

# LIFE & TRAVEL

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT SOCIETY WEDDINGS | SECTION D » SUNDAY, JULY 4, 2010 » THE TENNESSEAN »

DAILY CRAVE » SHOPPING DIVA CATHI AYCOCK PICKS TODAY'S TOP 5 DEALS » 2D »

## ARTS

# Deviation from plan hits the mark in Cheekwood installation

By Will Ayers  
THE TENNESSEAN

Aaron Rothman had a tough decision ahead of him.

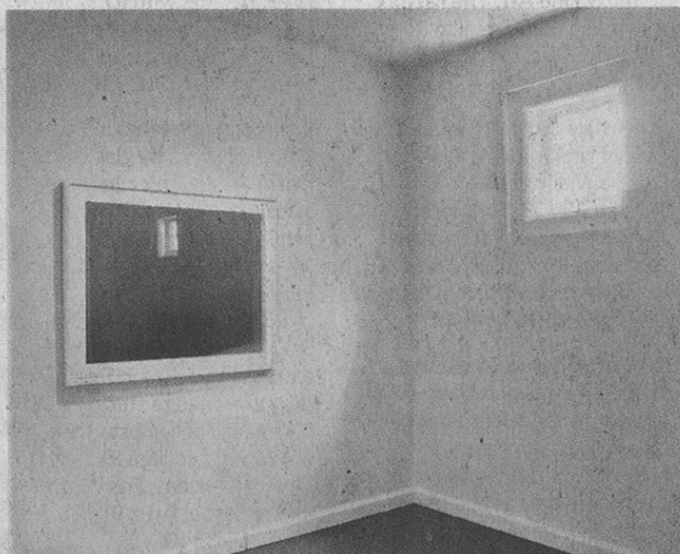
The Phoenix-based photographer had come to Nashville twice in the past year, once in the winter and once in the spring, to take photos for a new installation in Cheekwood's Temporary Contemporary series.

The idea was to place images of Cheekwood's grounds and the gallery itself in dialogue, exploring differences in light and sense of place.

Only once Rothman looked through his spring photos, he wasn't so sure he could include them.

"I had a really hard time deciding what to do," he said. "Part of me really wanted to use those pictures of the Cheekwood grounds, but in the end, the four pictures I ended up using, they had much more resonance in their emotional expression with the pictures I had taken there in the winter, and they held together as a show much better."

Rothman wound up using photos he took in 2006 outside Chicago while visiting his grandfather, who was nearing the end of his life. The images were of a green, lush landscape similar to Cheekwood in the spring, and they took on deep significance when his grandfather died soon after the visit. They seemed like a



Cheekwood presents a spare installation by photographer Aaron Rothman. SUBMITTED

natural fit for the spare, empty shots he had taken inside Cheekwood's gallery in the winter.

"I want the experience about the exhibition not to just be about this idea of death, but broadly speaking, there's that emotional reference of absence, or the coming together of the known world and the unknown world," said Rothman, who was raised by his grandparents.

This is where Rothman lives and works, the meeting point of two worlds. Much of his work is shot in the Southwest, sometimes at construction sites. He takes care to show only ambiguous visual cues, so there are no people in the frame, no signage to give the image any cultural markers. It could be a ruin, or something yet to be built.

### 'Find your own way'

In other photos, he'll frame a point of view in a desert landscape that's not classically photogenic, which suddenly opens up details that reel the viewer in: the particular way a pile of rocks is arranged, the shadows on a ridgeline.

"What I'm interested in is putting the viewer as an individual into a space and having you have to find your own way," he said.

At Cheekwood, by combining a set of images of the gallery itself with another set of the outdoors, each shot in a different season, he invites in the ambient light of the summer to create a new sense of place that's wide open to interpretation.

"You have all these seasons of light in one room," said Claire Schneider, the

### IF YOU GO

**What:** Temporary Contemporary: Aaron Rothman  
**When:** Through Sept. 12  
**Where:** Cheekwood, 1200 Forrest Park Drive  
**Admission:** \$15; \$12 for ages 65 and older; \$12 for college students with ID; \$8 for ages 6-17, free for ages 5 and younger  
**Contact:** [www.cheekwood.org](http://www.cheekwood.org), 356-8000  
**Hours:** 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday and Saturday, 9:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Thursday-Friday (through Aug. 31; closes at 9 p.m. Sept. 1-Oct. 29), 11 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Sunday.

show's independent curator. "I was really surprised by that and enjoyed it."

"There's really something strangely transformative when you sit down and spend time not just with the photographs, but really the space itself," said Jochen Wierich, Cheekwood's curator of art. "What Aaron does so wonderfully is that it's not only about what's on the wall, but about what happens when you enter a space."

The Temporary Contemporary series will continue in October with work by internationally acclaimed conceptual artist Mel Ziegler, who's also the chair of Vanderbilt's studio arts department.

Contact Will Ayers at [jwayers@tennessean.com](mailto:jwayers@tennessean.com) or 615-664-2235.