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EXHIBIT CAPTURES DRAMA OF THE SURPRISING CITY OF O`HARE

BY ABIGAIL FOERSTNER



Aircraft Landing on Runway 14R, Robert Burley, 1998

Most of the 50 million people who rush through O`Hare International Airport each year don`t spend much time there. If they do, it`s only due to delayed flights, heavy traffic or a wrong turn down a maze of lookalike corridors.

But Robert Burley explored O`Hare on purpose. Burley, a Canadian architectural photographer, spent more than three years photographing O`Hare`s architecture, aircraft, employees, travelers and prairie landscape.

The fact that there is a natural prairie landscape, strikingly juxtaposed against the manmade landscape in several of his photographs, may come as the biggest surprise to viewers of "O`Hare-Airport on the Prairie." This exhibit of

approximately 100 of Burley`s 16-by-20-inch and 20-by-24-inch color photographs opens Wednesday at the Chicago Historical Society.

Burley`s work is a prolific and poetic documentary profile that epitomizes the fierce high-tech pulse of a big city airport in the 1980s. He captures this pulse with a large-format camera and exposure times that reincarnate the approach of a passenger jet as the blurred flight of a magic, mythical bird. He captures the edges of the airport, where gravel service roads still cut a corridor through the tall grasses. He photographs the dramatic geometry of runways, terminals, hangars and maintenance buildings that are part and parcel of each flight. Portraits such as those of food servers, a firefighter and cabbies depict the mammoth support system required to sustain the country`s busiest commercial airport.

"O`Hare is a city within a city," says Larry Viskochil, curator of prints and photographs at the historical society. "It`s 7,000 acres, larger than downtown Chicago. It would cover an area from North Avenue to Cermak Road and from the lake to Damen Avenue."

Burley came to the historical society with the first photographs of the O`Hare project that he undertook while he was a graduate student at the Art Institute of Chicago. The society offered to collaborate with him on the project, one of several such documentary partnerships supported in recent years.

"There`s been no photographic documentary of a major airport," says Viskochil. "Transportation: It`s such an important part of Chicago history." The arrow-straight prairie horizon plays through these photographs as a striking counterpoint. The air-traffic control tower, a dome-crowned beacon, rises through several scenes like some modern-day oracle.

"The tower was my one reference point. That`s how I knew where I was at O`Hare," Burley says. But it was the landscape of the airport that drew his interest in photographing it even before he came to Chicago from Toronto.

"I wanted to explore the airport from ground level, to photograph the raw kind of landscape mixed with manmade elements," Burley says.

Seen briefly from the air or approached from the expressway, O`Hare resembles a sea of concrete. Yet some facilities are built on the grass, isolated from the

bustle of the terminals, and Burley`s photographs reveal their sculptural forms and surreal contrasts.

"Here you have this space-age thing stuck down in the middle of this flat prairie," Viskochil says, referring to a photograph showing a red-and-white checkerboard radio transmitter propped amid a field of trampled grass.

The exhibit marks the 25th anniversary of the official dedication of the airport by President John F. Kennedy. But the airport has many anniversaries. A little town called Orchard Place lent its name to the entire area encompassing what is now O`Hare before World War II. The name survives in the abbreviation ORD on baggage tickets. The airport came into being as Douglas Field to serve the Douglas Aircraft defense plant built there during World War II.

"After the war, the city took over the whole thing as war surplus,"

says Viskochil. The city named the airport Orchard Field and in 1949 renamed it in honor of Lt. Cmdr. Edward H. "Butch" O`Hare Jr., a flying ace killed in World War II. But the airport remained primarily a military field until 1955, when it opened to scheduled commercial traffic.

Burley`s photographs of the old terminals, with their utilitarian, no-frills architecture, give a sense of air travel with a focus on

destination. By contrast, his sweeping views of United Airlines` futuristic glass fortress of a terminal suggest an evolving sense of airports as grand spaces unto themselves rather than mere exit gates to grand spaces elsewhere. When Burley turns from architecture to people, the photographs offer a whole new set of perceptions. "The thing I caught on to with the portraits is that everyone has a uniform at O`Hare," Burley says. "The businessman has a suit, a briefcase and a Wall Street Journal. The tourists really do dress for travel too," Burley says.

His portrait of a casually dressed Baltimore couple en route for vacation with sunglasses, a flight bag and a video camera promises to be a quintessential profile of the 1980s traveler.

Burley`s behind-the-scenes perspective shows hangars that reduce passenger jets to the size of toy gliders and signs that suggest the rules of living in and with our late 20th Century technological society.

"Don't get sucked in," reads one sign warning employees to stand clear of a revving aircraft engine.

Burley worked his way through the airport slowly and methodically with a 4-by-5-inch view camera, color negative film and shutter speeds that ranged from one-hundredth of a second to 2 seconds. He took more than 1,500 photographs.

Burley had permission to take photographs in the nonpublic areas of O`Hare. But he found those same areas off limits when restrictions were tightened after a 1986 television expose criticized security at O`Hare. Luckily, he had only the hangars left to do and obtained permission from United and American Airlines to photograph in theirs. He also continued to take pictures in the public areas.

Burley, 31, grew up in Picton, a small town in eastern Ontario. In addition to his commercial architectural photography, he is working on another documentary project, photographing the parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, a landscape architect who laid out Jackson and Washington Parks in Chicago.

"O`Hare-Airport on the Prairie" opens in conjunction with the grand reopening of the historical society after a \$15.3 million renovation. Major support for the exhibit was provided by United Airlines, with additional funding from Chicago`s Department of Aviation.

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