It's hard to be down when you're up

Katherine Driscoll
IT’S HARD TO BE DOWN WHEN YOU’RE UP.
by Katherine March Driscoll

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In times of transition, the American dream must be evaluated in terms of a possible future rather than an impossible past. It’s hard to be down when you’re up pictures Rochester, NY as a model for the transitional state of today’s American cities using the color documentary style of 70’s photographers like Stephen Shore. Photographs and installation cite the fragments of potential found within the urban landscape through the dialectical nature of walking and reflecting, examining the relationships between person and place, reality and fantasy, history and future.
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IT’S HARD TO BE DOWN WHEN YOU’RE UP.
He needs me—
And I need a hand.

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I walk past my dream house everyday. It is blue shingled and reminds me of a boat. Facing the sidewalk is a large picture window that houses a thriving houseplant, stretching and pressing itself onto the glass for an extra dose of sunlight. When the sun shines through the trees, the shadows combine with the branches of the plant. Inside and outside dissolve.

In his 1968 work *Right to the City*, Henri Lefebvre professes “The whole is not immediately present in this written text, the city. There are other levels of reality which do not become transparent by definition. The city writes and assigns, that is, it signifies, orders, stipulates. What? That is to be discovered with reflection.”

*It’s Hard to be Down When You’re Up,* holds this practice of reflection as its goal, inviting the viewer to engage with space in both personal and social modes.

Rochester, NY, my hometown and subject, serves as a model for the state of transition common to many contemporary cities. Home of Eastman Kodak, and by extension the home of photography, I use the medium to orient and direct myself within this uncertainty. The photograph simultaneously acts as a document of the past and a possibility for the future.

Step back, look out, and observe what is happening from above. What does the structure tell us to do? How can we tell it what we need? On the street, I gather the fragments of possibility, the plastic palm tree and the flower that never got planted. From above I combine them. How these pieces begin or refuse to fit together into the whole determines how I move forward, what I seek to fill the space.

The pedestrian finds almost instant access to the community in which she/he walks, physically in it and socially in on it. A conversation develops between person and place that employs shared and learned metaphors in public and private spaces. Jokes and accommodations of the inhabitant are exposed by strolling on streets that were built for driving.

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