

The Batture Ritual

The Batture is the land the river owns. It is a thin strip of weeds, trees, and mud between edge of the Mississippi River and the tall, hardened levees that contain its floods. The batture is ephemeral. It disappears when the river is high and re-emerges when the tide falls, swept and transformed. It is a cyclical land, untied to human time and unclaimed, a temporary alluvial wilderness.

The batture is landscape that is constantly disturbed, in constant flux between cycles of growth and destruction. It never finds equilibrium. It is a nature defined by human, by the levees we built to constrict the natural cycles of the river. The batture is un-capitalizable, un-improvable. For a developer it is less than useless. It is a liability, and thus left alone. It is a prophetic landscape, a glimpse into what nature may mean in the Anthropocene.

Jeff Whetstone's photographs and videos explore the micro- and macro-economies and ecologies along the Mississippi River's batture near New Orleans. Families fishing for food come within feet of international oil-tankers and container ships that facilitate global trade. The batture is no dividing line; rather it is a magnet that draws animals and industry, fishermen and ocean ships, all manner of life into contact. It pulls into relief the unstoppable oppositional forces. One being global capitalism, trade, profit. The other being the innate and encoded drive that draws people to a frontier, to some sort of wilderness, disrupted as it may be, to find some sustenance – however they define it.