

Classy Shots

by Elizabeth DeCoursey (buzz@boulderweekly.com)

"Social Landscapes" is a refreshing, bold and thought-provoking photography exhibit at Denver's Gallery Sink. Anyone interested in a pictorial perspective of the disparate tones and environments that America has nurtured will find it a treat. The Gallery itself is comfortable, yet Spartan, with an urban atmosphere and a total lack of commercialism—a space to show art, not to don airy pretensions. As the title implies, the exhibit is a photographic exploration into many different dimensions of American social constructs. "Social Landscapes" easily navigates through Virginia trailer parks and across upper middle-class suburbia



The front foyer houses the work of local photographer Joel Dallenbach. Dallenbach focuses his interest on Denver and espouses a lyrical lilt to his compositions. The emphasis of his photos extend beyond foreground and into the background where signs, cars, a displaced head—or often a fallen person—draws attention. His work creates a cacophony of subjects within the frame suggesting an entire scene or story; his framed prints are accompanied by according contact sheets in which an entire story is present, a meander through the situations he runs across in Denver. It is easy to be guiltlessly lulled into Dallenbach's photos because there isn't a feeling of exploitation surrounding the people.

Also in the foyer, opposite Dallenbach's work, hang photos by New York-based photographer Susan Lipper from her 1994 monograph "GRAPEVINE." Lipper found herself stranded in a Virginia trailer park; she decided to stay for five years, during which she shot "GRAPEVINE." Although her work is interesting, it's difficult to see past Lipper's obvious superiority complex and her prejudice towards her compositions' subjects. One photo, for example, places two hard-living obese women in the frame: the one getting out of a car holds a string of slimy fish resting on the ground outside, while a beautiful little blond boy looks to the sky and waits. Perfectly lit, the photo provides a mood for the rest of Lipper's work.

Also, celebrity photographers Larry Fink and Thomas Roma epitomize an American class struggle as

their black-and-white works oppose each other on the Gallery walls.

Fink's work is privy to the worlds of high fashion models and high society socialites as he goes behind their scenes and to their tables. While Fink's photos extract a sense of apathy from the societal elite in their ostentatious surroundings, Roma's work exposes the freedom and life of a sector of Brooklynites who thrive beyond their social plagues of unemployment, poverty, and crime. Sink chose works of Roma from a couple of his books, like *Come Sunday*, through which Roma illustrates the strength of faith in Brooklyn communities.

The color photography in "Social Landscapes" is vivid and potently expressive. Marla Sweeney's portraits of the upper-middle class, which the European art world glommed upon, give a crisp peak into the pill padded and cell phone walled separation of American suburban families. Beth Yarnell Edwards offers photos from a series called "Suburban Dreams" and her compositions land in the same light as the sets of director, Pedro Almodovar.