

ROCKY'S PICTURE SHOW

"SHE HAD JUST FINISHED DECIMATING EVERYONE IN THE ROOM," PHOTOGRAPHER Rocky Schenck explained. "Then she calmly went upstairs with her glass of bourbon and started playing solitaire. I snuck up and took her picture. She didn't even notice, bless her heart." The photograph, called "Mother Playing Solitaire," is of Schenck's own mother and as eerie as anything from F.W. Murnau's silent-film version of *Nosferatu*. In fact, many of Schenck's hypnotic, soft-focus, black-and-white photographs combine scenes of everyday life with the dreamlike world of German expressionist cinema, not to mention a substantial nod to Schenck's greatest influence, pictorialism.

A former art student turned filmmaker and photographer, Schenck came to Hollywood from Dripping Springs, Texas, when he was in his early twenties and quickly became known for his flawless glamour portraits, reminiscent of such old Hollywood photographers as Horst and Hurrell. Album covers (for Alice in Chains, the Cramps, Neil Diamond) and rock videos followed (his one-take, 1997 video of P.J. Harvey and Nick Cave falling for each other while singing "Henry Lee" is a classic).

But Rocky's real love is art photography, and for the past 15 years he has taken his 35mm Nikon camera with him on the road to places as diverse as the titles of some of his photographs suggest—"Black Sea" (Kauai), "Cemetery Screening" (Los Angeles) and "Edvard Munch's Yard" (Norway), as examples. The results are phantasmagoric.

Whether it's a Dante-esque landscape of Death Valley, a carnival game called "Guns 'n' Clowns" or the spectral figure in "Ghost" (pictured here), all of Schenck's photographs seem like buried memories you can't quite recall but continue to obsess over with the hope that by doing so you will achieve that ever-elusive breakthrough, just like in therapy. In an appreciative forward to the upcoming book *Rocky Schenck: Photographs* (University of Texas Press), John Berendt (author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*) writes, "This compulsion to respond, together with the lovely elegiac mood in all his work, is the real power of Schenck's photographs." Berendt ought to know: He collects the work. So can you. "Photographs," Dec. 5—Jan. 17. June Bateman Gallery, 560 Broadway, Suite 309, New York NY 10012. ★ ANN MAGNUSON