

GAZETTE

THE PENNSYLVANIA

Fade to Black and White

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A book of photographs and poems pays loving homage to places and things left behind.



THE PICTURE THAT REMAINS

Photographs by Will Brown FA'67, poems by Thomas Devaney.

The Print Center, 2014, \$35.



When Will Brown FA'67 was taking photographs of his Queen Village neighborhood in the early 1970s, he wasn't really thinking about how those images would be viewed four decades later. He just knew that pretty much everything he saw delighted his eyes.

“When I was taking them, I was mostly thinking about the light, how things look, the composition,” he says now, his voice fading in and out of cell-phone focus from a small town in Maine. “The things that interested me—the old shops that are no longer in operation, the automobiles that have [since] been wrecked—I wasn't thinking about how it was going to change. I was photographing for the moment.”

The moment passed. The photos—of sepulchral storefronts, of majestic old Cadillacs in vacant lots, of winter sunlight slanting across fading wallpaper in an empty bedroom—appeared in several exhibitions, including at the Peale House Gallery of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. But the images never brought their maker much fame or remuneration, and eventually they were put in boxes. There they sat for several decades, while the neighborhoods—mostly in Philadelphia, a few in small Maine towns—died and changed and evolved in slow, inexorable increments.

Fast-forward to 2009. The Philadelphia Museum of Art was having a small reception for an exhibition titled *Common Ground: Eight Philadelphia Photographers in the 1960s and 1970s*, which included one of Brown's photos that had been given to the museum by its late director, Anne d'Harnoncourt, and her

husband, curator Joseph Rishel. Thomas Devaney, a poet and former program coordinator at the Kelly Writers House, had been asked to read some poems he had written to accompany the photos. The poet and the photographer had never met, which is why Brown was stunned to hear Devaney say that one of the poems was “inspired by the photography of Will Brown.”



“I said, ‘Whew! I’ve got to know this guy!’” Brown recalls. Later, at a party, he introduced himself to Devaney and proposed that they collaborate on a book—something his own mentor, Rudy Burckhardt, had done with another poet. Devaney immediately agreed.

The result was *The Picture that Remains*, published earlier this year by The Print Center. Brown’s tender, gritty black-and-white photographs—“stunning yet not flashy,” in Devaney’s words—are lovingly presented and complemented by the poems. In most cases the poems represent a “parallel work” to Brown’s photos, Devaney explains, “though there is much sharing and overlap via themes,” and a couple of poems respond directly to certain images.

“One of the most intriguing aspects of Brown’s photos,” Devaney adds, “is that not only will these scenes never look the way they do look in his pictures again, but another realization occurs, which—this is another reason I love them—is that they may only look the way they do because of Brown’s photos.” —

S.H



Rear Window

The collapse of tenderness
and no place to park.

But there, there's
an open spot.

Shift and reverse—
the vantage
of the rear window;
a need and skill met in
a semi-blind act.

All that happened—
all that needed to happen.

Shall we simply sit here and stare?

Whichever year it was,
the make of the car
ten or twelve years
older than that.
All of those years
in one: The one of the auto.
The one of the war.
The one of which side

of the street
did we park?

After the last argument,

the last silence
of the last two people
to hear it.

Together, that's the light we are in.

—*Thomas Devaney*