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How Justin Meyer is Capturing the Unexpected Iowa

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Words by Avery Gregurich | Photography by Justin Meyer | March 10, 2015

Justin Salem Meyer's job is to be a ghost.

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He's a wedding, portrait, and commercial photographer. And when his subjects look into his camera, he is invisible. He carries thousands of photos of them around on memory cards, waiting until he is alone before reconvening with them all. His intention has always been to capture something memorable: a wedding dress, a silk tie, a family portrait.

Now, Meyer wants to capture something else: the state of Iowa.

Instead of people, his recent collections document the landscapes and pastimes of Iowa, from game sports such as trout fishing and pheasant hunting in Northeast Iowa, to public expanses like Jester Park in Polk County. "We love to prop up the things that we are passionate about, and I'm really passionate about the state of Iowa and being outside in it," Meyer says. "I've become pretty good at finding amazing places that someone would look at my photo and say, 'That doesn't look like Iowa.'"

That sentiment is what drives Meyer, 32. "My goal has been to put out amazing work that make people say, 'I want to go to Iowa,'" he says. And not for Iowa's corn and pasture — that's not what Meyer is looking for. That's the Iowa everyone already knows. In over a decade as a photographer, Meyer has found that his home state has been pigeonholed into that familiar scenery. Now, he aims to capture the state's natural beauty to change people's perspective not only locally, but nationally, too.

Take his photographs of trout fishing, for example. Even within the state itself, Meyer feels that there's little art either online or elsewhere about the sport. Instead, organizations like the Department of Natural Resources **tell the familiar story** of "a 4-year-old kid holding a bluegill," Meyer says. He feels the real story of the trout-fishing sportsman is lost. "That story hasn't ever been shown in the way that people know

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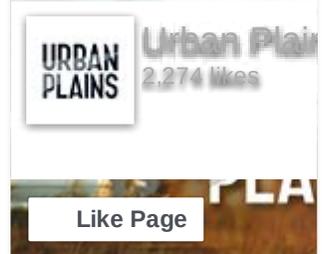


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that trout fishing is beautiful in Montana,” he says. “It’s not a secret, but it seems pretty close to it.”

For a portrait photographer, though, the outdoorsy route is a change of pace.

His change of artistic heart came after Meyer entered a few photos into the international Filson + Magnum Outdoor Photography Contest and won one of three first-place honors. As part of his prize, Meyer flew to New York to attend a masterclass with some of Magnum’s prestigious photographers. They asked him to bring a portfolio of his outdoor shots, which, as a portrait and commercial photographer, he didn’t have.



You won’t see cute pictures of kids holding up fishing rods from Meyer. He strives to show that real trout fishermen get their hands dirty and take the sport seriously.

“A lot of my outdoor work is because I was out there with people for senior pictures or something, and I shot something before I put a person in it,” Meyer says. “I realized by going back through all of my shoots that I’ve been showing people these amazing places all along.”

The international contest is as far as his shots have gone, so far. For now, he’s beefing up his **online portfolio**, and, in the near future, aiming to sell his photos to organizations like the DNR, which can in turn sell the state of Iowa to visitors and locals alike.

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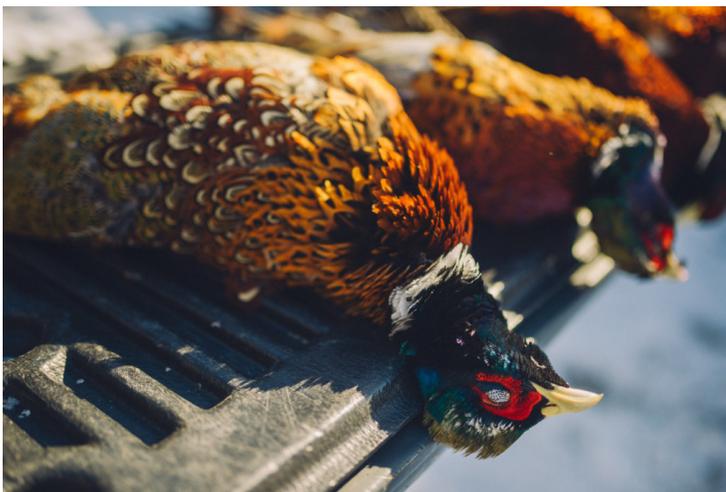
Looking forward, Meyer is excited to start experiencing places in Iowa that he hasn't been yet, like the bluffs outside of Omaha in western Iowa. Still, for a career portrait photographer, a ghost behind the lens, using nature as his only subject has taken a little getting used to.



Meyer is on a mission to prove that there's more to Iowa than flat cornfields and silos. This snapshot makes a compelling case.

"It's hard to not have people in [the photographs]," Meyer says. "Running around with friends early in the morning, you see some things and say, 'That's a photograph.' I didn't go to school for photography. I'm always learning. You get back and look at your stuff and you say, 'Ugh, what I saw was better than this.' But that's part of trying to get better."

Find Justin Meyer on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Zenfolio](#).



This is just the start of Justin Salem Meyer’s series on a pheasant-hunting trip in Northeast Iowa. He **documents the whole process**, from hunting the animals to cooking them.

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