

# Urbania

by Michael Borek

The title of this series – Urbania – starts from the word "urban," which means "in, relating to, or characteristic of a city or town." However, even though all of these pictures were taken in an urban environment, this definition is just a springboard to the term "Urbania," which I conceive of as "a state of mind that questions the perceived environment."

In these photographs, I try to show that what we see and how we understand what we see are not necessarily the same. Or at least not initially. For example, at first glance, the opening photo of the series seems to be only a picture of something on a wall that reminds the viewer of an eye with rust running down like tears. But upon closer examination, one realizes that the eye happens to be a CCTV camera, and it is the observer who is actually being watched on the street while looking at the eye. This series has several more examples of 'Big Brothers' located inconspicuously within murals. Despite this unifying theme, the viewer has the luxury of forgetting about these cameras and just looking at the 'eye' or the murals.

I used one of my favorite tools in photography in many of these photos: selecting topics with several layers of artificiality and taking them out of context. A good example is the photo-within-a-photo of a cowboy riding a horse that is obscured by real leaves. The image of the cowboy is part of a billboard ad for Marlboro cigarettes. But by cropping the scene so that there is no text, I took away the context. Richard Prince did something similar in his series of photographs of the Marlboro Man, where he took photos from cigarette ads, removed the accompanying text, and thus appropriated images that play on the familiarity of omnipresent ads and the romance of the wild West. To me, though, the leaves in my photo contribute another layer, by blending in with the billboard scenery and reminding the viewer to 'come back to earth.' I strive to present these ambiguities in my photos. As such, they might sometimes come across as slightly ironic. But I hope that they may be a little less deadpan than the works of conceptual artists. When I look at the works of Richard Prince, my reaction oscillates between "Really? You must be kidding me!" to "This is different. Kind of funny. I get it. I like it. I love it!" I would love for my photos prompt similar reactions. Or, preferably, just the second one.



Prague, Czech Republic.



Prague, Czech Republic.



White Fish, Montana.



Boston, Massachusetts.



Buenos Aires, Argentina.



Prague, Czech Republic.



Albuquerque, New Mexico.



New York, New York.



Prague, Czech Republic.



Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Prague, Czech Republic.



Prague, Czech Republic.



Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



Prague, Czech Republic.



Prague, Czech Republic.





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