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M+B

A moody moment at "9th and Lake." Rocky Schenck's photographs, on view at M+B, roam the city.

Images of an L.A. we don't always notice

L.A. is famous for its sun-kissed sidewalks and palm tree-lined boulevards, but it's also known for being able to morph into almost anywhere else.

Photographer Rocky Schenck looks to capture this shape-shifting quality in his solo exhibition "Rocky Schenck: Los Angeles" at M+B gallery. In 20 large-scale toned gelatin silver prints, the show depicts the city as a dreamlike metropolis filled with shadowy landscapes, gothic mansions and ghostly sirens. A film buff, the Austin, Texas-born, now locally based photographer says he is not casting L.A. as its noir doppelgänger so

much as documenting its secrets. "We all know the iconic places that have been photographed over and over again," Schenck says. "I'm drawn to the more mysterious side of the city."

Schenck roams the city, camera in hand, in search of the undiscovered. His amblings have turned up treasures in the historically rich West Adams and Boyle Heights neighborhoods. The image "9th and Lake," for example, depicts a spire-topped residence near MacArthur Park superimposed against a glowing background. An illuminated window reveals the silhouette of a solitary figure.

"When you see the title,

'Los Angeles,' you think you are going to see the cliché — the downtown skyline or the concert hall," says M+B associate director Shannon Richardson. "But you walk in and nothing is familiar. Rocky rarely reveals exactly where anything is because he wants it to feel sort of out of context, out of time."

Although many of the images can't be pinpointed to a specific location, some, such as "The End," are instantly recognizable. Snapped during last year's fire in Griffith Park, the

photo shows smoke rising above the Hollywood sign.

Even when the context is obvious, Schenck maintains an air of mystery by refusing to disclose his process. Saying only, "I use very old-fashioned techniques," he admits to shooting on 35-millimeter film and manipulating the prints not in a darkroom but while watching films such as "The Night of the Hunter," "Pandora's Box" and "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" on TV. Fittingly, his images possess an almost cinematic quality.

"I'm not trying to consciously duplicate film noir or silent movies, but I grew up on old films, so it's just in my blood," Schenck says. "Sometimes I feel like I'm taking stills on a movie, but the movie is life itself."

'ROCKY SCHENCK: LOS ANGELES'

WHERE: M+B, 612 N. Almont Drive, L.A.

WHEN: Ends March 1

PRICE: Free

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