

# Palisadian-Post

Work of Palisadian Photographer on Display in Solo Exhibition

By Sarah Shmerling | January 28, 2021



"Coffee with Cully," 1982 Photos courtesy of Lisa McCord

## ***"Rotan Switch" Offers a Look Inside Lisa McCord's Life in Rural Arkansas***

By SARAH SHMERLING | Editor-in-Chief

The work of Palisadian photographer Lisa McCord—described as a “personal exploration of home and family”—is on display until February 19 through Los Angeles Art Association.

The series, titled “Rotan Switch,” was captured over 42 years, beginning in 1979 when McCord was 21 years old. McCord documented life on her grandparents’ cotton farm, which is located in the rural Arkansas Delta community of Rotan.

“The series takes its name from the community’s central landmark—the now defunct railroad switch where farmers once loaded their cotton bales onto trains headed out of the Arkansas Delta—an acknowledgment of the complex intersections of industry and agriculture, of race and injustice in the American South,” according to information shared in a statement about the exhibition. “The resulting portrait of this rural community offers both a celebration of love and an acknowledgment of enduring pain as we seek to move toward a more just future.”

One of the first photos McCord captured in 1980 that is a part of the collection is titled “A Humid Day.”

“I was feeling stifled at one of my grandmother’s tea parties,” McCord recalled to the *Palisadian-Post*, “so I excused myself, grabbed my camera and headed across the railroad tracks and Highway 61 to the other side of the farm.”



“A Humid Day,” 1980

McCord explained that she saw several young boys with a dog hanging out beside a parked car, which had several more boys inside.

“It was a hot, humid day, and they were trying to use the car’s A/C to stay cool,” she said. “I can’t remember anything about the conversation I had with them, only that I felt much more at ease in their company than the ladies at the tea party I had left behind.”

McCord shared that she particularly feels connected to “Coffee with Cully,” a self-portrait featured in the exhibition with Cully, McCord’s grandparents’ cook who raised her mother and aunt, as well as helped with McCord and her siblings.

“She greeted me every morning as I sprang into the kitchen,” McCord said of her relationship with Cully. “We would discuss the day’s event and share family secrets. I loved Cully like a mother; she cared for me and loved me.”

Through her website, McCord touches on the fact that “Rotan Switch” is a “self-exploration” into her “inherently complicated role in this community as both the photographer and the granddaughter of the farm owner.”

She shared with the *Post* that while looking back, she realized when she started making photographs at Rotan, she was a “young girl looking for relationships to fill the void and loneliness” she felt in her own family.



Lisa McCord

“I wanted a community and I found one by photographing,” she explained. “I was both an insider and an outsider in two worlds. Much of the time, I was more comfortable hanging with Cully’s family than my own.

“Over time, I have become more conscious of the way racial and economic dynamics of the community are inherently present in my work. I am in the process of recording stories of my subjects to accompany the photographs.”

McCord shared that her hope is the stories will provide more context into the relationships and to paint a picture of Rotan that “incorporates many points of views besides my own.”

“I wasn’t able to include the written component in this exhibition of 62 photographs,” McCord added, “but it will play an important role in the book I’m in the process of writing.”

McCord shared that she has “lived in many countries across the world,” but her “idea of home remains firmly rooted in the Arkansas land and people.” She has now lived in the Palisades for 15 years with her son and husband, who grew up in the community.

She moved to LA in 1982 to be near her mother and sister. When she landed in the Palisades, it was originally on Castellammare Drive, but she has called the Alphabet Streets home for the last 15 years.

McCord, who also attended New York University, Le Contrejour, Paris, and The Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, NY, received her BFA from San Francisco Art Institute and an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts.

Her work has been featured in galleries and museums around the world, including the Annenberg Space for Photography, Building Bridges Art Exchange and Fabrik Projects and Classic Photographs Los Angeles.

As she prepared for “Rotan Switch” to open at the Los Angeles Art Association display, McCord shared her hopes for the display in today’s world.

“I think we, as a community, are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of representation and inclusion in the stories we tell,” she shared. “My hope is that this exhibition will shine light on this community in the Arkansas Delta, acknowledging its history of race and injustice in order to move into a more just future.”

*For more information about the exhibition, visit [laaa.org](http://laaa.org). For more about the photographer, visit [lisamccordphotography.com](http://lisamccordphotography.com).*