

Corey George
Artist Statement

I grew up on a small cattle farm in rural South Carolina. I spent many days of my youth in the woods surrounding our homestead, where I roamed through seemingly endless pine forests, and encountered all manner of wildlife. At this time, the landscape of the rural South was just beginning its shift from farms and forests to urban- and suburban-ization. When I returned home after receiving my BFA, I came back to a place that was in flux, with its natural resources, wildlife, identity, and even its way of life threatened.

We are living in a new era of Manifest Destiny. Landfills grow ever larger. Power plants and factories spew dangerous chemicals into the air, protected by laws that do nothing to protect people. Urban sprawl encroaches into the habitat of animals and decimates forests, resulting in “nuisance populations” of wildlife and forever changing our landscape. All these things are resulting in the destruction of the landscape I grew up in, the land that I have worked, hunted, fished and hiked in with my family, the land that I have made myself a part of.

This type of urbanization, while happening all over the country, is a serious threat to the rural South. Rural counties here don’t have many zoning laws outside of the city limits, and one family or one person often own large tracts of land. This makes it easy for developers to acquire and build. Once one piece of land is developed, the adjoining pieces of land skyrocket in value, making it unprofitable to continue to farm the land, or let it remain as a forest. It is a snowball effect, driven by our culture’s greed and desire to consume.

My work serves as a defense to both the landscape and culture I grew up in. I can’t travel hardly anywhere around the South without seeing a forest being leveled to become a strip mall, or a pasture being transformed from where generations of a family farmed the land into a housing subdivision. I can remember places that in my childhood that once were small towns, miles from the nearest city, that are now sprawling suburbs, complete with 4 lane highways, Super Wal-Marts, and malls, not to mention endless tracts of look-alike houses with treeless yards.

Part of Lewis Hine’s famous dictum was “Two things to be photographed, things to be appreciated and things to be changed.” This one sentence has guided my work and conceptual concerns for the past few years. My work explores and documents the rural landscape, attacking the negative, capturing the positive, and exploring the changes to this landscape we had made in the pursuit of progress.