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December 2017 Press Release

American Assemblies: Photography by Billy Cress and Mark Havens

December 1 - January 14, 2017

EVENTS:

First Friday Opening Reception: Friday, December 1, 6-10pm

2nd St. Sessions - Gravy Print Sale: December 9th, 1-5pm.

Closing Reception and Artist Talk: Sunday, January 14th, 2018, 1-5pm.

Open Hours: Saturdays 1-5pm

This month's show at Gravy, *American Assemblies*, comprises two sets of photographic works that focus on Jersey Coast architecture. The title for the show comes from the purpose of the two projects, importantly, collecting and preserving beautiful and dying structures through still photographs. These places, quintessentially American in their design, are captured in a very straightforward, honest way and are presented in an undiluted fashion.

Collecting and remembering are intents well-suited to still photography and become ever more relevant in a time when the beauty that once was is slowly killed off in the name of development.

Billy Cress' project in particular visually tells the story of the development happening along the coast, where these beautiful mid-century structures that are slowly dying each year, seem to stick out among the plastic, modern homes.

Partially a collecting project and partially simple observational photography, Billy's photographs are expressions of the ideas of time and place outside of a conventional context. The off-season at the shore is notoriously quiet, as can be seen in his images, which are devoid of people. Through his series of images, a tranquil energy is transmitted to the viewer, and in doing so, it makes one reflect on the beauty of these structures in their own right. Even in the off-season, these images capture the essence of what will soon be undoubtedly missed by those like Billy, who spent a lot of time here growing up.

Speaking about the evolution of his project, Billy mentions "I set out to have some alone time in a place I frequented growing up. After a very long time of not visiting I returned for a nostalgic walk, and this time with my camera. What I chose to take pictures of just sort of unfolded like it always does."

Billy's series of photographs is an extension of a collecting project he works on in Philadelphia.

Mark Havens' photos document the same beautiful but slowly dying architecture along the Jersey Coast, and add another dimension to the notions of time and place, notably, removing themselves from such contexts. He explains, "To great extent, I feel like the decontextualization of the structures from place

and hopefully time makes the images more open to interpretation or at least adaptation into the viewer's own personal narrative. I wanted these images to almost exist outside of place and time."

These photographs convey a strong sense of nostalgia, both in terms of the classic architecture and design, and the sense of something soon to be lost. His photos capture the essence of once iconic structures slowly being washed away by the tides of time. There is a definite sense of vacancy attached to these images, and by removing every subject but the building itself, we are presented these different locations in an almost idealized state.

This sense of "purity" is what Mark set out to capture. He elaborates, "Most of what I wanted to capture—once the project came into focus for me—wasn't vacancy or seclusion but a sort 'purity,' for lack of a better term. I wanted to show these places in their best, almost idealized state. I really like Werner Herzog's term for it—'ecstatic truth'—which he says can only be reached by using fabrication, imagination, and stylization. In the end, part of that stylization for me turned out to be the elimination of every other subject but the building itself."

He continues, speaking about how seeking this purity led to this sense of desertion present in the images, "Once I began to shoot photographs that were devoid of people or activity of any kind, though, I realized that the isolation actually clarified the bold architectural forms and, more importantly, served as an analogue of the larger situation at the time, which was pretty much wholesale destruction of a great number of motels on the island."

Indeed, there is a sense of clinging on, expressed by the bright neon lights that will soon be extinguished and that will no longer pierce through the dark night.

For the full interview with both artists, please visit Gravy's website at gravy-studio.com/2017-exhibitions.

And for more of their work please visit their respective websites (Billy Cress: <http://billycress.com/> and Mark Havens: <http://markhavens.com/>).

For more info please contact Gravy at gravy.photo@gmail.com or call 267.825.7071. Gravy Studio & Gallery is a collaborative photography workspace and gallery located near the Frankford Arts Corridor. Our goal is to serve as a multi-functional space that promotes the work of local photographers. Opening receptions are held on the First Friday of every month and additional open hours vary.