an adult. I kept my apartment in Charleston, and rented another in Savannah. While in graduate school, I spent half the week in Charleston, and half in Savannah, always making photographs along the 2 hour stretch of scenic highway. These adventures are what led to my MFA thesis and the book, *ROAD ENDS IN WATER*, published in 2010.

After finishing my MFA, I began teaching photography at the University of South Carolina as an adjunct instructor, the first step in my career as an artist and educator.

-Eliot Dudik
April 10, 2014

Reflections on Eliot Dudik's *BROKEN LAND*

William A. Cook, Ph.D.

Professor of English, College of Arts and Sciences, University of La Verne

Early Christian liturgical diptychs celebrated both the living and the dead creating thereby, through the inscription of their names, a communion of saints. This celebration by communion recognizes the ineluctable flow from ashes to ashes, from generation to generation that binds us all in one journey to the end of time. As an art form the diptych closes two tablets together allowing the cover image to declare its purpose, the names or images presented when the diptych is open. As an altar piece the diptych offered religious themes through painted symbols or images suggestive of the bonds that tie this world to everlasting life in Heaven.

Diptychs can be traced back to the sixth century before Christ, but it is the universality of the liturgical diptych that captures my interest as I stand before the panels that Eliot Dudik presents in *BROKEN LAND*. These diptychs are illusory in every sense: no physical tablets exist, no frame encloses a painting or a carving, no symbols or images exist except those the minds of the viewer can paint into a silent scene of fields, woods, and brush.

But Dudik has forced the photographs of his diptychs to frame a place that evokes a spiritual experience because it returns the viewer to a time past where a unique communion of humankind took place, eliciting from the very bowels of the viewer an emotion of connection with those brothers and sisters that slaughtered each other in these scorched fields that rise before our eyes through a transference of compassion from our souls. Thus does illusion inform today.

Ambrose Bierce, the only well-known American writer who fought as a soldier for the duration of the Civil War, provides us with word pictures of these scenes in his short story "Chickamauga." While the diptychs hanging in Carlson Gallery do not include the battle of Chickamauga, what Bierce describes drums into our conscience a vivid picture of the scenes caught by Eliot Dudik. Bierce captures this conscience riveting reality by removing the mute child, the protagonist, from hearing what he sees as Dudik removes us from seeing the battle of Antietam. Dudik's diptych depicts a barren battlefield bereft of soldiers, denying the spectator eyes to see the battle, and we, like the child present at the brutality, must create from our past what our eyes see and our ears hear and out of that silent cacophony fashion reality.

Hours passed, and then the little sleeper rose to his feet. The chill of the evening was in his limbs, the fear of the gloom in his heart. But he had rested, and he no longer wept. With some blind instinct which impelled to action he struggled through the undergrowth about him and came to a more open ground—on his right the brook, to the left a gentle acclivity studded with infrequent trees; over all, the gathering gloom of twilight. A thin, ghostly mist rose along the water. It frightened and repelled him; instead of recrossing, in the direction whence he had come, he turned his back upon it, and went forward toward the dark inclosing wood. Suddenly he saw before him a strange moving object which he took to be some large animal... But something in form or movement of this object... something familiar in its shambling, awkward gait... Before it had approached near enough to resolve his doubts he saw that it was followed by another and another. To right and to left were many more; the whole open space about him were alive with them—all moving toward the brook.

They were men. They crept upon their hands and knees. They used their hands only, dragging their legs. They used their knees only, their arms hanging idle at their sides. They strove to rise to their feet, but fell prone in the attempt. They did nothing naturally, and nothing alike, save only to advance foot by foot in the same direction. Singly, in pairs and in little groups, they came on through the gloom, some halting now and again while others crept slowly past them, then resuming their movement. They came by dozens and by hundreds; as far on either hand as one could see in the deepening gloom they extended and the black wood behind them appeared to be inexhaustible. The very ground seemed in motion toward the creek.

Occasionally one who had paused did not again go on, but lay motionless. He was dead. Some, pausing, made strange gestures with their hands, erected their arms and lowered them again, clasped their heads; spread their palms upward, as men are sometimes seen to do in public prayer.

Should we pause here to view Dudik's diptych at Bull Run, the two tablets split by a narrow creek coursing slowly, quietly humming between brush strewn fields littered with rocks and dead trees, and let our silent conscience watch the woods emptying of wounded soldiers as they crawl to the creek, we will see through the mist and debris what we would wish never to see, the slaughtered remains of fathers and brothers and sons driven to war by myths of glory and salvation.

With Bierce's help we now fill the tablets of illusion with images that cry for recognition and these silent, groping forms fill our emotions with need to respond both to the felt pain and despair and to the need to understand why such scenes exist. Such images now suggest the virtue of the liturgical diptych where the names of the baptized were written together with the names of the dead, all of one communion, all responsive to an inner call to act, all joined together by purification on entering this life, and all joined in death, an inglorious, silent, unknown death lost in time.

To those of us who have survived the attacks of both Bragg and Time, and who keep in memory the dear dead comrades whom we left upon that fateful field, the place means much. May it mean something less to the younger men whose tents are now pitched where, with bended heads and clasped hands, God's great angels stood invisible among the heroes in blue and the heroes in gray, sleeping their last sleep in the woods of Chickamauga (Ambrose Bierce, "A Little about Chickamauga").

Perhaps it is time now to reflect on Dudik's *BROKEN LAND* as it stirs memory, learning, knowledge and the invisible but haunting ghost that plagues all when viewing these scenes, the umbrella of morality that hangs like a pall over the living and the dead. Bierce makes clear the need to distinguish the soldier from the politician:

In these forgotten graves rest the Confederate dead they were honest and courageous foemen, having little in common with the political madmen who persuaded them to their doom and the literary bearers of false witness in the aftertime" (Ambrose Bierce, "Bivouac of the Dead").

Yet it is the mystery of the diptych that forces us to look beyond the past, beyond the carnage, the cries of anguish, the roar and thunder of the cannons, beyond the weeping soldiers crawling through the mud and slime of the blood soaked fields, the killing fields where 34,000 died at Chickamauga and 22,000 at Antietam. Rather it is the power of the diptych to thrust us into the present and the future where the lessons learned will not be framed by sins of omission, by propaganda and deceit, by hollow cries of false patriotism and fanaticism to allow once again brother to slaughter brother for borders, greed or power.

These are American diptychs; they call to mind our past not only of the Confederate and Union spirits that died here, but the spirits of the Native tribes whose souls were lost to minds cloaked in conquest, and yet others from ancient Africa who in body and soul became slaves to satisfy our insatiable lust for land and profit. In these empty images of fields, weeds, brush, shrubs, trees, swamps and creeks we can see and hear voices of despair, of anguish, of anger, yea of hate and vengeance yet feel from their suffering the everlasting cry that compassion, respect, dignity, and love arise from these illusions to give meaningful life to our future.

Eliot Dudik paints in the spirit of the unknown artists that created the liturgical diptychs maintaining their essence in framed tablets that through the mystery of light exposed we see and hear what is not there but through the mystery of imagination infused with spirit we can understand.

-William A. Cook
March 22, 2014

Reflections on Eliot Dudik's *BROKEN LAND*
Gregory Cumming, Ph.D.

Senior Adjunct Professor of History, College of Arts and Sciences, University of La Verne

The Civil War reflects not only the most turbulent period in American history, but also a time of great change. With secession came a time of reckoning regarding the relationship between the states and federal government and, even more fundamentally, the future of the American experiment in government. The Civil War allowed the nation to finally resolve the issue of slavery in a way that never could have occurred otherwise since the Constitution allowed the states, and not federal government, to determine this issue. As a result of this war, America moved forward not as a union of states, but as a united nation supported by a stronger federal government. As President Lincoln stated, this war resulted in a new birth of freedom. The government which emerged at the war's end abolished slavery and provided citizenship and the right to vote to the newly freed male slaves. The Union victory showed that the American experiment would survive and could move forward in ways truer to its ideals of liberty for all men.

The victory in war, however, led to a tragic defeat at the end of the Reconstruction period. While the Civil War did lead to the end of slavery, the ultimate defeat of Reconstruction led to the rise of a new type of exploitation – segregation, sharecropping, and Jim Crow laws. Thus the final victory over slavery did not occur until the 1960s when powerful voices joined together and moved a nation away from the bigotry of its past.

With the over 700,000 casualties that occurred during the Civil War, can we, as Americans state that the result outweighed the cost? The answer is an emphatic yes. As Thomas Jefferson stated many generations ago, “... the tree of Liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” The photographs presented by Eliot Dudik remind us all that the bloody battlefields of the Civil War such as Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Antietam witnessed great sacrifice and suffering that enabled our nation to survive and thrive. The men fighting back then on battlefields now captured by Dudik, ensured that future generations would live in an America that strives to be free from the prejudices of the past.

By December of 1862, Abraham Lincoln found a deeper meaning for the war. In a message to Congress he wrote that, “In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free – honorable alike in what we gave and what we can preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope of earth.” These battle sites presented in the photographs of *BROKEN LAND* represent our acknowledgement of our past and hopes, much like President Lincoln's, to preserve that which reflects our best and to cast off that which leads to our worst.

While democracy American-style may be loud, obnoxious, and sometimes bitter, it remains a much better alternative than any other political system the world has yet seen. Thus, Lincoln's words still ring true today, but only if this nation remains vigilant and true to our highest ideals established by the Declaration of Independence and fought for on battle fields throughout the land from 1861 through 1865. May we always remember and never forget what these men and women gave to ensure the future we have today.

-Gregory Cumming
April 7, 2014



Allatoona Pass, Georgia, 24 x 54"



Bull Run, Virginia, 24 x 54"



Antietam, Maryland, 41 x 96"



Vicksburg, Mississippi, 41 x 96"



Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia, 24 x 45"



South Mountain at Fox's Gap, Maryland, 24 x 54"



Cedar Creek, Virginia, 24 x 54"



Monocacy, Maryland, 24 x 54"



Boonsboro, Maryland, 24 x 54"



Rocky Face Ridge, Georgia, 17 x 36"



Aiken, South Carolina, 41 x 96"