



The Record

FRIDAY, JANUARY 21, 2011 • \$1.00

recordnet.com



Courtesy Kirk Crippens

Photographer Kirk Crippens' "Foreclosureville U.S.A." will run at Pacific's Reynolds Gallery through Feb. 18.

Portraits of Stockton's foreclosure pain

Stockton's foreclosure crisis produces a numbingly familiar litany of heartaches, blight, plunging property values and bad press. But, until now, no art.

Now Reynolds Gallery at University of the Pacific is exhibiting works by an East Bay photographer who spent 2009 documenting Stockton's foreclosure carnage.

"Foreclosure U.S.A.," by Emeryville's Kirk Crippens, fea-



Michael Fitzgerald

tures 29 of the 80 large, detailed images of foreclosed homes and related subjects he created for

his project.

"Honestly, I had never been to Stockton," said Crippens, 39. "I just drove into town without a contact whatsoever. I had to meet the folks of Stockton, the people working in the industry, the folks losing their homes."

Crippens got the idea after the recession caused the small publishing house for which he works to cut back his hours. He met with his patron to discuss projects.

The talk turned to Dorthea Lange's famous 1936 photograph of a careworn Great Depression mother.

"It sort of helped us remember and reflect on what our country went through in the Depression," Crippens said. "And we thought, maybe we can do something for our time."

Crippens researched the meltdown. All roads led to Stockton. An epicenter, it was

SEE FITZGERALD, PAGE A6

NEWS

recordnet.com

FITZGERALD: 'I hope it starts the healing'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

close by, and it seemed emblematic of the country's nosedive.

Crippens decided largely to eliminate individuals. He let the eerily vacant homes express the country's collective experience of sudden collapse and shattered dreams.

"I think the power of taking photographs that don't include people is they don't explain everything about the story," he said. "It's part of the mystery."

Crippens combed houses for visual clues. "You can see something of them in the colors they chose to paint their bedroom walls. Or in the wallpaper. Or the stuff they left their home in. ... In a way I'm taking portraits of people without the people."

Lugging digital camera and tripod into foreclosures during open houses, or via the famous foreclosure bus tour, which he rode, turned out to be no easy feat.

"What I had to do was run into the house and as quickly as possible ascertain what the most telling thing in the home was. And set up my tripod

and compose my photography before they shouted, 'All aboard!'"

Crippens' break came when he met local Realtor John Nydam. Nydam opened foreclosures for him. Unhurried, Crippens took "tens of thousands" of digital photos.

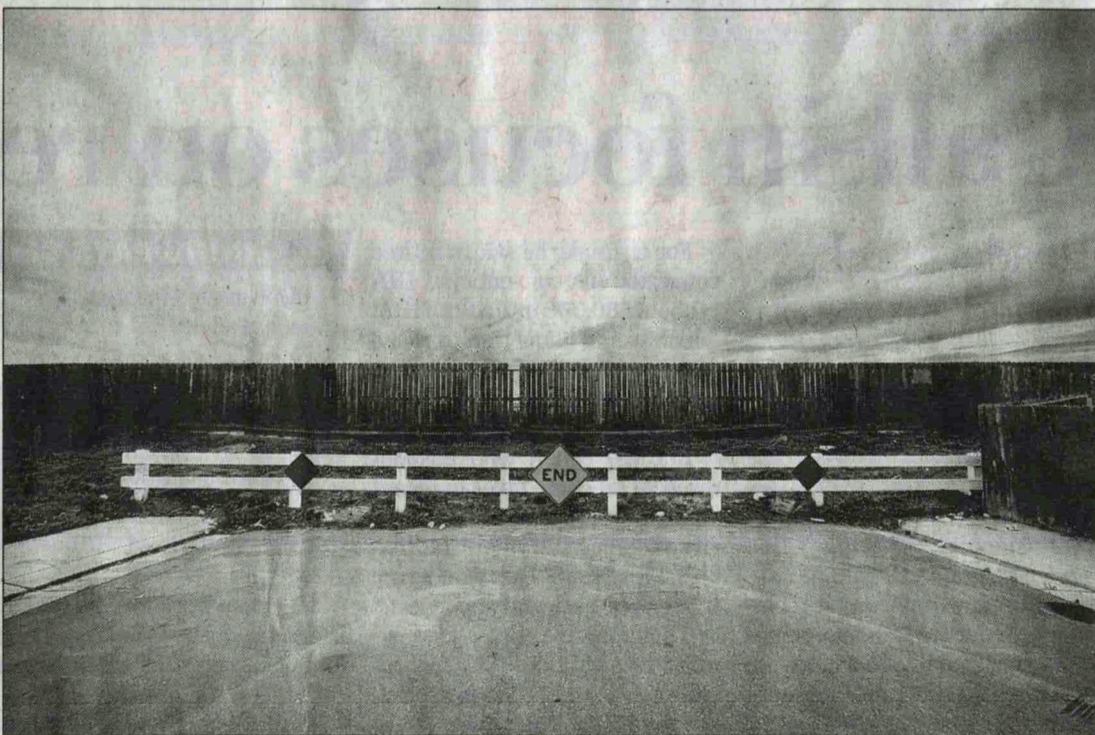
His 3-foot-by-3-foot images capture brightly colored walls of a vacated child's bedroom; abandoned juice bottles in an otherwise empty refrigerator; a neglected suburban back yard, reclaimed by mustard plant, as viewed through disheveled blinds.

In one closet he spied a handwritten note penciled on the wall: "Hello, angel. Tell me, where are you? Tell me where we go from here."

And, nearby on the same wall, one word: "Disenchanted."

"For a child — I'm assuming it was a child — to lose their safe place, that they never thought was possible, they just cried out, and they left a little note on the way."

Though he photographed no families, Crippens did meet them. One lost their house, and moved in with a brother, who



Courtesy Kirk Crippens

Photographer Kirk Crippens decided to let the buildings and locations tell the story of how foreclosures had left their scars in Stockton.

in turn lost his house. They all moved in with their mother. Three families in one house.

Crippens photographed their home as they steadily emptied it of belongings, fearing they

might come home one day to find themselves locked out.

"It was very, very difficult because I was immersed in one tragic loss after another," Crippens said.

Crippens photographed aborted Stockton suburbs where street signs stood isolated in empty fields; unmaintained roads disappearing into mud; even — an exception —

people, attending at a foreclosure auction at Memorial Civic Auditorium.

"Every weekend at the end of the day, I would call my loved ones back home. And I would reflect back to them what I had seen. And quite often I would be in tears."

Crippens exhibited "Foreclosureville, U.S.A." to critical acclaim in San Francisco before bringing it to the Reynolds Gallery, where it runs through Feb. 18.

This morning at 10 a.m. Crippens will discuss "Foreclosureville" on Jeffrey Callison's Capital Public Radio show "Insight" (91.3 FM).

He also will give a 6 p.m. Artist's Talk at Pacific in the hall adjacent to the Reynolds Gallery.

"This gives folks an opportunity to talk about it and reflect on it," Crippens said. "I hope it starts the healing. And I hope it helps us to question the way we grow in this country."

Contact columnist Michael Fitzgerald at (209) 546-8270 or michael@recordnet.com. Visit his blog at recordnet.com/fitzgeraldblog.