

The Ecstatic Eye

A photograph covers a book. But before the text is read, the picture begins to stir its contents. Enter a rival world--the earth is the actual earth, but it has been captured by an optical effect we could not have foreseen or contrived. A mystery is on the verge of unfolding. The text will not divulge the whole, and the image honors every refusal to rob an imagination. They are in cahoots, these words and these pictures. They set the rival world in permanent motion. At the same time, they direct us to a still center, the eye of it.

The scene is generally uninhabited, but someone has been here-- here a shed the wind left standing; here the earth scored by water, drought or vehicle. A ladder disappears over a gargantuan hedge. Surely the hedge has been manicured since the beginning of time. Stones have composed themselves for a nonexistent ritual, and behind them the sky is moving every which way. Or: a face floats toward us in a fresco; hands appear and are intercepted by a serrated whiteness, and a figure of salt pushes his burden underground--evermore. Of course the mark of an earthling is disturbing. But the feelings provoked by human intervention are countered by the unstinting splendor of the visible.

He plans ahead--not in the sense of a scheduled shoot at a designated site. He loads his car with equipment and maps, camping gear, audio tapes, trail mix, and makes an expedition of his art. He can get what he sees without getting out of the car if he chooses. If he steps inside a building, every feature bares its essential anatomy. Still, he says, the photographing is the hardest part. Craft is second skin. He took his first picture, of a broom, when he was twelve, and was printing for Aaron Siskind a decade later.

Between the developing and the fixing of the print, beautiful but unearthly shapes arise; earthen colors are coaxed out of chemicals—red-brown from selenium, deep brown from sulfide, blue-grey and pale red from gold chloride. Painting with fixer and the tonalities latent in sensitized paper. Moers is not secretive about his methods, but no one else seems to be engaging them. In fact, he cannot duplicate an image himself. The process, neither static nor even stable. Each picture is unique and abiding. Every development and stage thereof is rich with the anticipation of what he will see next. And what he will do to the image once in view.

Now: a cataclysmic tree fills an eerie space; an alien form crashes the horizon.
Sometimes it causes us to tremble. —C.D. Wright