

**Wing Young Huie**  
**Minnesota Museum of American Art**  
By Doryun Chone

A prominent figure in the Twin Cities local art scene, Wing Young Huie's previous projects intensely and lovingly documented ethnically diverse, economically underprivileged inner city neighborhoods. This time around, Huie packed up and hit the road, traveling with his wife through a couple of dozen states on a circular route around the continental United States and Hawaii. The result of his photographic journey is the exhibition "9 Months in America: An Ethnocentric Tour by Wing Young Huie," on view at the Minnesota Museum of American Art in St. Paul. Huie's landscapes and portraits evoke the "ordinary" yet uncanny America, in ways reminiscent of the tradition of American road photography whose lineage includes Stephen Shore, William Eggleston and, of course, Robert Frank. While Huie's images seem so familiar because of their wanderlust, it is when his camera zooms in on the Asian-ness of this country and its culture that the project's uniqueness comes into focus.

The term "ethnocentric" is thankfully interpreted by the photographer with judicious lightheartedness, which becomes less a political, sociological frame than a state of mind. Sure, certain random sightings, such as the "Chinee Takee Outee" road sign Huie captured in Jacksonville, Florida, are offensive in typically racist ways. But when framed by the photographer's remark—that he likes to try out Chinese food when he's in a new town and that the more "inauthentic" the food is, the better—the outrageous signage, rather than merely being a marker of ignorance or insensitivity, begins to narrate how being Asian in this country has been largely a fantastic construction via images and objects. When Huie's attention turns to portraying people (in video documentation and writing as well as photography), the overall picture exceeds the usual expectation: a young Asian couple (a rarity in terms of Huie's visual experience) he spotted outside San Francisco is juxtaposed with a Chinese-American man who moved from Los Angeles to Montana to work on railroads in honor of "the Chinese who came before him," and with young Southeast Asian youths loitering around a road sign that reads "Hmong Lo Street" in Hickory, North Carolina. The collage effectively tests the some times rigid notion of diaspora, around which much of the formation of Asian-American identity and culture has revolved.

In his preface to Robert Frank's 1958 book of photographs *The Americans*, writer Jack Kerouac waxed elegiac, claiming "with that little camera that [Frank] raises and snaps with one hand he sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film, taking rank among the tragic poets of the world." Huie's portrait of Henry Newinn of Houston, Texas, the president of the Asian Worldwide Elvis Fan Club, nobly posing with his wife in their cramped living room turned into a shrine for the King, may be neither tragic nor heroic. But it indeed tells a far richer narrative of Asian America than we are use to.