

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*Bryan Schutmaat: County Road*

September 12 – November 7, 2020

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *County Road*, an exhibition of new photographs by Bryan Schutmaat—the artist’s first presentation at the gallery.

Bryan Schutmaat began making his newest group of black-and-white pictures in the spring of 2020—just as pandemic fatigue was beginning to set in—while driving deserted back roads between Austin and Leon County, where his family has a farm. He shows us fields of tall grass sculpted by the wind, flowers soaking up the sun, dirt roads under canopies of trees, a pond and a brook or two, and the occasional building, abandoned or in disrepair.

Schutmaat grew up in Greater Houston and began spending time in Leon County as a child in the 90s; not only are the subjects of these pictures a sort of *home* for the artist, but he has built his career in photography around country drives that accumulate into explorations of the American West. From the first time he picked up a camera, Schutmaat has used photography as an escape—an excuse to get away from the parking lots, billboards, and strip malls that crowded his daily life in the suburbs. He prefers the desert, old mining towns, striking up conversations with ranchers and drifters, and watching sunsets and moonrises without any artificial light dulling the sky. He sees his work as something of an elegy—a clear-eyed reckoning with the mythologies perpetuated by Manifest Destiny, Ansel Adams, and Hollywood. Despite the many rusted promises and unrealized dreams he finds on his wanderings, he brings home stories of beauty and perseverance.

And so in this time of disruption, endless feeds of conflicting information, and fear of the unknown, of course Schutmaat packed up his camera and set out on long, lonely drives. He says he “hit dirt roads looking for quiet places. Life is among the leaves and branches. It doesn’t feel like anything is wrong here.” The serenity in these pictures is hard to come by these days. We see springtime unfolding just as it always does—with blooming flowers, growing trees, blue skies, green chlorophyll, yellow pollen.

Yet none of the colors of spring are in Schutmaat’s black-and-white images. The achromatism focuses attention on the way light wraps around each leaf of ivy, yes—but rendering springtime in an ashen palette connects the pictures of fields and forests with those that imply people: an old truck in a barn with a collapsed roof, a shuttered business on an empty Main Street. Schutmaat’s new body of work calls to mind Emily St. John Mandel’s 2014 novel, *Station Eleven*, set twenty years after a fictional virus wipes out 99% of the human population.

Spending time in the country this year, the artist has oscillated between feeling comforted

by and disconsolate about nature's indifference to woes from the world of men. Life goes on. *County Road* ebbs and flows, perhaps similarly to how many of us have reeled through the pandemic—or how Zephyranthes sway in a breeze. When Schutmaat measures the efforts of mankind against the quiet dignities of the natural world, the results are humbling—but not without a glimmer of reassurance.

Bryan Schutmaat, born in 1983 in Houston, lives and works in Austin, Texas. He has mounted solo exhibitions at the Aperture Foundation (New York), FOLA® Fototeca Latinoamericana (Buenos Aires), Houston Center for Photography, Museu da Imagem em Movimento (Portugal), and Newspace Center for Photography (Portland). He has participated in exhibitions at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Big Medium (Austin), Kunsthalle Mannheim (Germany), Museum of Modern Art (New York), and Stedelijk Museum Breda (Netherlands). His work is included in the collections of the Baltimore Museum of Art; Hood Museum of Art (New Hampshire); Middlebury College Museum of Art (Vermont); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Earlier this year, Schutmaat won a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship.