

# MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

## DEC 10 Book Review: *Upstate* by Tema Stauffer

*Upstate*, Tema Stauffer's quiet documentation of working-class communities along the Upper Hudson River Valley, is a somber tribute to post-industrial ennui and decay. Once a burgeoning hub that thrived during the explosion of the Industrial Revolution, these factory towns have been left, abandoned, or otherwise sparsely and carelessly populated. Xhenet Aliu in her forward says the images of *Upstate* are hard to look at because loss is such a defining characteristic of the collection. Beyond first impressions, however, and with the aid of Stauffer's keen attention to detail, these photographs evolve meanings more complex than what is simply an absence of people and, page by page, adopt some semblance of hope. Germantown, Livingston, and Hudson, New York are towns that resemble one another in the sunken quality of abandoned country houses and the skeletal remains of materials plants. What's odd about the collection is that these towns, though ghostly, are haunted by the living. Young families and old laborers alike still live and work amongst crumbling factories. In "Rear Room," a photo Stauffer captured in the Oliver Bronson House in Hudson, New York, the viewer looks down the length of an upstairs hallway to an ornate, delicately rotting staircase that curves in a helix to the floor below. In the foreground, blue and yellow paint crumble over one doorway and then another. The viewer's eye is immediately drawn to the banister, but, because this is several rooms away, the images create an illusion of movement as the viewer imagines crossing the actual distance to the staircase. But movement in this space is reason for suspicion, because tiny, but poignant, details tell us that no one lives here anymore. Other photographs capture the lighthearted side of crumbling infrastructure. In "White Car," taken in Hudson, New York, a white car is parked outside a storefront that boldly declares "Hairy Situations - Unisex Salon." Only upon closer inspection does the viewer notice that the car seemingly idling at the curb is rusted and unoccupied, that the neon "Open" sign is turned off, and no passersby linger to read the public notices and restaurant advertisements on the street. Some of the most jarring images are the portraits that would be considered normal in any other context. Here, though, the pale, naked chest of "Mike" (photographed in Castleton, New York), and his tranquil, almost drowsy expression, is almost uncomfortable to look at beside scenes of dilapidated row houses. Just as well, "Peter" (photographed in Hudson, New

York), appears like an unreal, beautifully featured and sharp-eyed man in torn and ragged clothes, sandwiched between an image of an old house and a barren field.

*Upstate* was published by Daylight Books in 2018. Please click [here](#) for more information provided by the publisher, and visit the photographer's website [here](#).

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