



## Clued In

*Redheaded Peckerwood* by Christian Patterson

SARAH P. HANSON

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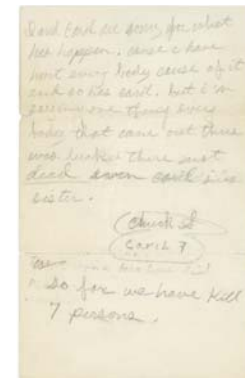
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Images from *Redheaded Peckerwood*, clockwise from opposite: *Prairie Grass Leak*, 2007; *Broken-Down Door*, 2006; *Shit from Shinola*, 2010; *Telephone*, 2008; *Confession Letter*, 2007 (detail); *Charlie's Bloody Ear*, 2007.



ALL IMAGES: CHRISTIAN PATTERSON AND MACK

Thus inspired, Patterson visited Nebraska over five consecutive Januaries, the month when the crimes occurred, tracing the fugitives' path. "Fifty years later there was only so much I could see or find," he says. But this "finding the presence in the present," as he puts it, became as much his subject as the crime spree itself. The photographs he took, bathed in the colors of midcentury middle America—Jell-O-mold green, carbon-copy salmon, bleached big-sky blue—form the core of the book; they are complemented by period documents and images. Crucially, the archival pictures are

not identified. "I want people to look at the work and feel that there's something to discover, to figure out," Patterson explains. In *Peckerwood*, as in his first book, *Sound Affects*, which was published by Edition-Kaune in 2008 and chronicles eerily unpeopled corners of Memphis's music industry, Patterson demonstrates a knack for synecdoche. An oil stain on concrete (Starkweather's first victim was a gas-station attendant) resembles the outline of a body; a vintage telephone crisscrossed with wires evokes the jolt of electricity that ended the convicted killer's life. ("It looks like the phone

you'd hear the worst news in the world on," Patterson notes.) Studio stills of such objects as a house of cards, a spilled bottle of shoe polish, and a dirty plush dog carry multiple resonances. Whether atmospherically abstract or forensically precise, they teeter between delicacy and violence. In the end, Patterson says, the enigmatic nature of his mixed photographs provides an analogue to the fundamental unknowability of the victims' thoughts and the killers' motives. By reopening the case and mingling fact and fiction, Patterson highlights what is still unresolved. MP