

Citysnaps

Urban photography by Brad Evans

“A place to view and think about photography”

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Yesterday I had a most amazing experience viewing photography in an environment that was unlike any other. That was at the Pilara Foundation's [Pier 24](#) warehouse, a newly opened 28,000 square foot structure dedicated to showing photography in a distraction-free space conducive to contemplation. The space is the largest in the US dedicated to the presentation of photography.

The warehouse at Pier 24 sits inconspicuously under the Bay Bridge and looks like any one of the other warehouses along the Embarcadero. But step inside and you are immediately greeted with nine Diane Arbus prints arranged in a grid and several of Richard Avedon's large prints from his *In the American West* series next to the check-in counter. Right from the beginning you knew you were about to experience something special.



There are more than 2,200 prints in the Foundation's collection of which a subset are on display. While there, I viewed prints from Richard Avedon, Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Garry Winogrand, Mike Disfarmer, Lewis Hine, Alec Soth, Paul Strand, Jeff Wall, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Robert Adams, Robert Frank, Edward Burtynsky, Larry Sultan, Eadweard Muybridge, Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Todd Hido, Richard Misrach, and Larry Clark. Being from memory I know I've missed a few in that list. What's really great, and not something you at first appreciate, is that you are one of only 15 visitors viewing the exhibition in the enormous space. The collection is most definitely world class and unlike any other.

Of all the photographs on display, I came away most moved by a large set of photos from Larry Clark's documentary about growing up in Tulsa with his friends; which then was later published as his book *Tulsa*. Photos were displayed on four walls of a medium sized space, where the beginning and end of each wall was marked with a photo of Clark himself. Even being familiar with his book, I still came away thinking more about his life and personal experiences in Tulsa's teen drug culture.

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The huge collection of photographs come from San Francisco native Andrew Pilara. He has been assembling his collection over the last six years after viewing the Diane Arbus exhibition at SF MOMA and then buying one of her prints at a local gallery. The space itself has been three years in the making and began with the Pilara Foundation securing a 10 year lease from the San Francisco Port Commission. A massive rehabilitation effort to bring the structure up to seismic safety standards was needed right from the beginning before interior improvements could be made. The warehouse had been abandoned since 1980 and needed a lot of renovation. The space is now beautiful and perfect for viewing great photographic works.

Admission is by reservation only where both self-guided and guided tours are available. There is no charge. I recommend starting with a guided tour to learn about the Foundation and its goals, as well as having an opportunity to learn about the photographs. My tour was conducted by Christopher McCall who is the the director of the foundation. For sure I'll be going back for many more times; the experience was that great!