

The PhotoBook Journal

January 18, 2019

Tema Stauffer – UPSTATE

Filed under: [Book Reviews](#), [Photo Book Discussions](#), [Photo Books](#), [Photographers](#) — Tags: [Family](#), [Photo-documentary](#), [Tema Stauffer](#), [Urban Landscape](#) — Doug Stockdale @ 3:36 pm

Photographer: [Tema Stauffer](#)

Born: Durham North Carolina, currently resides in Tennessee

Publisher: [Daylight Books](#), Chapel Hill, NC, copyright 2018

Foreword by Xhenet Aliu and essay by Alison Nordstrom

Language: English

Hardcover, Cloth bound sewn, 84 pages, 33 color photographs, printed by OFSET YAPIMEVI, Turkey

Photobook Designer: Ursula Damm

Notes: Upon opening UPSTATE for the first time, this reviewer was immediately taken back to her own years spent living in the Hudson Valley while attending Bard College. Not only because the subject of Tema Stauffer's new work is the nearby city of Hudson and the surrounding landscape, but because Stauffer's visual approach is in comfortable alignment with the work of seminal photographer Stephen Shore and the photography department he has directed at Bard since 1982. Thus while some photo books offer a glimpse into worlds we can never ourselves experience, the landscape and palette of UPSTATE felt so familiar that it has taken a bit of time to put into words the pleasure of this fine body of work.

Especially after reading the excellent essays that bookend Stauffer's beautiful images. Novelist Xhenet Aliu does an outstanding job of providing context for the recent changes in Hudson, a once mighty industrial city which has become the weekend darling destination of monied Manhattanites. Photo historian Alison Nordstrom's essay references Stauffer's work in the context of Hudson River painters, the New Topographics "school" of photography, Edward

Hopper, and even the Japanese concept of Natsukashii, which loosely translated means nostalgia for something that no longer exists. The quality of writing in these essays complements the quality of Stauffer's images and thus there is little one can add, other than to share an individual experience of spending time with this must-have book.

For those who are familiar with the work of photographer Gregory Crewdson one might find some similarity in the settings of UPSTATE. However, this reviewer prefers Stauffer's approach, which is non-fictional, honoring the truth of a real place rather than using it as backdrop for expensive cinematic narratives.

The design of UPSTATE also differs significantly from another recently published (and potential companion piece) photo-book, UPSTATE GIRLS by Brenda Ann Kenneally, which focuses on the chaotic lives of low income inhabitants of nearby Troy New York, and is thus presented in collage-like journalistic manner. In UPSTATE, Stauffer concentrates more on the architecture of a beautiful yet changing landscape, focusing on fields, winter light, abandoned buildings, and further evidence of blue-collar lives in which the hardware store is more important than the newest knitting store serving six dollar lattes. Thankfully, nothing found in UPSTATE, be they interiors or streetscapes, feels artificial.

There are many pleasures to this book of 33 color images, particularly if one appreciates fine printing and singular 8x10 images with clean white borders filling an entire page, complemented with blank white pages that allow Stauffer's formal images to breathe, as if on a gallery wall.

However, experiencing these images presented in book form offers the viewer a chance to appreciate not only Stauffer's eye for detail and active frame lines, but also her meditation on the subtle power of color. The opening image "River's Edge" offers complementary tones of blues and yellow via steel grey buildings and farming equipment, and is then answered by a distant red door in the following image "Furgary Shacks." Picking up on the musicality of Stauffer's color sense makes UPSTATE a fun book to spend time with. As with themes which rise and diminish throughout a musical suite, UPSTATE offers the viewer a delightful dance between cool tones of winter and exciting pops of warmth; some found in nature, some created by man.

A *minuet* of red returns in the collar of "Reggie" (a portrait of a distinguished yet paint splattered gentleman), crescendos in the following image aptly titled "Red House", finally diminishing yet still heard in the geometric lines of houses on "Cross Street." Stauffer's melodic images return to blues and yellows of "Rear Bedroom" and continues through the next four photographs, then red chimes back in with the appearance of Sumac trees, reaching a masterful pitch with the vinyl seats and ketchup bottle in the Elizaville "Diner". The *passepied* of this passage can be

found in the blue eyes and pinkish flesh of the bare-chested “Mike”, one of only three portraits contained in the book. The *polonaise* of “Allen Street” and “White Car” evoke the architectural work of Walker Evans and the time-stamping inclusion of vehicles found throughout Stephen Shore’s UNCOMMON PLACES. These two elements are successfully united with the inclusion of “Brown Dodge”.

Though these gorgeous 8×10 images can be appreciated formally, there are also traces of humor, best seen in “Interior, Furgary Shack #6.” For those who study the very edges of the frame, a game we lovers of large format photography can’t help but play, pay attention to the wall art in the background. Rarely does a photograph make you laugh out loud. This one did.

Throughout UPSTATE, Tema Stauffer shares her gift of seeing the inherent beauty of *what is*, and *what was*.

A subtle symphony of images, UPSTATE is a gorgeous collection of work. Highly Recommend.

Enjoy! – Melanie Chapman

<https://thephotobook.wordpress.com/2019/01/18/tema-stauffer-upstate/>