

the guardian

Georgia on my mind:
Mark Steinmetz's
American south – in
pictures
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From Mississippi lightning to balloons in Georgia, Steinmetz captures stories of longing, despondency and mystery in his photos of the southern states.



Athens, GA (Ribbon), 2009.

The American south glows with romance and poignancy in the photography of Mark Steinmetz, whose show *South* is at Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York, until 13 May.

Steinmetz lives in Athens, Georgia, but was born in New York and raised in the Boston area. He studied at Yale's School of Art

He cut his teeth working with the acclaimed street photographer Garry Winogrand, cruising around Los Angeles in Steinmetz's Fiat. 'Garry's cheerful, practical manner and advice probably helped me shave off years of worrying how to be,' Steinmetz has written

His work has since taken him from Little League baseball to Cleveland classrooms, Paris fashion houses and sheep farms. The *South* exhibition focuses on work taken mostly in Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi.

He works in black and white, explaining to *Vogue*: 'There are emotional notes that black and white can deliver that colour cannot. It is a different medium. It's like silent film. You know, Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin delivered some moments where they killed you. They just absolutely killed you. It's not going to happen like that again with sound'. Steinmetz photographs serendipitous moments of beauty, rarely knowing his subjects of his photos – he sometimes asks them to repeat a gesture he saw them making.

In another interview, he argues: 'Black-and-white has more stillness to it, you can be absorbed into it in a different way. You have to employ your poetic imagination. With

YANCEY RICHARDSON

colour, I just have an argument! Is the green really this green, or is that the green of Kodak? I'm more interested in the narrative, the human, the interior depth of what I'm photographing – I don't want to be distracted by bright red outerwear'.

He also prizes film over digital. 'With digital, people take pictures endlessly without being selective, and don't learn to discipline their minds. It's important to take an internal pause while you photograph. Time is actually malleable ... Be aware of how many frames you have left and stay conscious. That's how you'll walk away with the photo in hand'.

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Athens, GA (Balloon at Dusk), 1995

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'Today's world is so fast-paced ... that in comparison, darkroom work seems to be an alien relic from an ancient world'.

'I don't begin a project with an agenda,' he has said. 'It begins with a faint vision – one of those whispers on a breeze – that somehow gets a grip on me'.

Steinmetz's work has appeared in exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago and Box Galerie in Brussels. His books include *The Players*, *Angel City West* and last year's *15 Miles to K-Ville*; he has also written for *Time* magazine. His next project is a commission from the High Museum of Art in Atlanta for its *Picturing the South* series, which will be exhibited this year.