

## Distinction

### American Goth

*Rocky Schenck's moody photographs creep into five exhibitions this fall.*

Photographer Rocky Schenck sounds remarkably cheerful for someone whose pictures bear names like "Uninvited," "Lost," and "Solitude." Perhaps that's because making photographs "from the outside" is a recipe that seems to work for the Texas-born L.A.-based artist.



Photo by Rocky Schenck

his travels across Europe and the US, from a half-harvested grain field in Czechoslovakia to the Hollywood Forever cemetery in Los Angeles.

"This is how a photograph can evolve," he explains of one dreamy desolate interior. "I was in London, and depressed., and I was in this crummy hotel room, and I got really drunk and I realized that it all looked so sad that I got up and took a picture. A year later I printed it up and it became one of the images in my book."

Despite the story behind this particular image, Schenck's intensely toned images have an appealing vagueness. "People interpret things so differently. They think [the London image] represents a tranquil sight, but it's not that at all. That's why I think it's best not to explain how I feel about [my] images."

Schenck also politely declines to discuss his methods for creating his expressionist pictures.

"Maybe I am a paranoid old soul who doesn't want to have anyone borrowing my technique, but I never have told anyone how I make these prints," he says.

He will say that for years he researched antique photographic methods until he hit on the right technique which involves using masks and filters over the lens of the camera and also manipulating the surface of the print.

Schenck's interest in artistic experimentation is nothing new. The great great-grandson of romantic landscape painter Hermann Lungkwitz, Schenck seemed to inherit an artistic sensibility early on.

"My parents put me in a painting class when I was 12," he says, "and I was selling my little landscapes by 13."

Later, he began channeling his post-adolescent angst into making "psychological, experimental films," and used the Yashica his father bought him to shoot stills of each scene.

Soon, the stills themselves were what were most interesting to Schenck. Film dropped away, and he continued working on the single images themselves, at the same time maintaining a successful sideline career in commercial photography. He's since shot stills and music videos for a whole slew of clients from Verve records to Vanity Fair. And in contrast to his deeper, darker fine art, Schenck's commercial images are colorful, some psychedelic, and others with an old-Hollywood look.

Schenck can't predict where his work will lead him next, but he does plan on hitting the road again soon. He'll certainly make it to his openings at the Paul Kopeikin Gallery in Los Angeles, the June Bateman Gallery in New York, and three others in San Francisco, Austin, and San Marcos. For now it's back to Texas, for more exploration of his hometown state and the site of his favorite recent work, a shot which is emblematic of Schenck's twisted take on his place in the world.

"I was at a BBQ with my relatives ... and out of nowhere my cousin Cathy turned to me and said 'Why don't you take one of your creepy art pictures with all of us in it.' And I just loved that description - 'my creepy art.' So I took her up on that, and I shot this photo and I call it 'Family Reunion.' It's a really screwed up picture. I love it."

But how much longer Schenck can milk his outsider status now that he has a thick monograph being published and five exhibits of new work opening in art galleries across the nation this fall? He sells his lush, toned silver gelatin prints for upwards of \$2000 a pop to the likes of Sherry Lansing, Elton John, and author John Berendt (who also wrote the forward for his book, to be published this November by University of Texas press).

Still, Schenck continues to create his lush, gothic tableaux drawing from the experiences in his own life. He shoots his pictures during