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### Then and Now: The Enduring Allure of Light in Photography

*J. Fatima Martins*

"They wear in more than they wear out. It can't be helped. It's neither good nor bad. It's the nature of life." American novelist and photographer, Wright Morris, who popularized the photo-text, wrote these words as he meditated on and captured the condition of time with his stories and haunting photographs of America in transition.

This sentiment is also the thesis of "Then and Now: The Enduring Allure of Light in Photography," a presentation of contemporary forms of photographic technique and concepts selected by respected photographer Joel Meyerowitz. "Time certainly moves us past that early tragic moment," wrote Meyerowitz, who pulled in selections from regional member artists as well as national talent for this exhibition at the Copley Society of Art. The final photographs elicit a multitude of open-ended questions and responses, all grounded in the concept of "the moment." Here we find history in flux: time in transition, reality as illusion, the rise and fall of anticipation illuminated or hidden by the condition of light and shadow.

Exemplifying the enduring quality of classic methods and styles is Robert Pyle's platinum print, "Light and Shadow, Ft. Warren, Boston Harbor," an image in rich blacks and captivating shadows depicting the geometric drama of an empty interior in an old building. Pyle's photograph has the voice of the powerhouse photographs of the depression era and the 1940s, works by the grand masters of tonality and poetic photography who documented a vanishing America with action and visual force. Light sources entering from multiple angles enhance and give form to an already complex structure further highlighting texture and creating mood. Although the identity of place has not been eliminated and the photograph is meant to document what is representational, with the purpose, as Pyle writes, of capturing the "often-overlooked beauty and significance of place," his focus on structure pushes the composition into the abstract. The stark and mysterious interior presents many possibilities; the sense of foreboding is in place, yet visitors are encouraged to enter and explore. In this space, time stands still, yet movement is the subtext; what was is now gone, and the ghosts cross shadowy corners escaping the exterior light as it shifts around the room.



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The exploration of history, the specifics of geography and atmosphere and the pull of travel are elements of Mark Chester's silver print "Horse and Rider," a highly layered and emotive photograph recently published in his new book "Twosomes" (Un-Gyve Press, Boston). Set atop and in foreground of an effective contrasting landscape, the image of a solitary cowboy and his horse projects a lonely slow experience. Here nostalgia speaks, memories are shifting and the objects of human life are slowly decaying. The visual focal point of Chester's image are the contrasting texture and hard lines of the abandoned building against the organic and smoky valley and mountain, with the additional layer of human figure in action in front the building. Chester plays with the concept of "together, yet alone" in this work. Though cowboy and rider share mutual need, complementing each other, they are also individuals, and their distance marks the emotional condition of the image.

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