



John Moore, *East New Orleans*, April 14, 2007

Chef Menteur Highway plunges eastward over the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet into a succession of 60's-era housing chiseled from reclaimed wetlands. Here – amid a grid of streets with names like Robin Hood and Nottingham – rests John Moore's childhood home. An energy rater for a post-Katrina rebuilding firm, he's well-aware of the risks of building on land that more or less floats. "We all knew it was risky," he ventured, "but where else could you find an affordable two-story with a pool?" Reduced to a shell of lumber and façades, the house has been sold to a real estate speculator from New Jersey. "This pool was my favorite place to play growing up," John reminisced while staring for a long moment into the sordid rectangle of dank water. "These East New Orleans developments were sold as millionaire dream homes for workin' folks."

New Orleans Sketchbook

by Stewart Harvey



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Commentary

So why is he staring into the pool? What is he thinking? Who is he and why is he here?

These are the kinds of questions that one would naturally ask when seeing a photograph like this. The image is interesting, the composition engaging, and the moment poignant. However, in spite of this, the core elements of the photograph are who is he and what is he doing? We cannot possibly know the answer without a little help from a photographer—or the photographer's writing partner. (In this case, the writer and the photographer are one and the same.) It is the human drama that makes this photograph compelling, and that human drama is communicated to us by the text; the photograph punctuates and intensifies that drama through its visual contribution.

I've often found it useful when working with photographers to suggest that they are as much *storytellers* as they are image makers. This is not true of all kinds of photography, but is clearly demonstrably true in Stewart Harvey's portfolio. I've known Stewart for over 35 years and he is both a fine image maker and a superb storyteller. That's what makes this kind of work so exciting—the combination of both talents on display for us to connect so powerfully with the people being photographed.

Harvey crafts his text as carefully as he does his images. Consider the phrase, "the sordid rectangle of dank water." This is not a conversational phrase,

but a wonderfully descriptive one that helps us understand the subject's riveted gaze. That "dank water" appears so black and vacant in the photograph that is psychologically works as an abyss—quite the emotional opposite of a swimming pool. Then again, is he looking at the water, or is he looking back through the darkness to his childhood memories. The photograph provides one answer, Harvey's text expands that with a more metaphorical answer. Image and text are not duplicating each other's message, but supplementing each other with greater depth and emotion.

In this dual presentation, we feel his loss, we feel his memories, we empathize with his emotions because Harvey has made them accessible by combining these two powerful forms of communication.

The whole—image plus text—is certainly greater than the sum of the parts. The combination of strong imagery and powerfully written text is such an effective way of storytelling it's no wonder that still photography continues to have an influential and important place in our world of more hip, or cutting edge technologies. I cannot imagine the time in which the classic photo essay will have become obsolete.