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Wim Wenders's Open Road

BY THE NEW YORKER



"Armenian Alphabet," Armenia, 2008.

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Wim Wenders's stunning landscape photographs, which show sites in the U.S., Germany, Cuba, Japan, Canada, Israel, and beyond, reveal inclinations similar to the ones that find expression in his films: the spirit of a traveller, and the sense of longing, melancholy, and mythology that the open road can inspire. The images convey a reverence for desolate, panoramic landscapes—human occupants, when they appear at all, are, like Harry Dean Stanton in the roving opening shots of "Paris, Texas," dwarfed by wide expanses of scenery. In "4 Real & True 2!," a new book of Wenders's photos from the German publisher Schirmer/Mosel, we can see the artist's preoccupation with borders and border crossings (there are scenes from the former East Germany and from the Golan Heights) and with the memory of trauma (an image of the cleanup operation at Ground Zero, taken in November of 2001, looks like a scene of sci-fi apocalypse). And, as in Wenders's films, we see a strong painterly eye: a string of storefronts in Butte, Montana, Wenders writes, looks "as if I had walked into my favorite painting," Edward Hopper's "Early Sunday Morning"; "Wyeth Landscape," saturated with gold and grey, could be one of Andrew Wyeth's pieces sprung to life. In an essayistic prose poem printed in the new volume, Wenders emphasizes, above all, photography's role as a defender of reality "against the storm of the virtual second-hand":

You can believe your eyes,
just as you might look out the window in the morning and know:
This road, this garden, that high-rise, they all exist, they're there, just as I am!
You can regard these pictures with the selfsame certainty.

"4 Real & True 2!," a collection of Wim Wenders's photographs, with text by Beat Wismer, Hubertus von Amelunxen, Laura Schmidt, and Wenders, comes out on June 25th from Schirmer/Mosel. Wenders's photographs are also the subject of an exhibit on view at the Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf, Germany, through August 16th.