























Work

Noun: The transference of energy produced by a motion. Activity in which one exerts strength to do something. Sustained physical or mental effort accomplished by exercise of skill. Synonyms are labor, toil, travail, and grind. Activity of body, of mind, or machine, exhausting to mind or body.

Adapted from the new Merriam Webster Dictionary

Statement

There is a moment I prize in the act of work, a place where mind and body mesh. This confluence of mental acuity and bodily motion is one of our finest accomplishments. The intelligent use of the hands, the focus of the eyes, the subtle shifts in weight, the intuitive use of force, the living act of concentration needed to carry out the tasks of work are among our greatest pleasures. You need time and practice -- years of experience -- to master the skills of a trade. But once you are there, you are... there. In that moment, at the pinnacle of this graceful application of effort, I find my subject. In these pictures, the workaday falls away and I am in a perfect trance, close companion to the almost mythic beings who make our world go round, doing my work as they do theirs.

Dick Blau

TITLES/ORDER

1_Trout, 2007

2_Flat, 2007

3_Drive Shaft, 2007

4_Extraction, 2007

5_Wolf Tooth,2007

6_Wrangler, 2007

7_Cow Barn, 1907

8_Mixer, 2008

9_Crane Builder, 2007

10_Vet, 2007

11_South Tower, 2007

Epson Archival Inkjet Prints mounted on aluminum
13.33x20"

Dick Blau: Wisconsin Labor Project Field Notes

1_Trout

I am on the bank of a fast stream in Waushara County. They are DNR fisheries management specialists surveying the effects that various highway culvert designs have had on the streams that pass under them. The goal is to improve trout habitat. In the course of a long morning, Bonnie Jo and Scott measure stream depths and widths on both ends of the culvert, log water temperatures, and make photographs. The information they collect now will become part of a database to be used when the culverts are scheduled for replacement.

Department of Natural Resources Field Station/Wautoma
7/30/07

2_Flat

3_Drive Shaft

They wanted a picture from the Dells, but I didn't want to do the tourist end of things so I found my way to the garage where the Wisconsin Ducks are serviced. There are 98 of them, most of WWII vintage. It is hard, honest, filthy work. Ray is fixing a flat. Those are Ted's feet sticking out from under a Duck. He is trying to replace a driveshaft. Ted always mumbles when he works, Ray says. He seems to be saying something, but Ray has never been able to figure out what it is. Now Ted will retire in six weeks, Ray mourns, taking his secret with him. There is a kid in the shop as well. Some kind of apprentice. Ray says they are giving him the dirty work to see if he really likes grease.

Wisconsin Ducks/Wisconsin Dells
8/16/07

4_Extraction

5_Wolf Tooth
6_Wrangler

Meet Rick Tully, DVM. He's been an equine vet for 30 years. His Dad practiced in the same area for 34 years before him. We spend the day driving from one barn to another, Rick in constant touch with "base" through his CB radio. At one place he gives a physical to a pregnant mare, at another he x-rays a lame horse, at another he pulls a wolf tooth. Rick begins by sedating the horse. You can tell that a horse is sedated when its head hangs down. They remember the needle, he says, and don't like it, so you have to be fast. He is so fast I can never make a good picture of him doing it.

Elkhorn Veterinary Clinic/Elkhorn
9/6/07

7_Cow Barn

She asked me if I'd like to go into the barn where her husband was about to milk the cows. I went in, but I wasn't ready for the darkness and the handheld flash was new. I fumbled around for a while and broke into an anxious sweat before I found my groove. When I was packing up, he said, Well, I guess it's as hard for you as it is for us. And, standing there all wet, I just had to agree.

Cow Barn/Elkhorn
9/6/07

8_Mixer

We are in a long-established family deli, a Kenosha institution. Dominic, who looks to be in his wiry 80's, is mixing up a load of sausage. He

doesn't say much, but he does tell me that he makes 18 pounds of Italian every day. I gather that he is retired, but that he still comes in, just for this.

Tenuta's Delicatessen/Kenosha
1/10/08

9_Crane Builder

It is dawn in the Menomonee Valley, and they are preparing to build another of the immense cement pillars that will support the Interchange. You build the pillars around a set of steel reinforcing rods called rebar. Once the rebar is set into the foundation of the pillar, the crew uses a large crane to position a steel mold around the rebar and then to hoist an enormous funnel above it. They fill the funnel with liquid cement, which then squirts into the mold. When the cement dries, the mold is moved upward and the process begins again. That's John rigging the crane boom.

Marquette Interchange/Milwaukee
10/3/07

10_Vet

See above (4/5/6)

Elkhorn
9/6/07

South Tower

As I travel around the scaffold, I meet some ironworkers who invite me inside the South Tower. It looks like an ancient castle, but one that is filled with huge black steel girders, welding tools, and electric lines. Joe tells me that the tower needs a whole new support system, or one day sooner than later it will end up in the street. As I climb in, he tells me to be sure to tie on. You see those holes? he says, pointing to the floor. This thing is made of cake tiles, and when we stepped on them this morning a couple broke off and fell away.

Milwaukee City Hall Renovation/Milwaukee
7/22/07