



## COLORADO SPRINGS

**Stephen Batura:**

**“A Reservoir of Occurrences”**

**at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center**

The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center is second only to the Denver Art Museum as the place to find important shows in Colorado. Since 2008 when Blake Milteer came on board there as curator and director of the exhibition program, he has presided over a series of solos highlighting the accomplishments of both historic and contemporary Colorado artists. Stephen Batura’s “A Reservoir of Occurrences” is the latest, though sadly it also marks Milteer’s swan song, as he’s leaving the CSFAC. Batura, who lives in Denver, is a conceptual realist who uses found imagery to serve as ad hoc studies for his paintings, drawings, and photos. It was 15 years ago that Batura came across amateur photographer Charles Lillybridge. Nearly 2000 photos by Lillybridge had wound up in the collection of History Colorado and seeing them online, Batura was struck by the sincerity and obsessiveness of the effort. Although he did not view the photos as particularly accomplished, Batura appropriated the subjects in them anyway, and in the process improved on Lillybridge’s compositions. Also, referencing Lillybridge’s use of black and white, Batura reduced his own palette to a few shades for each, with these limited color-sets differing in different paintings. Despite the sources of Batura’s paintings being photos, his style is anything but photo-realist; instead he embraces an expressionist handling of the pigments.

The show fills several galleries and has a notable exhibition design providing, in the initial space, a shorthand guide to Lillybridge’s—and thus Batura’s—favorite topics. There’s a modest house, a picnic, and a landscape. These subjects are humble, yet Batura converts them into

heroic statements, blowing up their size, with many of the included works being all but murals. The most over-the-top of these is *Stream*, or at least nine of the 17 panels that comprise the ambitious piece. Each panel depicts a riverbank view and is exaggeratedly horizontal, mimicking the river itself, with major shifts in color as the viewer proceeds from one panel to the next. Featuring over 60 of Batura’s Lillybridge-based pieces, “A Reservoir of Occurrences” offers just a taste of what the artist has been doing over the years, with the full complement of relevant material spanning over a hundred paintings, and a thousand works on paper. Batura sees this show as the finale for the project since he intends to move on in a different direction from now on.

—MICHAEL PAGLIA

“RIVERSIDE,” 2003, **Stephen Batura**

CASEIN, ACRYLIC ON WOOD

PHOTO: COURTESY THE ARTIST