



MARCH 2011

## Recording Change with a Camera

William Christenberry

*Building with False Brick Siding, Warsaw, Alabama*



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In 1974 William Christenberry stood on a dirt road in Alabama with his camera. The building in front of him looked humble indeed with its spindly porch pillars and fake brick siding tacked or stapled to its walls. A tangle of weeds encroached upon the front steps but the yard had been cleanly mowed. It appeared that the front door was ajar. Perhaps someone was living inside.

Eight years later in 1982, William Christenberry returned to the same spot and took another picture. Hidden underneath an enormous overgrowth of kudzu vines, the same small building had all but disappeared. The scrawny pillars were now thick and lush with leaves; the outline of the roof, once neat and clean, had become leafy and unkempt. Weeds had overtaken the entire yard, obscuring the steps and the porch itself. It seems that nobody had set foot there for quite a while.

Here, then, are two photographs with the same title, taken eight years apart. How different they look! And yet each contains a small sign of its future or former self. In the earlier photo, kudzu begins to creep up a pillar; in the later photo, a few bricks are still visible above the door.

People ask William Christenberry why he bothered taking pictures of run-down dilapidated buildings. Why not photograph fancy elegant buildings instead? Christenberry replies that the land around his grandparents' farms where he grew up, was "where my heart still is" even though he moved to the city long ago. Each year, he drives back to Alabama with his camera to renew old memories and see how the places of his youth have changed and endured over the years.

### CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

How has your appearance changed from year to year? Study your annual school photographs, and then make a double self-portrait to show how you look this year compared to how you looked some years ago.

Meet William Christenberry online at [www.vimeo.com/3012856](http://www.vimeo.com/3012856). Check out "Kudzu – the Vine" at [www.jjanthony.com/kudzu/](http://www.jjanthony.com/kudzu/) See how the kudzu vine creeps over buildings, trees, and even cars in the South.

William Christenberry (American, born 1936). *Building with False Brick Siding, Warsaw, Alabama*. 1974; and 1982, printed 2011. Archival pigment prints. 8 x 10 inches; and 19 15/16 x 23 15/16 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Sandra and George Dalsheimer, Baltimore, BMA 1986.38.4, .3. ©William Christenberry; courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York



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1974; and 1982, printed 2011. Archival pigment prints. 8 x 10 inches; and 19 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 23 <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Sandra and George Dalsheimer, Baltimore, BMA 1986.38.4, .3. ©William Christenberry; courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York