

Approaching Nowhere



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In *Approaching Nowhere*, Jeff Brouws surveys the evolving cultural landscapes of rural, urban and suburban America, from secondary highways to strip malls. Combining bleak beauty with an understated social commentary, he seeks a deeper meaning behind the cycle of construction, decline and renewal. Brouws' photographs go beyond mere description and gather layered meaning, often functioning as antipodal metaphors or asking sociological questions. When captured by his lens, deserted streets and freeways evoke the restlessness of an uncertain nation. Simultaneously, Brouws reminds us that roads are part of a vital infrastructure, central to a consumer

society's dependency on the transportation of goods and services.

Ever fearful of a homogenized America, Brouws bears witness to new superstore construction that eradicates valuable farmland in the Midwest. Other photographs examine embattled landscapes of once vibrant, but now abandoned central business districts in rust-belt inner cities like Buffalo, New York or Gary, Indiana. As commercial ruins shuttered and victimized by suburbanization, white flight, and chronic poverty, these places represent a nowhere - a discarded zone - in the consciousness of most Americans. On Chicago's south side, high-rise towers of segregation based on Le Corbusier's Radiant City concepts stand in silent testimony to the failure of public housing erected during the Great Society era of the 1960s. Manufacturing plants shuttered by two decades of outsourcing and deindustrialization lie fallow in Ohio. In upstate New York, a franchised landscape of corporate logos has replaced a view formerly revered by the Hudson River School painters. Once unique in its qualities, this place - like so many others across America that Jeff Brouws has documented - are being steadily replaced by a ubiquitous sense of conformity.

The photographs in *Approaching Nowhere* quietly ask us to re-examine the links between economics, consumerism, place, race, social class, housing, and urban planning. By subtle implication they suggest a deep underlying disparity throughout a country that purports economic equality and social justice for all.

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