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VISUAL ART **Currently Hanging: Photography Immersed in Local Waters by Dan Hawkins**

posted by JEN GRAVES on MON, JUL 15, 2013 at 12:30 PM



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

This photograph is part of Dan Hawkins's series *The Water Project*. He shoots images of local waterways, then develops them using waters from those natural bodies. He's looking for places in the landscape "where the division between the physical and the metaphysical is especially thin." Today is the last day to see his pictures [at the Photographic Center Northwest](#).

Yesterday I put my body into Green Lake. I've lived here several years and never been tempted by Green Lake's murky water before; this time I was drawn in by the enthusiasm of a child who insisted we jump in together from our paddle boards. In the back of my mind as I leapt alone—he played that dirty trick of counting down but not jumping—I recalled with vagueness having heard about **the algae or general funk of this water**. Then I was under.

My bank of knowledge about the science of local waterways is as murky as Green Lake. A transformative summer a few years ago that involved a great deal of local swimming **left me feeling superstitious, like I'd been baptized there**. Since then, I love these waters unconditionally and do not want to know too much. This past Saturday, I swam at Denny Blaine Beach, which a week ago was closed for suspicion of poop bacteria. Now people were cavorting and things seemed fine, but it's requiring a little more will for me to stay in denial this summer about what's in the waters where I so blithely swim.

Dan Hawkins is a Seattle photographer who created a series he calls *The Water Project*. (A few pieces from it are showing at the [Photographic Center Northwest](#).)

Hawkins has tended to go into ruined environments to make pictures; he has a web site called [Washingtonruins.org](#). He is aware of the problem of disaster porn and works to transcend it. The way he writes about *The Water Project* feels both personal and mythic:

When I go to the river I am looking for something there in the water.

In standard photography you are being shown what is there but with *The Water Project* **I am trying to show you something that is not there...**In these lonely places (under bridges, next to the shore, at the edges of the water, etc) there is a sense that something spiritual from the city is emerging and being shown to you. I believe that there are specific places in the landscape where the division between the physical and the metaphysical is especially thin. It is in these places that I choose to work.

By incorporating the waters from the site into the development process I am attempting to allow the site to further influence the photograph. **To have a say beyond just the light** that has been captured. The processing of film inside the development chamber is a sensitive and extremely refined process. By disrupting this harmony I am letting something, usually silent, break through and display itself in the medium.

The element he's letting into the pictures is not the same element as **my sudden awareness of having pores all over my body** when I jump into the waters this summer. But still, there are similarities between his division between the physical and the metaphysical, and my preoccupation with what feels like a very porous border between healthy and sick water.

Anyway, you can check out far more of Hawkins's pieces from *The Water Project* on his web site [here](#). Some of the pieces are tinged with what feels like **a nuclear blast of chemical color**, and others are rainbowy and picturesque. I chose to post the one above because of its emphasis on what's below surfaces: the surface of the bridge and its underbelly, the surface of the pier and the dark area beneath that, the watery overlay over the whole image versus the image itself below it. Basically, I have no idea what's in the water.