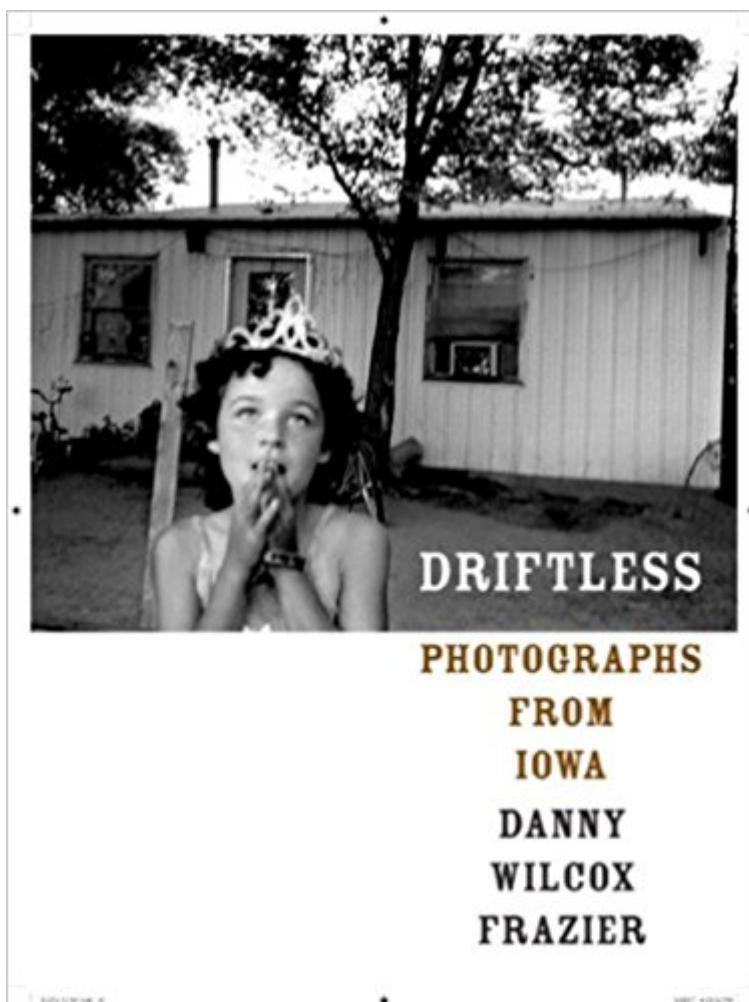


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Driftless: Photographs From Iowa (Center For Documentary Studies/Honickman First Book Prize In Photography)



Synopsis

Winner of the third biennial Center for Documentary Studies/Honickman First Book Prize

Robert Frank, Prize Judge

In *Driftless*, Danny Wilcox Frazier's dramatic black-and-white photographs portray a changing Midwest of vanishing towns and transformed landscapes. As rural economies fail, people, resources, and services are migrating to the coasts and cities, as though the heart of America were being emptied. Frazier's arresting photographs take us into Iowa's abandoned places and illuminate the lives of those people who stay behind and continue to live there: young people at leisure, fishermen on the Mississippi, veterans on Memorial Day, Amish women playing cards, as well as more recent arrivals: Lubavitcher Hasidic Jews at prayer, Latinos at work in the fields. Frazier's camera finds these newcomers while it also captures activities that seemingly have gone on forever: harvesting and hunting, celebrating and socializing, praying and surviving. This collection of photographs is a portrait of contemporary rural Iowa, but it is also more than that. It shows what is happening in many rural and out-of-the-way communities all over the United States, where people find ways to get by in the wake of closing factories and the demise of family farms. Taken by a true insider who has lived in Iowa his entire life, Frazier's photographs are rich in emotion and give expression to the hopes and desires of the people who remain, whose needs and wants are complicated by the economic realities remaking rural America. Poetic and dark but illuminated with flashes of insight, Frazier's stunning images evoke the brilliance of Robert Frank's *The Americans*. To view an image gallery, [click here](#).

Book Information

Series: Center for Documentary Studies/Honickman First Book Prize in Photography

Hardcover: 120 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books; 1st printing edition (November 8, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 082234145X

ISBN-13: 978-0822341451

Product Dimensions: 9.6 x 0.6 x 12.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds ([View shipping rates and policies](#))

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #866,793 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 in Books > Travel > United States > Iowa #977 in Books > Arts & Photography > Photography & Video > Collections,

Customer Reviews

Ã¢ "Driftless is FrazierÃ¢ 's document about rural Iowa. His home. . . . Years of working, walking, photographing, carefully making notes, names, places. . . . Inhabitants: Farmers, Migrant Workers, their families, Hunters, Churches, Trailers, Storms, Open Fields, Sunday Night. . . . Passionate photographs without sentimentality. His work reaches out: let me tell your story, it is important. FrazierÃ¢ 's work will surviveÃ¢ "his book will be the foundation for more to come. . . .Ã¢ "Ã¢ " Robert Frank, prize judge“I wanted to explore the lives of the people who stay, who are casualties of the growing economic divide that separates America’s rural and metropolitan classes. Having lived in Iowa all my life, these forgotten communities are part of my own history.”—Danny Wilcox Frazier

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Driftless: Photographs from Iowafantastic book, great illustrations, excellent quality.the photographs them selfs are powerful yet simple and alive.big prints.over all is a nice book to look at

I viewed this entire portfolio at a web site provided by the Duke University. Most of the photographs are dramatic and vibrant. Often, the images show some odd structure in the foreground with a cluster of people in the background. Typically, the photographs show the lower classes, but a few of the images depict well-dressed people practicing their religion, or engaging in a civic activity. And a few of the images do not have any people and instead disclose the desolate, flat emptiness that is typical of the middle west. Some of the images are as follows:(1) Migrant workers tossing watermelons on wagon;(2) A bull rider with incredible muscles walking near a stack of cut logs;(3) A

slaughterhouse;(4) A graveyard;(5) A man with a pistol shooting bottles;(6) A clothesline with wind-blown towels and, in the center background between the towels, a woman entering her trailer home. The woman assumes an unusual and unique posture, as she climbs some steps.(7) A group of deer hunters toting rifles, milling around at the entrance to a cow pastur;, with some cows in the background; and(8) A wedding party on a parade float.Nearly all of the photographs are in sharp focus. Occasionally, we find a sharp-focus picture with a blurry object, such as a dog, in the close-foreground. The technique of taking a photo of a typical subject (perhaps 5 feet away from the lens) with a large, blurry object located very close to the lens (about ten inches from the camera) is not a rare technique. I use this same technique for my own photography at children's birthday parties and children's Halloween parties.The images in DRIFTLESS fit well into an established genre. Other examples of this genre include:(1) IN THE AMERICAN WEST (1996) by Richard Avedon;(2) PHOTOGRAPHS FROM ONE YEAR (1983) by Nicholas Nixon;(3) SOCIAL GRACES (1984) by Larry Fink;(4) APPALACHIAN PORTRAITS (1993) by Shelby Lee Adams; and(5) GRIMM STREET (2005) by Mark Cohen.I am a great admirer of the first four of these books.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM ONE YEAR by Nicholas Nixon is one of my favorite photography books of all time. IN THE AMERICAN WEST is distinguished in that the actual photographic prints are about 5 feet tall. I saw an exhibit of IN THE AMERICAN WEST in the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C. APPALACHIAN PORTRAITS is excellent in terms of composition, uniqueness, and image quality, but some of the images in APPALACHIAN PORTRAITS are so bizarre that a typical person would find no solace in looking at them (we find snake handlers, and hillbillies looking like escapees from a mental institution). But I do not care for GRIMM STREET. I found only two or three of the images in GRIMM STREET to be interesting. Most of the photographs in GRIMM STREET are unbearably blurry and grainy. I tossed GRIMM STREET into the garbage.To conclude,

DRIFTLESS:PHOTOGRAPHS FROM IOWA features sharp-focus images, with excellent contrast (ranging from bright whites to jet blacks), and plenty of variety. Variety takes the form of inhabitants of trailer homes, hunters toting rifles, tawdry scenes in taverns, and straightforward landscapes. My thumbnail descriptions of the photographs do not do justice to the photos. The watermelon tossing photograph, is a once-in-a-lifetime photograph, that will likely be the envy of most street photographers.

The idea has merit: to capture the feel of a changing Iowa, with the relentless agri business taking over the individual farms, small towns built up over decades on many of the State's crossroads now disappearing, their inhabitants, having either worked on the land or in local industries but now

drifting away. This is an opportunity for a cracking photo story. What I see in these pages, though is an aimless series of poorly cropped and framed photos, frequently with fuzzy shapes and just far too many lopsided horizons and uprights. Oddly, very few seem to be (visually) unique to Iowa, they could just as easily have been taken in other Plains' states. For this kind of reportage style you have to go back to the FSA photos of the Thirties and there is a book devoted to the State: "Unknown Iowa: Farm Security photos, 1936-1941." Unfortunately it was very poorly produced by a Kalona, Iowa, printer in 1977. However the sixty-seven photos by Lee, Rothstein, Vachon and Post Wolcott beautifully capture the feel of the people and the land. They clearly have a sense of place and tell a story which I felt was more or less missing from Frazier's contemporary look at Iowa because his photos are too personal and subjective (and I wonder if he takes them quickly, too). The book is reasonably looking production with the eighty photos printed as 175 screen duotones on an excellent matt art paper. Unusually the book was printed in Britain rather than the US or China. The publisher thinks a Foreword by Robert Frank might give the publication some credence but he writes less than 130 words. Perhaps more relevant would have been some observations from Danny Frazier. >>>LOOK INSIDE THE BOOK by clicking 'customer images' under the cover.

They are depressing pictures. definitely if you were to take color photos in the spring and summer there would be a much different mood. it conveys sadness for a corner of the world which seems to be slowly dying away. the pictures really got at the core of what it means to be iowan, the snow and cold that you just deal with, the openness-- land that goes on forever with nothing hidden, the partying and drinking on one hand and the amish on the other, the humility and lack of pretense of the people.

Danny Wilcox Frazier's book of photographs, *Driftless*, is just that. The reportage/documentary style body of images is an aimless collection of photographs tethered together by the vague theme of "Iowa." Some are excellent, many are poor. There are many pictures that capture an utterly indecisive moment, causing one to wonder what its purpose in the book is. Nothing in the volume totally blew me away. Furthermore, the quality of the printing feels flimsy and the layout, with a combination of full bleed two-page spreads and smaller pictures vertically off-set on opposite pages, leaves a lot to be desired.

The sugar-coated, romanticized, or one dimensional view of "Middle-America" would have us believe that Iowa is only a land of covered bridges, fields of dreams, or over weight mall moms

casting their red state ballots. But the world where Danny Wilcox Frazier lives is the real deal, and he explores it deeply with his camera in ways that are never sentimental and trite or judgemental and cruel. He finds stunning beauty and intrigue in the daily lives of real Iowans around him. This is the most powerful collection of photography released in 2007.

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