

Rockyford as art

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Danny Singer, *Rockyford*, 2011 – Still from video.

Six minutes of video footage taken in Rockyford have recently garnered national attention, and it's all about appearances.

In 2010, photographer Danny Singer was asked to contribute a piece to the Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art exhibition. Singer's work primarily includes taking photos of small prairie towns. He was told to find a place in Alberta similar to the coat of arms, with prairies stacked across mountains.

Singer, an Edmonton native, drove all through Alberta and found nothing suitable, until he passed through Rockyford.

He noticed that if he went right up to the end of the mainstreet with a long telephoto lens, he could not only see both side of the street, but the prairies far off into the distance. Setting up a video camera there, he recorded about six minutes of activity.

The video garnered a lot of attention, and recently Rockyford was featured in Montreal's Art Souterrain last month.

Many may ask why. Singer has been taking pictures of small town main streets for the last 10 years, having shot over 150 places. He takes over 100 exposures, walking down the street,

and using photoshop to create his very long images with no real perspective. He had originally been noticed because of a video posted on his website, of a small town post office. To explain it, the words must come from Singer himself:

“Nothing happens and the camera doesn’t move,” he said. “You can go for 10 minutes with absolutely nothing happening except the clouds going by and the birds chirping, then, all of a sudden, cars will come into town, people will walk in and out of the post office. There will be this flurry of activity and then nothing happens again.

“The reason I do those videos is as a counterpoint to the large photographs I do. Those prints are about 10 feet long and people always say to me: ‘Well, what goes on in these places? What do people do?’

“So, I was looking for a way of talking about the way time moves in small places. Everything happens, just like it happens anywhere else, but it seems to happen at a different speed.” When shooting in Rockyford, Singer noticed that people would, for example, drive into town, get their mail, then get back in the car to drive across the street. He laughed: no one seems to walk in the small town.

Singer, having lived in a number of big cities, said in those places people tend to walk a lot, but in small towns, people walk very little, as they’re just there to use the services. Singer will be releasing a book of his works later this year called *Main Streets, Towns, Villages and Hamlets of the Great Plains*, which will include Rockyford. He said he originally got the idea when he moved to Montreal and was blown away by the old buildings.

“I had this idea that if I could photograph the whole main street, I’d get a better idea of everything in relationship to everything else, rather than just taking a picture of one building, which could be an anomaly. But if you see a whole street of buildings, you get a real sense of the architecture as well as the history.”

Singer’s work is currently available at the Trepanier Baer Gallery in Calgary, or on his website at www.dannysinger.net.