

Laura E. Migliorino
The Hidden Suburbs: A Portrait

It is estimated that 1/3 of all Minnesotans now live in a suburb, but who are they?

The series of portraits seeks to reveal the diversity that exists in the outer ring suburbs of Minneapolis and St.Paul. The images dispel the stereotype of the suburbanite and challenge assumptions about suburban residents. When I think of suburbanites, I think white, Christian, straight and Republican but these portraits tell a different story.

My interest in exploring the suburbs has evolved over the 20 years that I have commuted from my home in South Minneapolis to work in Coon Rapids, Minnesota. I have watched the farmland disappear and replaced with housing so uniform and controlled it is often difficult to distinguish one from another. The spread of development impacts the environment in multiple ways, reducing wilderness, wildlife habitat, and increasing traffic and congestion. Beyond all reason though the suburbs continue to thrive and expand, the notion of the American dream as a house in the suburbs is alive and well.

The Process

I am a photographer that hybrids the tradition of silver film with digital technology, shooting slide positives then scanning into Photoshop. The final images are printed on canvas emphasizing the historic tradition of the painted portrait. My approach to photography is very painterly, an extension of my years as a printmaker and painter. I came to photography late in my career and am largely self taught.

The complexity of the image with multiple layers, and frenetic composition reflects the confusion of the suburbs and lack of good urban planning. This unsettling feeling is intended, and hopefully will evoke a mix of positive and negative feelings from the viewer. The juxtaposition of the happy, relaxed families with the swirl of activity is symbolic of the conflicted feelings many Americans have about suburban life.