

## **LONG DISTANCE**

My attitudes about photography changed after using pinhole cameras for several years. These cameras initially caused frustration because I could not compose my images. My home-made cameras had no viewfinder, so the results were not completely under my control. This was in direct contrast to the kind of carefully composed, full frame images I had always made in the past. The difference between seeing, composing, printing, and looking at (and remembering) the final image was radically altered in pinhole photography, where seeing the image (appear) was always a surprise. Eventually I began to enjoy this aspect of these new, 'found' images. They allowed the unexpected to enter the work, which was something I had always embraced in other mediums.

My interest in shooting while driving is linked to this love of chance. Shooting with a twin-lens while driving does not give me the opportunity to carefully compose. That process is replaced with choosing images from a proof sheet, where judgment, as well as serendipity, can once again enter into the process. The reference to moving and being in a car is also important to me as an indication of place. This experience of the exterior world, mediated through mood, traffic and speed, is a primary one for me. Whether driving or stopping to shoot, I draw my inspiration from being in the car and moving through space. The blur is not just photographic, but is also similar to how I see. Rushing through the day, often in the car, I only half-notice what is not integral to my task. Everything else glides by peripherally, flickering on the edge of my vision. My interest here is in being closer to this kind of perception.

Another important aspect I have taken from pinhole photography is duration. Long exposures are both a limitation and an opportunity: an opportunity to think about time and photography differently. Roland Barthes wrote about photography and Time as a laceration—the paradox of the present, forever represented in the image *and* the certainty that that preserved moment is an impossibility, already gone as soon as it registers on the film. In pinhole photography, the movement of time is embedded in the image. The recognition of time's passage is compacted within each image; a different kind of photographic flatness. The notion of the still moment in my earlier work came to seem like an artifice to me. The physical impossibility of stillness is suggested by the motion blur. And by simultaneously showing still and moving shots, that timeless reverie that most photographs encourage is interrupted. These two kinds of stilled moments rub against each other, allowing neither to be comfortable.

Openness is an expected quality of landscape photography. Of course, the pictorial landscape is always flat. All space is illusory in images. But for many years my urban photos were spacially closed off. They focused on walls, murals and signage in various states of decay. The sky and the horizon almost never appeared. This is how I felt about Philadelphia at the time I made those images. This new work reflects the city I live in today, where light is abundant, but the skies are not always 'open.' I am surrounded by displays designed to grab my attention. These things act as visual clutter, interrupting the view. They scream, "look at me!" I juxtapose these strategies for catching my attention with their drab or incongruous surroundings. Sometimes, in my attempts to capture these displays there is often the feeling that the camera has missed, finding only empty space. This creates frustration, but I enjoy these happy accidents. For me, the West equals color, cars and distance.

Representations of nature in landscape painting and photography have been used as symbols for the infinite for years. Mountains, skies, oceans; subjects that are too large to comprehend became stand-ins for the divine. In the past, the landscape has also been linked to such negative thoughts as the fear of death, absence and emptiness. All these things are elements of the sublime. Many of my images try to picture empty space, a kind of banal sublime. In 'empty,' there is an implication that something is missing. It is the negatively valued half of an empty—full dialectic. I choose to align 'nature' with the banal and the ugly, with development and decay, with beauty and the void. How do you make a picture of what's missing, of nothing? This has been a preoccupation of mine for years.

*Brian C. Moss, 2001-03*