

Review: As planes take flight at LAX, two photographers find a darker reality below in 'Grounded'

 [latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-galleries-grounded-esmoa-review-20180803-story.html](https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-galleries-grounded-esmoa-review-20180803-story.html)

By Christopher Knight
| Art Critic |

Aug 03, 2018 | 8:30 AM



Zoe Crosher, "LAX Royal Comfort Motel (detail)," 2005, photograph (ESMoA)

In 1975, John Divola photographed abandoned houses along the northern edge of the runways at Los Angeles International Airport. Casualties of a formally defined Noise Abatement Zone, the houses were deserted in the wake of a larger, ecologically minded social movement toward curbing the effects of pollution.

A terrorist had set off a devastating bomb inside the airport a year earlier. The NAZ photographs, however, record a different, socially mandated form of destruction.

Advertisement



John Divola, "LAX NAZ Forced Entry Site 25, Interior B," 1975, photograph (ESMoA)

Nearly 30 years later, in the early 2000s, Zoe Crosher began to photograph the interiors of motels and hotels along West Century Boulevard, the wide street that leads into LAX. Not abandoned, these are sites of intentionally temporary occupancy. Curator Colin Westerbeck has faced 31 of Crosher's color photographs across from 21 of Divola's better-known black-and-white prints for "Grounded," a curious if somewhat slight exhibition at the El Segundo Museum of Art.

Crosher pointed her lens in unexpected directions, photographing interior fragments like a curtain tied back in the corner of a room or a skewed view past an air conditioning unit. Almost always, a window is included, while a passing airplane is conspicuously glimpsed outside, either landing or taking off.

In more than one picture, the angle of the shot puts the airplane in a visual trajectory aimed at a nearby building.



Zoe Crosher, "LAX Adventurer Hotel," 2003, photograph (ESMoA)



John Divola, "LAX NAZ Forced Entry Site 26, Exterior A," 1975, photograph (ESMoA)

In the wake of 9/11, airports had become psychologically charged zones of anxiety and distress. The already transient, provisional quality of motel rooms acquires an inescapable gloom. Crosher's photographs seem surreptitious, oscillating between perfectly benign and unpredictably creepy.

In that, they are fitting heirs to Divola's poignant images of smashed-up homes. His photographic formalism — flat prints of flat surfaces such as walls, windows and doors, seen head-on — gets put through a ringer. Broken windows and dislodged doors of ruined homes pry open the established means and methods for traditional camera work.

"Good Housekeeping" this is not. Like Crosher's bleak work, albeit in a very different way and with a dissimilar demeanor, his LAX-adjacent images are modern meditations on transience and mortality.

El Segundo Museum of Art, 208 Main St. Through Sept. 22; closed Sundays-Wednesdays.
(424) 277-1020,

Arts and Culture Newsletter
