

The Unseen America

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Gibbs senior high school prom, Saint Petersburg, Fla., 1986

Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City features the unnoticed memories of America photographed by Mary Ellen Mark



Russell, Kansas, 1996

Mary Ellen Mark holds a special place in American photography. Among women, it's easy to see her as a bridge between the grit and absurdity of Diane Arbus and the high-fashion reportage of Annie Leibovitz. She often photographed at the margins of society: rundown motels, KKK rallies and trailer parks. Her version of America is easily ignored except under her outrageous gaze.

Mark died in May 2015 at the age of 75. Much of Mark's photo reportage occurred at the coasts (notably New York City and Washington state). However, the midwest appeared in many of her books and projects, including many images in her book "American Odyssey." From this book and to celebrate Mark's life, one Kansas City curator gathered prints from local collectors for public display.

"I grew up in rural Kansas and I can remember idolizing Mary Ellen Mark," said Rachid Emerson, a curator at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. "As a child, I saw a particular image she shot of a swimming pool in my hometown of Russell. That image startled me because it was so wonderful and so close to home."

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art will host the show Emerson curated. "Her Mark on Fly-Over Country," is a limited-run exhibition of Mark's photographs running from Dec. 14 through Dec. 21 in the Shuttlecock Gallery. The exhibition is free but suggests a \$5-per-person donation to the museum. The hours for the exhibition are 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.



Minnie Mouse, Parma Mall, Ohio, 1997



Halloween Dog Event, New York, 2000