

## Witho Worms, When You Look at a Landscape by Loring Knoblauch in Collector Daily

Comments/Context: Many of the coastal areas of northern Norway, up above the Arctic Circle, are ruggedly desolate. Dark mountains fall directly to fjords or coastal seas, some covered by blankets of forest, others just barren rock. At a distance, these vistas feel almost unpopulated, the skies wide and large and the hills and horizons turned into undulating silhouettes.

For many landscape photographers, such unforgiving yet craggily graceful terrain would inevitably lead to sweeping images that stylistically recall the 19th century survey photographs of the American West. And in the simplest sense, Witho Worms's Norwegian landscapes do recall that spare, elemental O'Sullivan-like simplicity. But Worms is much more of a conceptual thinker than the pioneer photographers ever were, and so he hasn't stopped with simply documenting the notable vistas and landmarks of these distant lands. He has instead used his broad views as a starting point for an innovative image deconstruction (and reconstruction) effort that transforms these landscapes into something far more intricately layered.

Worms is a photographer who is still fully rooted in the idea that printing is an integral part of image making. He is an expert practitioner of the carbon printing process, and many of his recent projects (as seen in his 2018 gallery show, reviewed [here](#)) explore how that exacting process can be executed and extended in ways that open up new artistic possibilities.

In these new landscapes, Worms begins with his full frame large format negatives, and then masks them down during printing to highlight a much narrower rectangle of the original view. His approach creates a windowed effect, where the cropped view is seen in full light and the surroundings are allowed to drift to black. We can see this narrowing in many metaphorical ways – as tightening, or encroaching, or disappearing, or simply a blindered perspective.

While it's nearly impossible to see in the images above or in digital images on the Internet, the black areas of these landscapes aren't actually featureless voids. They extend in all directions, continuing horizon lines, clouded skies, and ripped waters (thereby reminding us that the narrowed views are edited samples of something wider and larger), in tones so dark that they are only dimly perceptible. Worms has further darkened the areas with a wash of ink, and the combination creates a shimmering dark glow that recalls solarization or negative prints. When your eyes adjust to these subtleties, there is a kind of magic that

takes place, the views oscillating between the cropped slice and the wider sweep in the shadows, or a sense of inside and outside the edge.

Back a few steps, the blackness feels uniform, and Worms's slivers of landscape start to recall the elongated horizontals of Art Sinsabaugh. Worms seems to be deliberately eliminating the bigness of the Norwegian sky, tightening the views down to thin strips that tend to highlight the up and down of mountain vistas – a few of the more high contrast compositions feel almost like heart monitor blips or figure/ground inversions. Others flatten the grandeur of the vistas into seemingly intensified bands, where all the extraneous information has been removed, leaving just the snow-capped mountain ranges or smoothly sloped hills. What's perhaps surprising is that these expansive, almost grandiose landscapes feel extremely intimate and personal, their best features framed just for us by Worms's black viewfinder.

The reason these landscapes by Worms are so memorable is that they don't turn Norway's coasts into one-dimensional celebrations. They instead offer multiple entry points, associations, and conclusions, that challenge us to see the land, and our visual relationship to it, in different ways.