

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

Three shows at Griffin Museum of Photography

By Mark Feeney | GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 24, 2013



Mary Beth Meehan, “Untitled” (young boxer).

Life in Burkina Faso, the changing face of Brockton, and coping with multiple sclerosis would seem to have little in common. One of the rewards of the three shows currently at the Griffin Museum of Photography is that despite being so different in subject they share a common spirit. In a way that’s never sentimental or manipulative, David Pace’s

“Burkina Faso: Night and Day,” Mary Beth Meehan’s “City of Champions,” and Patricia Lay-Dorsey’s “Falling Into Place” are matter-of-factly life-affirming — and casualness makes the affirmation all the more affecting. The shows run through March 3.

Burkina Faso is in west central Africa. Pace first went to a village there, Bereba, in 2007. He goes back every fall. “I have become a participant in the life of the village,” he says, “rather than an observer.” You can see the lively, loving results of that participation in the nearly 60 color photographs that make up “Burkina Faso: Night and Day.”

As the subtitle indicates, Pace offers a kind of visual duet. Half of the show consists of pictures of weekly Friday night dances in Bereba. The rest, taken in daylight, show the countryside and

people at work there, especially in quarries. The dynamism of the dancers finds a counterweight in the solidity of the quarries. Their carved-out sides have a rigorous, geometric beauty. Even more striking is the sight of quarry trees. Local custom is to dig around trees rather than cut them down. So there the trees stand, looking at once majestic and lonely, marooned on red-clay plinths.



David Pace, “Untitled” (dancers).

Meehan didn’t have to worry about losing observer status: She’s a Brockton native. Meehan, who’ll be giving a gallery talk at the Griffin on March 2, began taking the photographs in “City of Champions” in 2006. Combining celebration and tough-mindedness, the series is, in her words, “meant to push past headline, nostalgia, and stereotype and humanize this changing place.”

Meehan doesn’t intend her title at all ironically. The city she shows may have seen better days but it’s hanging in there, as champions do — and transforming itself in the process. A place that was once populated by immigrants seeking a better life still is. It’s just that the immigrants now come from different countries.



Patricia Lay-Dorsey, “Untitled.”

The show includes 15 pictures. Neither framed nor matted, they're big (24 inches by 30 inches) and in color. The effect is direct and unmediated. The people shown — among them a young boxer, a very blond young mother holding a mocha-skinned child, people at a pool party with Fourth of July bunting, members of the Brockton High marching band — are as varied, and vivid, as their city.

Lay-Dorsey's "Falling Into Place" consists of 14 color photographs. Self-portraits, they show Lay-Dorsey brushing her teeth, playing bongos, on her motorized scooter, in the tub, on the floor. She ends up on the floor with some regularity, as she notes in an accompanying audio presentation, because of her multiple sclerosis. She takes the self-portraits using a remote-control shutter release and timer. "My life is not tragic," she says. "It's just different." Yes, it is different, as living in Burkina Faso or Brockton is different, and — this perhaps should go without saying — every bit as interesting.

BURKINA FASO: Night and Day

Photographs by David Pace

CITY OF CHAMPIONS:

Photographs by Mary Beth Meehan

FALLING INTO PLACE

Photographs by Patricia Lay-Dorsey

Griffin Museum of Photography,

67 Shore Road, Winchester, through March 3,

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