

Subtle statements

Roma portrays drab Brooklyn neighborhoods with finesse

By Alan G. Artner
Art critic

Thomas Roma's photographs of lower-middle-class housing in Brooklyn—at J. Rosenthal Fine Arts, 212 W. Superior St.—capture the grinding drabness of the neighborhoods without ever expressing superiority toward them.

The large black-and-white prints simply explore the visual possibilities afforded by modest urban domiciles and their detritus, while only now and then exploiting the opportunities for irony or humor.

One such picture, of a windowless wall of a two-flat shot from a neighboring yard, cleverly suggests that Paul Strand's famous white fence has been uprooted and brought to the city, where it has fallen on hard times.

This is the kind of art-about-art reference that the best of the pictures have, and it belies an apparent casualness of composition as well as a seeming indifference toward printing.

In truth, little is casual or indifferent here while much is wonderfully subtle (Through Tuesday.)