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Places

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Sergeant Crabtree of Green and the Road from Kara Balta to Bishtek

Photographs by Margaret Morton

Places come in any number of forms, but there are two ways in which even a few photographs say “place.” One is when pictures give an eloquent sense of time passing and passed; the other is when the place is presented as an easily imagined dimension, one bigger than design: a tense border, an active coastline, or a significant roadway, say. Each of these can be edited down if necessary and still give a sense of place. Otherwise, a place photographed is simply a place catalogued, guidebook style. In that case, the pictures will need explanation, and the more there are the more thorough the catalogue or guide. People inspect such a set to find what may be missing.

Experienced photographers often specialize in one or the other of the two ways to describe place. A studier of time, Robert Polidori photographed the rot that follows radical change—after nuclear disaster in Pripjat or Chernobyl for *Zones of Exclusion* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2003), and in ruined houses in New Orleans in *After the Flood* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006). Gabriele Basilico photographed both the north coast of France for *Bord de Mer* (Udine: Art&, 1990 and 1992) and what he came upon in following the roadway from Piacenza to Rimini for *L.R. 19/98 La requalificazione delle aree urbane in Emilia-Romagna* (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2001).

Margaret Morton has recently photographed two places, producing

two sets of pictures illustrating in the simplest, most straightforward way each of the approaches. One set is of a place near where she grew up, in Ohio, when it was simply a crossroads in farming country. Over the last fifteen years those crossroads have been filled with businesses, and as part of a “township” it was given first a “village” and then a “city” name—Green—as though it had come from a novel by Paul Auster. What gives her set the sense of time passing and passed is that on the weekend when she took the photographs, all the signs in this decorated-shed town remembered a local soldier who, in his early thirties, had just been killed in Iraq.

The second set is of bus stops on a road from Kara Balta to Tokmak by way of Bishtek, Kyrgyzstan. There the land is still farming country, and the bus stops are not on cross streets or at towns that would have given them names. Instead, each is decorated with tiles depicting an image by which it can be remembered: a landscape, a wild animal, a pair of medieval knights, a Kyrgyz horseman, a Soviet tank, a hammer and sickle. One stop is in the form of a traditional local hat. As often happens with a set of pictures of an easily imagined road, coastline or border, there is also in this second set a sense of time passing. Here the stops were erected under the Soviets, and now need repair.

—Cervin Robinson



















