

The Life and Happenings Around Blejoi Bridge

by Andrei Baciú



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Commentary

The two poles of landscape photography are romanticism and propaganda. So much of landscape photography presents us with an idealized view of the landscape under perfect conditions — the Golden hour, the perfect snowfall, the spectacularly beautiful scene, the otherworldly. Or, landscape photography leans toward political commentary — man's abuse of the environment, the impact of civilization on wild spaces, urban sprawl, or industrialization. It's rare to find landscape photography from that vast middle ground that simply shows us what is without sugarcoating or tar-and-feathers.

The title of this project says it all. It is *photographer as observer*, photograph as witness. Baciú's project is extensive, covering the seasons, the inhabitants (human and other), and the temporal — with people we see and people who are only implied with their footprints left behind in the snow.

Curiously enough, I feel I know far more about Blejoi Bridge than I do about Yosemite after seeing all those idealistic photographs from Adams and others — or perhaps what I know is more *truthful*. I remember how disappointed I was in the view of Yosemite when I visited it for the first time and found not a pristine clearing winter storm or clear-air view of Half Dome, but rather a crowded and smoggy summer storm of tourists and traffic jams on the valley floor. It was then that I realized that so much of landscape photography is a sort of fiction.

Baciú presents us with something entirely different. There is no sense that he has tried to present to us anything other than a truthful, common, ordinary view of this landscape. That does not say that he has presented us poorly or randomly composed images. The photographs themselves are beautifully done — but they are not an idealized fiction.

Consider the composition of this image — the beautiful arc of the train tracks, the visual balance of the power line towers to the left and the small shack on the right edge; the visual sweep of the walker's anticipated path; the distant delicate horizon line in the low hills. This is a beautifully composed image. However, the landscape is scrubby, utilitarian, dirty, cold, and thoroughly unremarkable. In an Ansel Adams landscape, the scene is phenomenal and the photograph does its best to measure up. In this example from Baciú's Blejoi Bridge project, the scene is thoroughly common and aesthetically bland, whereas the photograph is deftly made and aesthetically far more appealing than the thing photographed. This is a terrific example of photographic realism compared to either romanticism or anti-romanticism.

One additional small attribute should be noted: the falling snow. Isn't it interesting how often we



find weather presented so dramatically in romantic landscape photographs — but in such a way that tends not to affect the photographer him or herself? The storm clouds unleash their deluge safely in the distance (but not on the photographer); the surf pounds the rocks (but not the photographer); the snow lies voluptuously on the terrain (but not on the photographer). Baciú places himself (and us) out in the weather where the snow falls unromantically on the landscape, but on us, too, in real-time

reality rather than in some sort of photogenic perfection. The weather is not part of the romance; it is part of life.

Why is it that we don't see more realism in landscape photography? Is it did more difficult to do? Or difficult to sell? Out of step with today's aesthetic zeitgeist? I have no idea, but it is such a pleasure to see realism done so well in this portfolio.