

EXHIBIT AT CBC

# 'Dump Sites' a look at nature after death

Photographer Stephen Chalmers wants to remember victims, not their serial killers

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The haunting photography of Stephen Chalmers' *Dump Sites* exhibition, which opens June 30 at Columbia Basin College, pays homage to the victims of serial killers.

"Many of the most notorious serial murderers are either from Washington state or were active here," Chalmers said.

Chalmers says FBI profiler John Douglas describes the Northwest as "America's killing field."

"The weather — weeks on end of dreary rain punctuated by rare, brilliant days — probably has something to do with it," Chalmers quotes Douglas as saying. "Or, the fact that this is where the frontier ends and America literally runs out of room."

But as Chalmers points out, what the public remembers about the horror of these senseless deaths is the name of the murderers — Ted Bundy, Green River killer Gary Ridgway and about 40 others — instead of the victims.

It was the victim focus of his work that attracted the CBC gallery.

"Stephen Chalmers' photographs present a provocatively different take on the idea of landscape — different than seen in more traditional art," said Karin Pierce, director of the Esvelt Gallery.

"Chalmers is also tackling the controversial issue of society's fascination with evil and what murder looks like while hoping to create a memorial for the victims."

Chalmers spent the last couple of years visiting many of the sites where victims were found and photographed them months, and in most cases, years after they occurred.

He purposefully blurred a

section of each photo.

"The general rule for the images is that the areas in sharp focus are the locations, to the best of my knowledge, where the victims were found," Chalmers said.

His images were taken on an unusually large format camera with a 4-by-5-inch sheet of film, he said. His reason for doing this stemmed from the fact that many of the areas in question were beautiful settings that gave no clue as to the horror that happened there.

Though the images might seem creepy because of what they signify, Chalmers explains, "What I find disturbing is that there is nothing disturbing about them at all."

Hence the reason to bring the sites into focus to honor the dead instead of sensationalize the killer. His photos are titled by the name of the victims and their ages. He does not identify who killed them.

There's the solitary tether ball that hangs in a play area surrounded by trees and dirt where the body of 15-year-old Debra Estes was found.

Another is a peaceful country setting with rolling hills and a farmhouse in the distance. Sixteen-year-old Jennifer Joseph's body was found there.

Then there's the dirt path through a wooden glen where the bodies of the Neer brothers, William, 10, and Cole, 11, were found.

"The news industry is obsessed with these sorts of crimes," Chalmers explained. "As the saying goes, 'If it bleeds, it leads.' It seems that every convicted serial killer has at least a couple authors acting as biographers and numerous television and newspaper reports about the life of the perpetrator.

"If you were to ask a person on the street to name three serial killers, they could likely



The body of 15-year-old Debra Estes was found in this wooded play area.

Courtesy Stephen Chalmers

do so without even pausing to think. If you ask them to name a single victim, most people would be hard-pressed to do so. Our society fetishes the criminals and blames the victims."

A selection of his work will

be on exhibition through Aug. 7 in the Fred Esvelt Gallery at Columbia Basin College in Pasco.

A presentation with the artist starts at 6 p.m. June 30 in Room L-102 on the CBC campus. A reception will fol-

low at 7 p.m. in the gallery. Admission is free.

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at art exhibits