

i n c o n v e r s a t i o n

ANNE WILKES TUCKER & DAVE ANDERSON

Anne Wilkes Tucker: You recently shot an assignment on the murder of Emmett Tillⁱ. How do you feel that project relates to *Rough Beauty*?

Dave Anderson: Well I guess that at first glance some people may view a project set in Vidorⁱⁱ as a race-related thing. There's the obvious Klan history, but then there's also the idea of exploring a particularly white area – an area known for its 'whiteness,' I suppose. The Till story was the complete opposite, it was all about blackness and hate – what it meant, and how white society responded to it. *Rough Beauty* is about whiteness but it's not about hate. I certainly heard about the town because of its racial history—but the project that evolved didn't center on it at all.

AWT: I think that's the point; the race issue attracted you to Vidor, but race isn't what I get from the pictures. In both these stories, one in Mississippi and the other in Texas, you were going in as a stranger. You're not a Southerner. You weren't born and raised in this area. So what personal skills do you think you have that allowed you to do both stories?

DA: I think there are two things. One is that when I'm involving people, I'm pretty easy going and don't seem to ruffle feathers. Most importantly, I'm fascinated by other people's lives. I really want to hear about you, your parents, your brothers, your sisters, where they went, why they went there. And then I want to hear about your relatives, what country you came from, what State, whether you were born in the North, whether your parents were Southern... I'm fascinated by all of it. I love that whole concoction that creates a person – the place, the outlook, the experience, the way they approach life. It's always unique. You can see very strong influences that make people similar, but there are always these very interesting undercurrents. I think the most basic thing is that people sense that I'm interested in them because of who they are, and that there isn't much they can say that would cause me to reject them, unless they become belligerent or something.

AWT: Did that ever happen?

DA: No—well, only once. At least, there was only one time that I was a little nervous. There was a woman on her front lawn – young, maybe early twenties. She was sort of pretty, and I thought she was an interesting subject. I asked if I could photograph and she said okay. Then her boyfriend came out. He was immediately jealous and defensive – he tried to convince her not to have her photo taken, and then he tried to chase me off. She stood her ground, though, and I took the photos while he was yelling after me. Other times, I've approached people who didn't do anything violent, but who made it perfectly

clear that I wasn't welcome – looking at me as if to tell me to back off. When someone is looking at you in a particular way, you can tell.

AWT: How do you respond to that?

DA: I always try to be respectful about it and I tell people why I'm there. Like yesterday there was this kind of really chaotic scene in someone's yard. I was photographing from the road because you can't go on people's property without them being there. Then this woman came out and asked me what I was doing. I told her I was taking a picture of her no trespassing sign.

AWT: Where?

DA: This was in Vidor, I've been there the last three days. I usually tell me them why I'm there, but I'm not always absolute about that. There was one place, for instance, where I noticed a burned-out cross – clearly a Klan property. I wouldn't have told those people I'd come over because I heard they were Klan. But that's an extreme example.

The thing is, I rarely set out to do portraits. It's always an object in the yard that draws my interest. For every person that has a 'No Trespassing' sign, someone else has a dog, or a doll lying on the ground, or a piece of folk art that I think is beautiful. So usually I'll get out of my car and I'll be looking at something from the road or from right off the yard. If it looks like no one is around, I'll start snapping. But if someone's around, I'll go knock on the door to ask permission. Often a neighbor will come out and start asking what I'm doing, and I'll just say what drew my attention – maybe just a tin can with flowers coming out of it that I thought was beautiful.

AWT: So how does the interaction go?

DA: What happens is, they'll say "You want to take a *picture* of that?" At first they're edgy, and then it becomes "why do you want to take a picture of *that*?" or "you want to take a picture of *me*? Why? I'm not beautiful." And I'll say they look great. Then it's "be my guest, whatever" and that's how it goes.

Like recently I met some good ol' boys—a dad and his son—who had all these tattoos. They were macho guys, just drinking beer, and I said, "Well, you guys look like you just got off work and deserved a beer," and that I thought it was kind of a cool scene and could I take a picture. The dad was like, "Yeah, take a picture of my son's tattoos." And so the dad is standing there watching his son pose for me, pointing to all the tattoos on his back. I don't try to pose them and so I really don't know what's going to happen – but something good usually does. So I guess an openness and genuine interest in their lives shows that I have respect for them, and I think they can tell.

AWT: That's the first contact. Do you revisit some of your subjects?

DA: Yes

AWT: Do you bring them photographs from the first time?

DA: Yes. It's interesting, though. My best photographs are always the first ones, when we don't know each other. But yes I do bring them copies. But Vidor is so serpentine; it can be really hard to find a place again. In my car I have a box full of photos, some of which have been there for a year because I couldn't find a place again. Now, though, I try to remember to take down addresses so I can mail the photos. I've gotten most of the pictures out to people.

AWT: For you, what's the most significant part of this blend of object and portrait in building a story?

DA: I like integrating objects and portraits because objects always communicate something about the people that own them. This is especially the case in a poor town where so many things are hand-made. All of the non-portrait pictures, except one or two landscape images, are about these kinds of objects. One that keeps coming to mind is 'Deer Stand'. I responded to that for lots of reasons. For one thing, graphically, it resembles a face. And, of course, it's hand-made. Buying hunting gear is not that expensive – you can buy a prefab deer stand that's not going to kill you financially even if you're low-income – yet they made this. It's very rudimentary and it's in this beautiful, eerie landscape. Where there's poverty there's usually this sort of hand-made element – doing whatever you can with whatever you've got. And that speaks of a kind of resilience and determination that really resonates with me.

AWT: How different is it to the environment you grew up in?

DA: I grew up in East Lansing, Michigan, an upper-middle-class college town. I lived in a nice house with nice things – but not extravagant. My parents were well educated, very political, and Quaker. Mom grew up in Scarsdale, New York, a well-to-do town, and came from a family of intellectuals. Her father was an inventor, a biochemist. Dad grew up on a farm in Sparta, Michigan and I grew up in East Lansing, close to the farm, and spent a lot of time there in the summer. It was a fruit farm. Dad's family owned it. They weren't rich or anything, but they employed people. There were farm workers living in tenement style housing, probably with no running water, and definitely without health care. One hundred feet to the back of the farmhouse my dad grew up in were a pair of one-room buildings. I guess they had electricity, they must have... but they were ramshackle. This old Indian man named George lived in one of them, and he was very nice, though he was a drunk. And there were seasonal migrant workers who lived in the other building.

AWT: That part of our backgrounds is so similar. We were the in-town family but all the cousins lived on the farms – and the people that lived in the houses were black, not Indian and migrant. They were shotgun houses. I knew these people well, and they're very important in terms of who I am today.

DA: You probably had more interaction with them. I was young. I only kind of knew George. Sounds like you knew them better. The migrants, I never knew their names, I

would just see them and wave to them. But that scene, that lifestyle, I'll never forget it. You always wonder how you'd face challenges if you were faced with different circumstances. I don't want to sound patronizing, nor would I want to romanticize poverty; but somehow, when I'm around people who live much closer to the bone than I ever had to, it gives me a little faith. Seeing how people can just keep on going no matter what kind of financial stress or trauma, seeing how they just have to make it work. Even with a lack of resources, people can lead really interesting and good lives.

AWT: I think it's two-fold. A woman who raised me was blind, and she developed great senses. She could sort blue, black, and brown socks by the feel of the dye on the cloth. So there was this disabusement of what a handicap was. But how can poverty be romanticized? I didn't disrespect it, but I did not romanticize it. I have never had any delusions, either to demonize or romanticize. They were real people. Some were happy, some miserable, some were alcoholics, but it made them real, it gave me that exposure. I had exposure to real wealth and I had exposure to no wealth too.

DA: That gives you a perspective that cannot be taught. It's invaluable to have some sense of how people live and how they make it. I think it's essential.

AWT: When somebody looks at your portraits, what do you want to happen? Besides for them to say they're fabulous?

DA: I want to surprise people. Part of why I enjoy this has to do with my background. I grew up in Michigan, went to Westtown, a Quaker high school in Philadelphia and then to Oberlin College in Ohio. Even though it's in the Midwest, Oberlin is essentially an Eastern school with a lot of people from New York. Then I lived in D.C. and then in New York City. From high school on I was constantly exposed to all these people that were basically well-to-do Easterners and I was a Midwestern guy from Michigan. It was sort of exotic to them. They would say "Michigan, what's that all about?" I would tell them that my daddy worked on the assembly line and that my mama was a secretary, just to mess with them. I even convinced someone once that we had outhouses.

I was always very sensitive to that pervasive mentality that if it wasn't New York or one of its "suburbs" -- i.e. Los Angeles or Washington -- then there probably wasn't going to be anything or anyone of note from there. It was all about these big cities and everything in between was at best quaint and at worst completely backward. Of course pretty much anywhere you go people think they do it best and everyone else is kind of entertaining and a little bit off, but this kind of small-mindedness has always made me crazy. Especially when it comes from people who have actually moved from areas like mine and have taken to behaving as though they've been big city people their whole lives. This really bothers me. I just think: what is *wrong* with you -- what's interesting about you is that you come from there and not that you are here now.

So to get back to your original question and my comment about surprise, I just love tweaking that provincial mindset by showing beauty where people aren't expecting any. There's nothing better than messing with people's preconceptions. Especially when

it's about a place that everyone—even people from only five miles away—tends to revile. Maybe that's rambling...

AWT: Not at all. I've always approached it differently, but I am laughing. For one thing, I didn't consciously lose my accent, but I know that when I first went to New York, people thought I was stupid; I just opened my mouth and people assumed I was stupid. There was never a moment when I consciously said to myself that I would lose my Southern accent, it wasn't even a moment of shame. I never denied I was from the South but it was a nuisance. It just led to all these conversations that I got tired of having, about race and about all kinds of things. That's one thing. The other was when the Bill Eggleston show was at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)ⁱⁱⁱ and I was standing looking at this picture of a cotton field and thinking about all those summers when I went around with my uncle just having a good old nostalgic time, and there were these two Upper East Side ladies next to me who looked at the picture and said, "Oh, this is so exotic!" That was home to me. If I'd walked around New York and said this is so exotic they would say their home cannot be exotic, but my home is, and that's big. So I totally understand your examples of why you chose Vidor and how it links to who you are and where you were raised.

DA: My dad teaches history now. He has this assignment he gives students called "A Personal Economic History." They have to go and write an economic history of their family, researching an element of one part of their family, interview relatives and write about it. Dad is always telling me their stories and they're fascinating. He teaches at Michigan State, the more blue collar state school in Michigan, and he gets kids whose grandparents were in sit-down strikes, or who built the railroad or worked in WWII factories. Dad has always idealized the spirit of blue collar labor, and even though we weren't blue collar, he talks about it rapturously. So in my mind, someone like Ray Wilson, with all the problems he has, is still a guy who has a tremendous resilience and inventiveness. These places and people don't get credit for having real ingenuity, but it's there to see, certainly in some of the photos I shot down there after Hurricane Rita.

AWT: Was Vidor affected by Hurricane Rita?

DA: Terribly. Other than Port Arthur (Texas) and a couple of towns in Louisiana, it was the hardest hit. A lot of the town hasn't come back. There's destruction everywhere. I came across this family. I don't know where the parents were, or if they even lived with them – but it was a bunch of kids seemingly on their own, the oldest was 23 or 24, a teenage girl, a baby who was 2 or 3 and a couple of other kids. I was talking to them and taking pictures and I noticed that the hood of the car was popped and there was this cable coming out of it, running into the living room. It was burning hot outside; mosquitoes everywhere. This kid had figured out how to extract the fan from the car engine. He had pulled it out, brought it into the house, bungeed it to the rocking chair, propped up the rocking chair on books and then run a jumper cable from the fan to the car battery. They'd pulled all their mattresses out of the bedrooms into the living room and slept with a fan on them. They had to go out in the middle of the night and recharge the battery, but they were all so tired and exhausted that they slept through and killed the battery. To me

that was Vidor, all the stress and all the ingenuity and all the determination. The sisters thought he was crazy. He thought it was funny and knew it was a wacky thing to do, but it was great. To me that's a perfect example of what the town is like. People say it is the best place to have your car break down because they can fix anything in Vidor.

AWT: Like Cuba.

DA: Yes, exactly. And someone has got a truck to haul it up on, someone else is a mechanic and can fix this, nothing is going to stop you. Of course, many would say "Unless you're black."

* * *

AWT: In printing "BBQ Queen" did you manipulate it?

DA: A little, as I do with a lot of pictures, I let the background go dark and dodged the subject in.

AWT: Why?

DA: Because that's what the photo is about for me, the subject. It varies. Sometimes the background is too busy... I really like a simplified photograph. I like the background to drop unless the photo is about the background, or it's a major player.

AWT: Where did you pick that up?

DA: Keith Carter taught me how to do that.

AWT: Why did you choose Keith?

DA: When I quit my job to pursue photography, my idea was to get a car, hit the road, photograph the country and try to apprentice myself with photographers that I really liked. I focused on Sally Mann and Keith. I came across Keith's work in the midst of my "photo attack" or whatever it was that consumed my life all of a sudden. I was going to every gallery I could and I showed up at the Howard Greenberg Gallery^{iv} in Manhattan and pretended I was a collector. I had them show me everything they had. Then I noticed an image through a window to a closed, darkened office. I couldn't see it very well but what I could make out was this Latino-looking girl wrapped partially in a flag. It was so beautiful, I had them pull it out. It turned out to be a Keith Carter photograph. I then had them go through the stacks and it was like photo after photo, and I thought, Okay, this guy is touching something that is significant to me. I responded to the romantic imagery, but more important was the humanity. There is humor and humanity in so many of his pictures...

AWT: After you got the car, did you go to Sally's or Keith's first?

DA: In the end, I never even contacted her. I heard that Keith was a really good teacher and saw that he was teaching a workshop – but that was \$3,500 bucks. Then I Googled him and got his number and called him up. Pat [Carter] answered. I said I'd really like to go down there and did Keith need an assistant. I'm sure they thought I was nuts – actually, they told me later they did think I was nuts. She said he didn't need anyone, but that he taught at the local school. So I looked into that. It would cost \$1,300 bucks for an entire semester there and it would be in Texas, somewhere I'd never spent time. I thought that sounded like a really good deal—interesting, and cheaper.

Before starting I did a workshop with Michael Kenna. I'd also been in contact with Susan Spiritus^v previous to all this because her daughter and I had worked together at the White House – so Susan was giving me advice and she set me up with George Tice.

AWT: Did you learn anything from George Tice. Was it useful in some way?

DA: It was good to be in the darkroom and see how he printed. George is a master printer and it was interesting to see how intuitive he was. I always thought that a perfect print needed a very exact set of test strips. But he would do a contact strip to figure out the length of the exposure and then a single one of the whole print at that exposure, double check it, then see where the highlights were. Even if the exposure turned out to be off, he would just look at it and say that one is 15 seconds. He might have just done 9 or 11 seconds, then he would just say, that's 15 seconds. Get the right burning tool and expose it, burn it in... and, yep, got it. But it also made me confident that I didn't have to follow every rule and do every last thing, that I could just intuit my photographs and my printing. So now I don't use test strips or anything. My personal challenge is to guess the exact exposure just by looking at the light on the paper holder, and I'm pretty good at it, I usually have to make adjustments but... And I guess the more basic things about being fastidious, about not mixing, not letting your hands touch anything. So there is a preservational quality to it. But his style of printing is real straight and that's not the kind of printing that fires me up. I like the more cinematic kind of stuff.

AWT: Let's talk about Kenna

DA: Before I photographed I collected a little bit. After I left the Clinton White House^{vi}, I went to work for MTV and was on this bus tour of the country called the "MTV Choose or Lose Bus" where we covered the 1996 election and encouraged, and registered, kids to vote. We went through Santa Fe and I stopped off at the Andrew Smith Gallery. I came across a Michael Kenna photograph that I fell in love with, *One Hundred and Four Birds, Prague*. I tried to bargain them down on the price. They wouldn't, and I left town without buying it. We went back a couple of months later. They still had it and again I tried to bargain them down, but they wouldn't budge. In the end, as we were driving out of town, I called them up and bought it. Then I got the Kenna retrospective book as a birthday present. After that I hardly got any more photographs, I wasn't really going to galleries. Maybe four years later I went to a big photo exhibition at the Jacob Javits Center and was not that impressed with the contemporary work that I saw.

Then my mom was ill and died. After that I finally came back to New York. I got this mailing from the *International Center for Photography* (ICP)^{vii} – I must have gone to an exhibition or something – and in the mailing there was a course catalogue. I started flipping through and there was a workshop with Michael Kenna. And I thought, “Well this is some kind of message from God, and I better sign up.” So I did. But I knew I didn’t want to be some yahoo who just shows up with a camera, so I signed up for *Photo I* at ICP in advance of the workshop. I’d never taken a black-and-white photograph before. This was February of ’03 when I started. After about three weeks I was completely obsessed. I couldn’t stop photographing, I was going into work late, leaving early and printing all weekend long.

I knew a couple of people, a couple of collectors and a photojournalist who was really accomplished, and I started showing them my work, and they encouraged me. Within a month of starting *Photo I*, I had already decided I was going to quit my job and pursue photography. I talked to a few people and they all said that I was completely out of my gourd – if someone came up to me and said the same thing now, I’d probably give them the same advice – but I was hell bent on it.

And so I took *Photo I*, then *Photo II* and then I went to Maine and took a workshop on composition with a wonderful photographer named Cig Harvey. Then I did that printing with Tice for three weeks, before going to France for the Michael Kenna workshop. I drove him crazy. He was there to take some pictures, hang out, drink wine, and I was on a mission from God to become a photographer. I was keyed-up. He’s a pretty Zen guy and I was driving him nuts. I would be walking up to him with a contact sheet and you could see his face fall—there goes his mellow afternoon. Sometimes he would just walk away. I think he probably didn’t like me much by the end of the workshop. His wife and I got along very well though and he and I did too, actually, just as long as I wasn’t hounding him to look at contact sheets.

Before going to France, I’d found out about Keith and began a correspondence with him. Then I did an interview with the Chair of the Art Department at Lamar and got accepted, drove down and enrolled. I got back from France, was in New York for a week, packed up my stuff, drove to Texas and was there a week later. And on my way down I stopped outside Memphis and a guy told me about Vidor and that’s how I first heard about the town.

AWT: So how long after you got to Keith’s did you start going to Vidor? What year was this?

DA: 2003. About two days out from Beaumont, I stopped by the road to take pictures of these crazy sculptures that were being built on the side of this hill. There was a guy who had a satellite dish installation company, and he was making sculptures out of his dishes in the form of space cowboys and rocket ships. I started photographing, of course. His Daisy Duke-looking daughter came out on a three-wheeler and started talking to me. Then he came at me like I was trying to make off with her, even though I was just taking pictures of his sculpture, and I sort of soothed him and we got talking. He mentioned that he was from Texas and I told him I was moving down to Beaumont. He said “Beaumont, eh? ‘Lot of black people there.” I said, “Oh?” He said, “You might want to look at Vidor. No black people there. Now I’m not saying that they run ‘em off, but they got a real

active Klan.” So then I got to Beaumont and I was over at Keith’s for coffee and I said that there was this town I kept hearing about and I couldn’t remember how to pronounce it. He said that he didn’t think that I’d want to spend much time there. Then I started asking other people and everyone had a very strong reaction. Keith’s was the mildest.

AWT: Had it happened yet?

DA: You mean the dragging?

AWT: Yeah.

DA: Everyone thinks that was in Vidor, but it was in Jasper^{viii}. But, yes, it had happened.

AWT: Where are they in relation to each other?

DA: Jasper is about 40-50 miles from Vidor. Did you see the documentary, *The Two Towns of Jasper*? It’s worth watching. They had a white crew to shoot white people in Jasper and a black crew shoot black people. Then they edited it into a single movie to show the situation of the town after the dragging.

AWT: So what got you to Vidor that first time?

DA: Well I enrolled in classes. I signed up for everything that Keith offered because I wanted to be exposed to everything— so I took *Photo I* again. His first assignment is, he tells everyone to write down a secret they’ve never told anybody, then he throws it in a hat and passes the hat around. You have to pick one out and shoot somebody else’s secret. The one I got looked like a girl’s handwriting, and she had written this beautiful thing. It read, ‘I’m more scared than I look.’ It really struck me. Then that night, I was talking with someone on the phone about that girl’s secret and also about Vidor. I wish I could take credit, but my friend said, “Well there’s your excuse: Go to Vidor.” So I got in the car the next morning and went. And that’s the only assignment I ever did for Keith. I started with Vidor and never stopped. I didn’t do anything else he assigned. But I kept shooting.

AWT: Diane Arbus, one of the first assignments she gave was to describe something in your life that was important to you that cannot be photographed.

DA: What did she do?

AWT: Well, I only remember other people’s responses. Mine happened at my father’s funeral. It was a moment that I could have photographed, but it wouldn’t have made sense just as a photograph. I remember walking down the church aisle and hearing someone say, “She doesn’t have on gloves.” And to this day I can see my hands against that pattern of the rug at that church. A photograph of that carries none of the explanation. The photograph doesn’t carry the statement.

DA: What did you think?

AWT: It just made me cognizant. I just looked down at my hands and then went on with what I was doing. But Ikko Narahara told a story about while he was waiting for a commercial job in Amsterdam. He was on assignment and he needed to get all these cranes that nest on chimneys. He waited and waited for a bird to fly off the nest, he wanted one in and one flying off.

So finally one of the birds stood up, but he just put his butt out and shat – out of the nest! He could have thought about doing that but it wouldn't be the same photograph. It has nothing to do with the frustration. I don't remember what any of the other comments were.

DA: Did you find the church incident hurtful? It's very poignant.

AWT: Later I found it stupid, but at the time I was just thinking, "criticizing my clothes"? It wasn't like: "Poor Anne, poor kid's father died of a heart attack." It was about my clothes. And I actually remember nothing else from those two days. Hardly anything.

DA: Was it a shock?

AWT: Daddy got up one morning. He said to my mother, "I'm having a heart attack. Call the doctor." The ambulance came. Daddy was a big man. My mother said that he had to walk down the stairs and that she always blamed that for his second heart attack when he got to the hospital – just as they got to the hospital. They had just been up to visit me at school.

DA: My grandparents died in a plane crash. They were both larger-than-life characters. My grandfather invented all of this stuff, my mother idolized him, and she was really close with her mom. She was 28, I think. Pretty young. She was unhappily married, two small children and her husband couldn't understand why she was crying all the time. They were divorced pretty soon after. She remarried later. That shadow of losing her parents was always very obvious to me. Whenever they came up in conversation you could see the emotion wash over her face. This is a memory I have of her that probably started when I was 7 or 8 and that was 15 years or so after they'd died.

AWT: Were you from the first family or the second?

DA: Second. I have two brothers from her first marriage and I'm my Dad's only child. They stayed together my whole life. Another interesting parallel: I was also away at school when Mom got cancer. She had it twice. The first time we thought it might kill her; the second time it did. The first time, I was away at school, so I had that same kind of thing; people coming to get me. I have no memory of who told me. They must have done it right because I'm not traumatized, though I was unhappy at boarding school. And Mom getting cancer didn't help.

I'd talked to her on the phone one night and knew something was wrong. She said she just had the flu and I believed her. But then I found out and I had to go home the next

day. I was in a geometry lesson and of course I couldn't concentrate. There was this girl that I used to write notes to – she was a good friend of mine, I had a secret crush on her, and I thought she was just the greatest thing. She was a little selfish but not terrible, so I sent her a note and asked her how she was doing, and that my mom had cancer and I was going home the next day. So I gave her this note and...no reaction. A few minutes later she handed me a note that said, "Don't talk to me right now, I'm in a bad mood." I never talked with her again.

There was another girl, who I recently got reacquainted with, named Amanda Knowles. Amanda was a different story. She and I were also good friends. Amanda was always shy, though she was very intelligent, very interesting and good-hearted. The last thing I was doing before I left for home was playing volleyball. All of a sudden I spotted Amanda across the court. She saw me and froze. She didn't know what to do. She stopped and you could sort of see her bucking herself up. Then she marched over to me. The net was between us. She looked at me but she didn't know what to say. Then she kind of cocked her head, put out her hand, shook mine and said, "Good luck!" It was such a meaningful thing. The heart was all there. I always think about that.

And then when mom got cancer again and died, that was a very different experience because we all saw it coming, Mom last of all. She knew it was back, but she didn't want to do chemo, she wanted to try all of these alternative treatments. But she never got better. We knew it, but she wouldn't admit that she was dying.

AWT: How old were you?

DA: Right before I started photographing. She died in December 2002.

AWT: Is there a relationship there?

DA: Oh yeah, though I had talked about pursuing photography before she was sick.

AWT: When did you start taking pictures?

DA: Like most people, I always had a camera. I signed up for a photo class in high school but dropped out before taking a roll and never studied it again until 2003. But along the way I always had a camera. In 1990, I was working on a political campaign for Senator Carl Levin, and traveling with him to help with the media. One day, my boss just handed me a camera and told me I was now the "official" campaign photographer. It was simply that there was nobody else to do it. And – no false modesty here -- I rarely shot anything good. One time someone else on the campaign took some instamatic pictures at an event and her shots were clearly so much better than mine. That was pretty deflating. Six years later I was working on the MTV bus and I photographed our events for a feature I did on MTV's website called "Road Notes."

AWT: Like your *Roadside Ghosts* series?

DA: No, this was something different. Basically I would interview people and talk to them about their lives. I would then post a little piece about them with a photo on

mtv.com each time we had an event. It was pretty quick and dirty. But there was a second camera that I was taking pictures with and I was trying to be arty with those.

AWT: So what is *Roadside Ghosts*?

DA: A series of photographs I've taken while I road tripped – mainly around the United States.

AWT: Since when?

DA: Simultaneous with *Rough Beauty*. It started in the middle of 2003. The first image was taken when I was on a boat over to meet George Tice. *Roadside Ghosts* is tinged with memories of my mom – trying to come with grips with it. It's hard to chalk it up to anything specific because there is nothing of mom's in it. There is one image of these clothespins, and the clothespins are from the clothesline that would run behind Mom's head when we would sit outside. She always loved to have our meals out on our back porch whenever we could. Over her shoulder was always the clothesline, so for some reason the clothespins symbolize my mom and my home. So now I have a thing for clothespins.

AWT: If you were to draw a photographic lineage, who would precede you?

DA: Well for portraiture, Julia Margaret Cameron because she was the first one to do a really naturalistic portrait. There are a lot of other greats from that period, too – especially Nadar and Southworth & Hawes. Early 20th century masters like Paul Strand and Mike Disfarmer and then of course the FSA photographers. I particularly love Russell Lee. He was so prolific and covered so much ground. He really did a more beautiful and under-appreciated job than his peers.

AWT: Most unassuming man you will ever meet. Great laugh, a throw back the head laugh.

DA: I don't know a lot about him, but his work is amazing. And, of course, Dorothea Lange portraits blow my mind. Then there's August Sander—everybody always references him, but he's really special. I want to do a Sander in America^{ix}. I really want to repeat that project.

And Walker Evans, not for his portraiture, but for his architectural stuff.... Did I ever tell you my little thing that I am so proud of? My two grandfathers were classmates of famous photographers. It's interesting because it sort of melds the two families in a nice way. On my mom's side the more sort of well-to-do intellectual side of the family, my grandfather was a classmate of Walker Evans at Andover. My grandfather died before I was born so I was never able to ask if he knew him well...

And on my dad's side, my grandfather was a college classmate of Harry Callahan, who I really love. I love the Eleanor portraits and his abstracts and his incredible sense of design. I really care a lot about composition, that's why in some of my images if the background is busy I burn it down.

Then Robert Frank and Richard Avedon. The American West show was the first photo exhibition I ever saw. Of course Diane Arbus too, for her sense of adventure and her willingness to throw herself in these foreign situations and become as much a part of them as she could. I have problems with the way she did portraits, not their quality but for their lack of humanity. I find them kind of cold. Even though she professed real warmth for the people. As for contemporaries, I already mentioned Keith but I have also become completely enamored by Fazal Sheikh – I think he does incredible work for all the right reasons.

AWT: He's also a great quote collector. I read some and there was one that was just... "No one need teach an orphan how to grieve." Kind of appropriate to our conversation. I love that work, but it is tough, tough work.

DA: It is beautiful.

AWT: I know, but it is tough.

DA: Little moments in hard, hard circumstances.

AWT: Let's go back to what it is that you want people to see.

DA: I guess the simplest answer is that I want people to experience beauty where they didn't think they could find it. That's really the simplest way to put it. But, you know, beauty is defined in so many ways.

AWT: You're also pushing the boundaries of beauty. There are certain people who will never see.

DA: But if they only took the time to look – to really look – then they'd find it. It's always there.

An edited transcript of an interview held in January 2006.

Dave Anderson always had a camera nearby, but it wasn't until his thirties that he began to seriously pursue photography. After studying briefly at the International Center for Photography, he was inspired to leave behind a successful career in media and politics to become a full-time photographer. Soon his work was being recognized internationally. In 2005 Rough Beauty was named the winner of the Santa Fe Center for Photography's National Project Competition. Described as 'one of the shooting stars of the American photo scene' by Germany's fotoMAGAZIN, Anderson's work can be found in major public and private collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, the Worcester Art Museum and George Eastman House. Anderson has photographed for Esquire, Stern and ESPN magazines, among others. A native of East Lansing, Michigan, Dave now resides in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Anne Wilkes Tucker is the founding Curator of Photography at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where she has worked since 1976. The museum's collection now includes over 20,000 photographs and the prestigious Manfred Heiting Collection. Tucker has curated over forty exhibitions, including retrospectives for Robert Frank, Ray K. Metzker, Louis Faurer, Richard Misrach and Brassai and the landmark exhibition 'The History of Japanese Photography,' most of which have been accompanied by a publication. Her essays have introduced the debut monographs of photographers from Joel Sternfeld to Alec Soth. She has lectured throughout the U.S., Europe, Asia and Latin America and has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. In 2001, TIME magazine honored her as "America's Best Curator."

ⁱ Emmett Till was a black teen from Chicago who went to Money, Mississippi in the summer of 1955 to visit relatives. Not properly schooled in the ways of the segregated South, Till brazenly whistled at a pretty young white woman. Two nights later her husband and brother-in-law abducted Till, beat him and finally executed the boy before throwing his body in the Tallahatchee River. Days later his mangled body was discovered and transported back to Chicago where his mother insisted on an open casket funeral that was attended by over 50,000 people. The killers were soon let off in a sham trial and no further charges were ever brought against them. Meanwhile, a photograph of Till's pulverized, unrecognizable face circulated widely in the black media and sent shockwaves through the black community. The moment is considered a seminal one in the American civil rights movement. The photo of Till and the events surrounding his lynching were cited by Rosa Parks as a primary reason for her refusal to move to the back of the bus, an act which famously galvanized the American civil rights movement.

ⁱⁱ Vidor, Texas is a small town of slightly over 11,000 in East Texas with a long history of Ku Klux Klan (KKK) activity. The town is predominantly white and fairly poor, though not without small pockets of middle class inhabitants. Many Vidorians work as laborers in construction and the oil & gas industry. The town leadership has taken steps to discourage Klan activity and anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that it no longer acts as a hotbed of Klan organizing, though nearby towns certainly harbor significant Klan populations.

ⁱⁱⁱ MoMA has been home to some of most seminal exhibitions of photography. Its first photographic curator, Edward Steichen, was also a master of the medium and organized the most popular show of photography ever mounted, entitled "The Family of Man." His hand-picked successor, John Szarkowski, mounted a number of landmark exhibitions, including shows by Dorothea Lange (1966), Henri Cartier-Bresson (1968), Brassai (1968), Walker Evans (1971), Diane Arbus (1972), Harry Callahan (1976), William Eggleston (1976), Irving Penn (1984), and Garry Winogrand (1988).

^{iv} Based in New York City, the Howard Greenberg Gallery was founded in 1981.

^v The Susan Spiritus Gallery, Newport Beach, CA has been open for over 30 years.

^{vi} Anderson worked on the 1992 presidential campaign of Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas. After Clinton won, he was hired to work in the White House Office of Media Affairs, where he coordinated television appearances and town hall meetings for President Clinton. He left after three years to manage MTV's "Choose or Lose Bus."

^{vii} The International Center for Photography (ICP) was founded in New York City in 1974 by photographer Cornell Capa with the intent of keeping the legacy of 'Concerned Photography' alive. Now a major museum and educational space, the ICP mounts numerous exhibitions each year and houses an entire school of photography.

^{viii} Jasper, Texas, located 70 miles North of Vidor is home to perhaps the most vicious race-related murder in recent American history. In 1998, James Byrd, Jr, a 49-year-old black man was beaten brutally then dragged along a country road outside of Jasper until his body was completely torn apart. Three men participated in the murder and two of them had ties to white supremacist groups.

^{ix} German photographer August Sander (1876-1964) spent a lifetime attempting to make portraits of every manner of German citizen. As described by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Though it was never fully realized or adequately understood, August Sander's *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*People of the 20th Century*) was intended as a comprehensive photographic index of the German population, classified into seven groups by social "type": the Farmer; the Skilled Tradesman; the Woman; Classes and Professions; the Artists; the City; and the Last People. The uncompromising directness of Sander's incisive portraits continues to influence artists today." (Source: metmuseum.org). Anderson's version of this project would be to document, through naturalistic environmental portraits, a cross-section of Americans living and working at this time of immense cultural and social change.