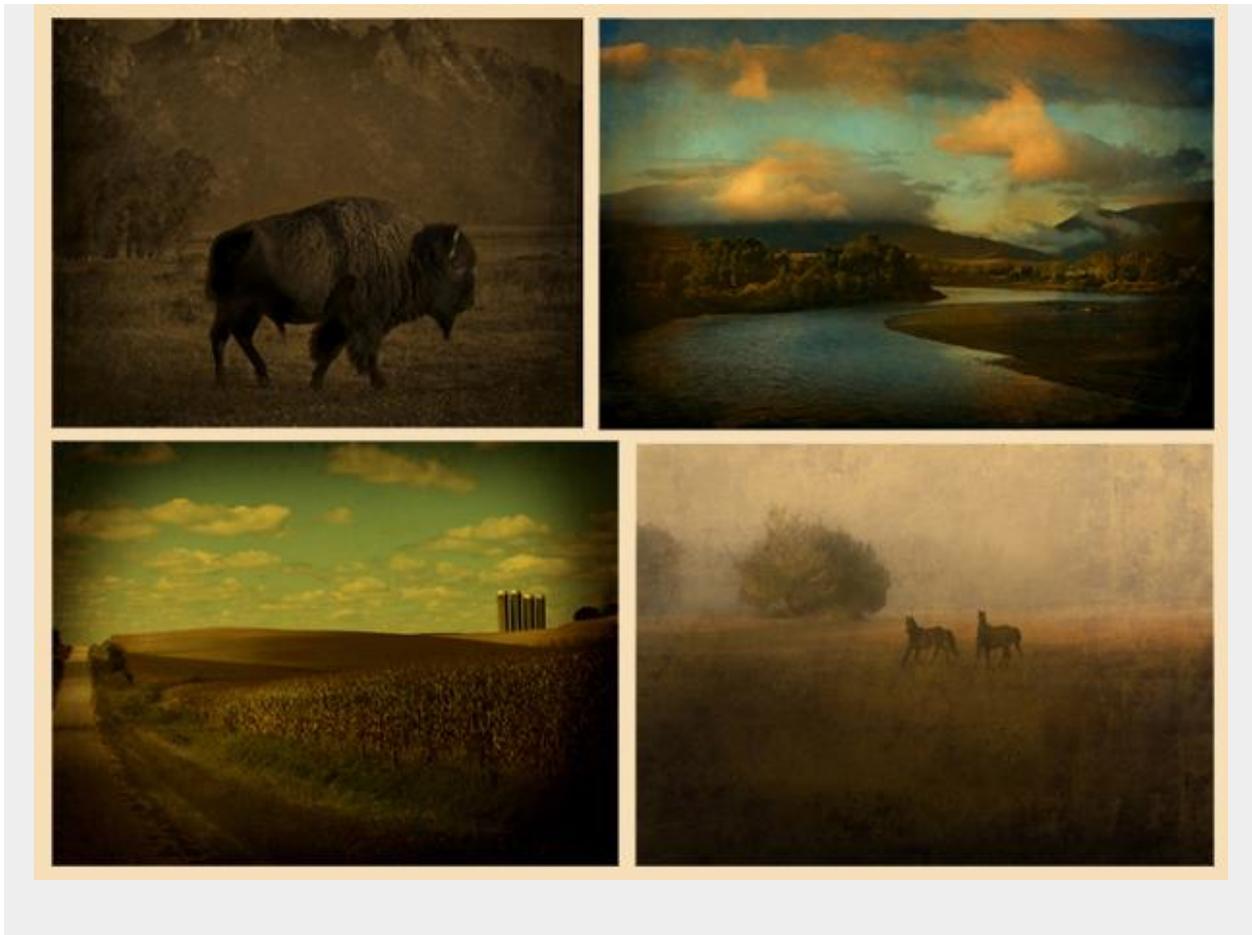


## Frist Center to exhibit Contessa Gallery artist and Nashville photographer Jack Spencer's work



NASHVILLE — The work of Nashville-based photographer Jack Spencer will be on view at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts from July 12-Oct. 13 in the Center's Upper-Level Galleries.

The first major museum exhibition of the artist's work, "Jack Spencer: Beyond the Surface" is composed of 70 photographs — selected by the artist and Mark Scala, chief curator at the Frist Center — that reveal the artist's interest in the ephemerality of life, the subjectivity of perception and the overriding value of beauty.

Spencer is renowned for his toned photographs and Southern subjects, but for many years he has focused on other regions and produced color work that approaches pure abstraction.

"Spencer's photographs are distinguished by a painter's sensibility," said Scala. "His use of richly textured, softly-focused forms and toned surfaces add to the ambiguity and mystery of his photography, a medium often associated with realism and authenticity."

"Early in his career, Spencer was influenced by the soft focus of Edward Steichen's Pictorialist photography and the gritty realism of Robert Frank, the Swiss photographer whose seminal series 'The Americans' documented his perspective of everyday American life," said Dr. Susan H. Edwards,

executive director of the Frist Center and photography historian. “Spencer wanted to take Frank-type images in the field and Steichen images in the darkroom, combining Pictorialism with Realism.”

According to Edwards, Spencer is also inspired by painters from Edward Hopper to Mark Rothko, and literary giants from William Faulkner to magical realists Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez.

“Spencer’s photographs are elegant and more complex than they appear on the surface,” Edwards said. “We look to photography for a clear vision of the truth, but Spencer denies us the certainty of expectations in favor of the richness and rewards of subjectivity. The tonal wealth of his photographs takes us into the obscure realm between fact and fiction.”

“Beyond the Surface” will be presented in six sections organized by subject, theme and style: The works included in Portraits and Figures reveal Spencer’s capacity to define the psychological complexity of his subjects, who often occupy the periphery of society.

Conversely, each person portrayed in Apparitions is disguised by a mask or face paint, subordinating individuality to an expression of cultural identity. To create his most recent body of work, Mythologies, Spencer painted fields of color and improvised marks onto the nude or semi-nude bodies of his models. He then photographed and often digitally altered the painted figures and their surroundings to impute a mysterious fictional narrative or primal context. Day into Night includes images of human presence made visible by ephemeral evidence — cast shadows, veiled bodies and blurred movement, often at dusk or dawn — symbolizing the transitional nature of life.

In This Land, richly hued scenes of the American West, Midwest and South were inspired by Spencer’s desire to explore the theme of national identity through the image of an open and unpopulated land. Blurring the distinction between figure and ground, proximity and distance, Color as Light includes coastal views in which the luminous, almost aqueous density of atmosphere merges land, trees, animals and sky into a palpable gestalt — abstract landscapes of the mind’s eye.

### **About Jack Spencer**

Since the mid-1990s, Spencer’s photographs have been included in group exhibitions in museums in the United States and abroad, including the Birmingham Museum of Art, Ala.; the Columbia Museum of Art, S.C.; the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.; the Honolulu Museum of Art, Hawaii; Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga; the Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Ga.; the Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego; and the Museum of Modern Art, Frankfurt, Germany.

He has had one-person exhibitions at numerous galleries around the country and abroad.

Spencer’s works are included in many public and private collections, including the Berkeley Museum of Art, Calif.; the Birmingham Museum of Art, Ala.; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, Ga.; the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, New Orleans; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Calif.; Sir Elton John Photographic Collection; Tennessee State Museum, Nashville; Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson; Greenville County Museum of Art, S.C.; the Columbia Museum of Art, S.C.; and Emory University, Atlanta.