

JOHN CHIARA

Mississippi

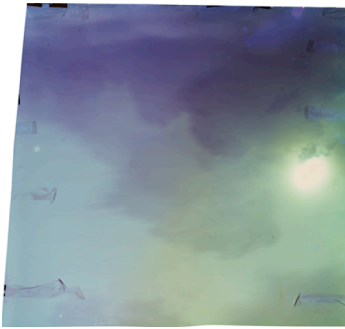
ROSEGALLERY

To understand the world, you must first understand a place like Mississippi.

- William Faulkner

ROSEGALLERY is pleased to present *John Chiara: Mississippi*, a special exhibition of photographs produced by the artist along the Mississippi Delta during 2013–14. Join us on 13 June 2015 from 5:30–7:30 PM for a book signing and reception with the artist. The exhibition will be on view from 13 June – 5 September 2015, and is made possible through a collaboration between ROSEGALLERY, Seven Chimneys Farm, and The Porch Society.

There are worlds within worlds in Coahoma County, writes artist John Chiara. It is a place with a strong oral tradition where the locals have a deep historical and cultural knowledge of the region. It is the birthplace of the Delta Blues. It is a landscape enlivened by a photographic collective memory, fed by nearly two centuries of photographers working their magic and being changed by the magic of the land in return. The artist continues:



The sun radiates and creates an energy here like no other place. This is due to the water table being approximately ten feet below the large flat plain that is Coahoma County. This is an area that has consistently flooded over and over again for several thousand years, making it one of the most fertile regions of the world. The fertility, the heat, the humidity make this land want to be something it currently is not. You can see it in the way the Kudzu, like chainmail, drapes itself over old trees, and how the farmers now arm themselves with earth-altering, agricultural weaponry.

Over the period of one year, San Francisco based artist John Chiara made numerous trips to Coahoma County, Mississippi, located in the town of Clarksdale. He put down temporary roots, ultimately spending several months, ten days at a time, immersed in the culture and getting to know the land. He studied the area throughout drastically different seasons, from the sweltering summer and its shocking greenery to the relatively dormant fall and winter months when the landscape is unnervingly exposed. He got to know the people and the folklore of the region and was deeply affected by the essence of nature in the area. One could say he communed with the spirits there.

I find myself photographing the way the light is hitting the inner branches of trees at a particular moment. Because I thought I saw history in there...I sensed meaning in its reflection of this place.

For Chiara in particular, visiting and exploring a region like Coahoma County with large format equipment is a task ripe with challenges. His cameras are hand-built, massive and cumbersome. They require a level of physical exertion to transport, maneuver and operate that is rarely attempted by contemporary photographers of the digital age. For the Coahoma County work Chiara utilized two different cameras to produce over 100 photographs at 34 x 28.25 inches and 50 x 53 inches. His process, which involves using Ilfochrome paper, allows him to record an image directly onto the photographic material. The rich quality of the Mississippi earth with subtle notes of local history is rendered in exquisite detail by this uncommon practice. The resulting prints retain poetic traces of noise and residue from the photographic event and the final images are haunting, lush, and characterized by an exceptional luminosity consistent with the quality of light Chiara is intent on capturing.

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John Chiara earned a BFA in photography from the University of Utah in Salt Lake City and an M.F.A. in photography from the California College of the arts in 2004. In 2011 the Pilara Foundation commissioned the artist's *Bridge Project* for their permanent collection and it was included in the exhibition *HERE* at Pier 24 Photography. He has been included in group and solo exhibitions nationally and abroad. The artist is currently featured in *Light, Paper, Process: Reinventing Photography*, which opened at the Getty Museum on 14 April 2015 and is on view until 5 September 2015. His work is now part of their permanent collection. John's first book, *Coahoma County, Mississippi*, a chronicle of this work published by ROSEGALLERY, is now available.

Image: *Delta at First South*, 2014