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Arts

## Take a picture, it'll last longer

By LISA SORG  
09/01/2005

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When Hurricane Katrina threatened to demolish part of the Gulf Coast last week, one could have argued that the fragile bays, estuaries, and wildlife preserves choking in the contrails of the petrochemical industry were already gone.

A cataclysm on the scale of a Category 5 hurricane or tsunami is rare; our sacred places usually quietly erode under a steady drip of diluted environmental regulations and human intrusions. The Gulf's dead zones developed after decades of pollution; recent news reports outed Texas Parks and Wildlife for secretly negotiating with a Houston developer to sell 45,000 acres of Big Bend State Ranch Park, one of Texas' most remote and beloved areas. Without the public outcry that sank the plans, the site of ancient civilizations would have likely become a luxury golf course.

Like wildfires, humans can destroy and restore their environment. This quandary lies at the heart of two Blue Star photography exhibits, *In Response to Place: Photographs From the Nature Conservancy's Last Great Places* and *The Last Great Places of Texas: Photographs from the Nature Conservancy's Texas Preserves*, on view through October 9.



A photo by Rick Hunter captures a detail of the Texas City Prairie Preserve. Hunter's photographs, and those by several other noted local photographers, for the Nature Conservancy project are on view at Blue Star Contemporary Art Center through October 9.

Many photos, including Annie Leibovitz' gelatin silver print of a grove of dwarf pines in a New York preserve, show nature in its pure and pristine form, with no indication of human impact on the ecosystem; yet the photographer's presence in and of itself changes the environment, even if it's merely a desert marigold crushed beneath a hiking boot.

Other human signs range from the subtle to the overt: In Lee Friedlander's shot of Arizona's Muleshoe Ranch, the foreground focuses on footprints left on a dusty manmade path leading from a wild and isolated desert. And Terry Evans' aerial photo of "Pond and Oil Pump House" shows a vast Oklahoma prairie pock-marked by telephone poles, a highway, and a white oil pump house, while a manmade pond punctures a blue hole in a brown landscape.

Fazal Sheikh's black-and-white portrait of "Dona Nika in Her Garden" places

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Intern at the San Antonio Current

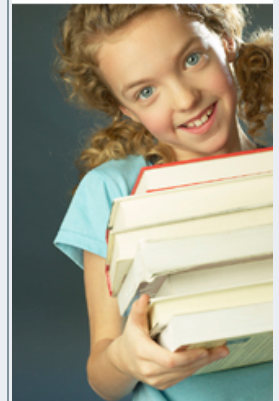
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her subject in Brazil's Grande Sertao Varedas National Park, where the woman apparently lives. While the material world has failed her - she wears mismatched footwear, a worn boot and a laceless loafer - nature continues to provide, as sumptuous fruit hangs over her head.

While photographers have long been fascinated with magnificent landscapes, tight shots also reveal nature's obsessive detail. In Michael Nye's "Mad Marsh," long grass appears as delicate as lightbulb filaments, and Rick Hunter, shooting at the Texas City Prairie Preserve, home of the endangered Attwater Prairie Chicken and not far from one of America's most polluted coastal cities, displays small insets of swirled tree bark, seed pods, and cattail stands.

As damned as we are to remove ourselves from nature - cocooning ourselves in concrete and steel most of our lives - humans are inextricably part of it. When birdwatchers spotted an ivory-billed woodpecker, once thought extinct, in a remote forest preserve, we rejoiced not just for the bird, but because we had recovered a part of ourselves. •

By [Lisa Sorg](#)

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