

## That Day: Pictures in the American West

Laura Wilson photography exhibition opens at the Briscoe Western Art Museum, Sept. 15

BY KATHLEEN PETTY



PHOTOS BY LAURA WILSON: (ABOVE) COWBOYS WALKING, J.R. GREEN CATTLE COMPANY, SHACKELFORD COUNTY, TEXAS, MAY 13, 1997. GELATIN SILVER PRINT, 2015. HIGH RES (1); (BELOW) HUTTERITE GIRL IN FIELD, DUNCAN RANCH COLONY, HARLOWTON, MONTANA, JUNE 17, 1994. GELATIN SILVER PRINT, 2015. (1)

The American West is a far more complex region than what's depicted in classic John Wayne films or modern portraits of growing cities. That's what Dallas-based photographer Laura Wilson wants visitors to understand when they tour her exhibition, *That Day: Pictures in the American West*, which opens Sept. 15 at the Briscoe Western Art Museum.

The 84 photos included in the exhibition are also featured in Wilson's book of the same name. In it, she catalogues photos taken over more than 30 years of work in the West—from portraits of a six-man football team and debutantes in rural Texas to photographs of the Hutterite group in Montana and the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. "Just because we're in the West, in San Antonio or Dallas or Denver, doesn't

mean we know what's happening in Montana, Utah, Nevada or rural Texas," says Wilson, who will speak during a lecture at the museum on Tuesday, Sept. 19. "Rural America is what interests me. I feel it's important to shine a light on these groups of people who lead very often times hard, dignified lives."

Wilson, who first began photographing the West in 1979 while working with famed photographer Richard Avedon, says she was never one to fly in, take a photo and leave. Instead, she spent days (and sometimes years) working with the same groups of people to ensure she understood them and was accurately depicting their lives.

A native of the Northeast who has lived for years in Dallas—where she and her husband raised their sons (actors Luke, Owen and Andrew Wilson)—Wilson says she's always been drawn to the West. "The landscape is amazing," she says. "I'm interested in the prairie and the Great Plains and the desert. It's the sparseness of the West that interests me and what that does, how that affects people's lives."

She grew up in the era of classic Westerns and says while the romantic West depicted in those films and shows is part of the American West, she's also found it doesn't tell the full story. Her photos, which have been featured in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vanity Fair* and elsewhere, shed light on some of those lesser-known elements.



The Hutterites in Montana, for example, are a largely unknown group of Anabaptists with German roots. They live communally and in Montana, have made their home on large farms and ranches. Similar to the Amish, they live without a lot of modern amenities—a lifestyle that Wilson spent years documenting.

Her work also shows the struggles of alcoholism on an Indian reservation, of the sometimes-dangerous world on the Texas-Mexico border and of what daily life entails for those living outside of the major cities in the American West.

Many of the photos in the exhibition are large in scale. Unlike the digital prints of today, Wilson says they were taken with film and printed in a traditional way. “Even I can’t get that done this way anymore,” she says.

## Fact File

*That Day: Pictures in the American West Photographs by Laura Wilson*

Sept. 15-Dec. 10

Briscoe Western Art Museum, 210 W. Market St., 210-299-4499, [briscoemuseum.org](http://briscoemuseum.org)

### Events to Attend

Sept. 19 [Voices of the West: Distinguished Lecture Series with Laura Wilson](#), 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 17: [Exhibition Film: Las Marthas](#), 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 26, Oct. 3, Oct. 24, Nov. 7, Nov. 21, Nov. 28, Dec. 5: Exhibition tours, 6:30 p.m.

