ANDREW MOORE  EAST/WEST

January 23–February 26, 2014 / List Gallery, Swarthmore College
Andrew Moore’s List Gallery exhibition, *East/West,* offers the opportunity to compare his distinct yet related series of photographs of sites in Russia and Ukraine (2000–2004), Bosnia (2001–2002), and Detroit, Michigan (2008–2009). Despite enormous differences in their geographic and cultural contexts, these bodies of work share an ongoing concern with the fragility of humanity in a rapidly changing world. The melancholy that pervades many of his photographs of decaying structures standing at the periphery of the Soviet empire also permeates his images of Detroit’s collapsing landmarks—buildings that once seemed to embody the American Dream. Both bodies of work explore the collapse of a once dominant mythos, the scope of human struggle, and the potential for resilience.
Moore’s large-scale photographs, many of which measure 5 by 6 feet, continue the tradition of 20th century documentary photographers such as William Eggleston (b. 1939), who pioneered the use of saturated color in monumental and richly textured photographs of prosaic subjects: commercial spaces, worn facades, and vacant interiors. Like his close contemporaries, Edward Burtynsky (b. 1955) and Robert Polidori (b. 1951), Moore also dramatizes the impact of global industrial production. Works such as *Abandoned Missile Base, Skripleva’s Island, Far East* (2003, see page 2), portray some of the human consequences of rapid geopolitical change. As Moore describes it, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, missiles were removed from the island base in Vladivostok’s harbor, six miles from the mainland. An isolated family remains in the ruins, surviving with only a small rowboat and the generosity of local fishermen who provide food and supplies. Moore’s image portrays this family of five gathered in a circle with their dog. Their relaxed intimacy contrasts with the barren rocks, ramshackle shelter, and ruined barracks in the distance. At left, a pole with crisscrossed signs posting approximate distances to far-off cities underscores the atmosphere of cultural and technological deprivation.

Moore’s large-scale images allow us a close-up view of what would otherwise remain remote or exotic: Detroit neighborhoods where invasive vines have enveloped abandoned houses; vacant buildings that have been scavenged by urban adventurers; war-scarred building façades overshadowing everyday life in Bosnia; abandoned military sites in Siberia; and Soviet-era landmarks in need of repair. His eye for compelling color, texture, and incongruous juxtapositions link the instability of architectural structures to the vulnerability of the economies and ideologies that shaped them. Seen side-by-side, these bodies of work challenge categorical oppositions that, when accepted at face value, would short-circuit nuanced analysis: urban/rural, cultured/natural, inventive/factual, and East/West. Although Moore dramatizes the ephemeral nature of civilization, he also invites us to study the margins of society, where he discovers surprising signs of beauty.

Moore was born in 1957, the year Russia launched Sputnik, the first space satellite. Like many children in the 1960s, he grew up imagining and dreading a Soviet invasion and the communist influences so often denigrated in textbooks and popular culture. He was raised in a Connecticut suburb of New York City at a time when many schools still practiced cold-war nuclear air raid drills. Most people imagined fighting the Soviet empire, not travelling there to create art.

In contrast, Detroit in the 1960s was still considered by many to be the “arsenal of democracy.” Also known as the Motor City, the birthplace of Motown records, and the home of the Detroit Lions, who won their fourth N.F.L. championship in 1957, Detroit represented American ingenuity and vitality. Although the U.S. Government started to award military contracts elsewhere after World War II and Detroit’s fiscal policies were exacerbating the resulting population loss, Michigan’s industrial and modernist ideals were still equated with American prosperity and freedom. Car and furniture design as well as innovative architecture by Albert Kahn, Frank Lloyd Wright, Eero Saarinen, and others became hallmarks of American progress. In 1976, when Detroit’s population had steadily declined for 25 years, General Motors executives and others, believing that new construction could catalyze development, constructed the Detroit Renaissance Center—seven interconnected skyscrapers and the tallest hotel structure in the Western Hemisphere.

The son of an architect whose home office was filled with drawings and scale models, Moore began from an early age to think about the critical role of design and of how spaces are “brought to life through architecture.” During more than 25 years working as an artist, he has also explored the myriad ways in which humans inhabit, abandon, renovate, or repurpose the structures around them. His primary subject is not just the structures themselves and what they reveal about human intent, but the history and forces beyond individual control that continually transform our ways of life.

Like many contemporary photographers working today, Moore has sought compelling subject matter and broader perspectives through travelling widely, not only to remote sites in Russia, Ukraine, and Bosnia, but also to Vietnam, Cuba, and Abu Dhabi. His work in the United States has taken him to many regions including Kansas, Nebraska, and other regions of the American Midwest, which inspired his current series, *Dirt Meridian* (2011–on).
In compositions such as *Motherland, Kiev* (2003, see page 18), Moore captures the domineering excess of the vast public spaces and propagandistic structures that were constructed at the expense of the individual. Moore’s image allows us to consider the 100-meter high statue of *Rodina Mat, or Homeland Mother*, an allegorical figure representing Russia that was appropriated during the Brezhnev era to represent Soviet power and unity. Once teeming with state-choreographed political gatherings, the surrounding plaza is empty except for scattered groups of tourists. Moore emphasizes the plaza’s vacancy and monotonosy through elevating his viewpoint. In addition, he captures a moment when a dark cloud ominously frames the statue. The low-lying sun dimly illuminates the figure from below in ironic counterpoint to its martial stance. Whereas *Rodina Mat* still stands triumphant, Moore recasts her victory as a pyrrhic one.

Traveling to Siberia and elsewhere in Russia, Moore created images in which dramatic historical change is evident even in cluttered alleys, commercial shops, or domestic scenes. *Misha and Vladimir, Lake Baikal* (2003, see page 15) depicts a baby bear resting in a courtyard. The chain securing the bear’s collar to the wall also draped across the neck of an oversized and decayed bust of Vladimir Lenin. Chain loosey-goosey together by their anonymous owner, both the bust and bear look downcast and forgotten in a corner filled with outmoded crates, tools, and building scraps. Whereas the composition appears relatively informal, the contrasting blocks of color and texture interlock, emphasizing the scene’s incongruity and claustrophobic mood.

Similarly, Moore’s images from St. Petersburg convey the fragility of culture and his interest in the “unlovely beauty” of derelict yet colorful interiors façades—motifs that seem to repeat endlessly, embodying an oppressive conformity. Even the relatively enticing arrangement of paintings in *Restoration Room, St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts* (2002, see page 17), highlights the notion of faded beauty and collapsed hierarchies of value. Placed edge to edge like the surrounding rows of stools and chairs, the arrangement conveys a disturbing sameness as if everything has been rendered equally important or unimportant. Almost all the paintings include figures, yet the room is otherwise empty, frozen in time.

Singer 4 x 5 and 8 x 10-inch format cameras that require careful site selection, set-up, and long exposures, Moore produces richly detailed and formally complex images that offset bold symmetries with skewed or dynamic forms. In *Opera House, Irkutsk*, (2003, see page 16), where he portrays the ornate theater undergoing restoration, Moore symmetrically frames the circular gilt ceiling so that the chandelier hangs close to the center of the picture. Light does not emanate from the chandelier but from the surrounding sconces, which shine on the tarps draped across the balconies. The restorer’s darkened bucket lift cuts diagonally across the otherwise symmetrical composition in contrast to the white walls and plastic sheeting. Moore’s wide angled exposure gives us the impression of looking straight ahead and upward at the same time. Through an optical illusion, the restorer both touches the ceiling and seems to swing outward in a motion that, if it were actually occurring, would topple the lift. The resulting sense of vertigo becomes integral to our understanding of this landmark and its shifting history. In *Opera House*, the grand stage does not become Moore’s subject but his fulcrum or viewpoint.

The atmosphere of vulnerability and transition is even more pronounced in Moore’s photographs of Bosnia (2001–2002), where he found the consequences of the Bosnian War (1992–1995) writ large on building facades. Images such as *Supermarket, Gorzade* (2001, see page 20), provide haunting images of daily life returning to a structure scarred by mortar rounds. Moore accentuates the scene’s claustrophobic and ominous mood by closely cropping his image so that the building’s upper story, which is punctuated by gaping mortar holes, fills the top three quarters of the picture. Only a sliver of sky, a strip of sidewalk in the foreground, and a wedge of shrubbery

Pursuing a long-standing interest in East Asian architecture, Moore first travelled to Russia in 2000 and ultimately made six trips to that country and Ukraine. Realizing that he could not synthesize such a diverse culture, he decided to visit areas on the periphery of the former Soviet Union such as the Solovki Archipelago, Sakhalin Island, the Crimean Peninsula (now Ukraine), and the city of Ulan Ude near the Mongolian border.
In Birches Growing in Rotted Books, Detroit Public Schools Roosevelt Warehouse (2008, see page 10), Moore documents an abandoned schoolbook repository where a broken skylight on the top floor allowed rain to speed the disintegration of forgotten textbooks. The decayed books turned into mulch for the birch saplings that subsequently took root and grew toward the opening. The sight of such rapid growth amid the otherwise barren interior offers a reminder of nature’s tenacity and capacity for renewal. Through highlighting such contradictions, Moore also challenges us to question how structures associated with core American values could so unexpectedly become peripheral.

Moore’s fascination with large scale prints and intense color as well as his ongoing focus on architectural transformations distinguish his work from that of his teacher and mentor at Princeton University, Emmet Gowin. However, like Gowin, Moore discovers and composes scenes so that they not only startle and disturb, but also prompt empathy. Gowin influenced generations of photographers through three decades of teaching, his intimate family portraits, and aerial photographs collected in the exhibition and monograph, Emmet Gowin: Changing the Earth, organized by Yale University Gallery Director Jock Reynolds. Reynolds used the term “terrible beauty” to describe Gowin’s alluring images of ecological depredation, many of which documented the Nevada proving ground where the United States Government conducted 928 atmospheric nuclear tests. As Gowin has written:

> Even when the landscape is greatly dis-figured or brutalized, it is always deeply animated from within. When one really sees an awesome, vast, and terrible place, we tremble at the feelings we experience as our sense of wholeness is reorganized by what we see... At such a moment, our feelings reach for an understanding. This is the gift of a landscape photograph, that the heart finds a place to stand.
Although working in color and on a much larger scale than Gowin, Moore’s similar dedication to craft, detail, and formal composition produces works that reawaken viewers’ capacity for feeling and discernment. He accomplishes this in part by avoiding sensationalized representations. For example, the homeless person in Shelter and Vent, Detroit Dry Dock Building is not visible, but his ramshackle shelter suggests his presence and struggle to survive. His glowing fire provides a metonym representing all humanity. Like the image, Moore’s logistically descriptive title does not encourage us to pity the man or imagine that we understand him as an individual. In contrast to the “image porn” that some critics observe in popular media—art that panders to voyeuristic curiosity about disaster or the desire to feel in control relative to others—Moore’s images demonstrate conceptual complexity and formal relationships that convey a transcendent dignity.

For example, images such as Ice Alley, East Methodist Church, Detroit (2008, see page 25), are at once extraordinary and understated. A wheelbarrow sits in a flooded alley that has frozen into a trapezoidal shape receding toward the brick wall in the distance. Years of neglect have allowed tall trees to grow from the cracked pavement, threatening the foundations of the buildings. The dark trunk at left obscures the rear edge of edifice, concealing the way it intersects—or doesn’t—with the building at the end of the alley. As a result, the façades appear simultaneously contiguous and separate. One can’t quite make sense of how one would proceed through the space.
Moreover, instead of revealing the spreading tree canopy, cornices, or sky, Moore crops his image so that we only see a bricked-in area. This marginal space alternately expands or flattens as built structures and the forces of nature vie for supremacy.

Some might argue that Moore’s works continue centuries-old traditions of documenting or romanticizing the resurgence of nature amid the ruins of previous civilizations. In the mid-fifteenth century, ruins appeared in the backgrounds of European paintings portraying religious themes, such as the Nativity. The divinity of the Christ’s birth was made more convincing against the remains of a collapsed pagan culture. Subsequently, 19th century Romantic painters such as Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) portrayed the sublime forces of nature before which human endeavors appear insubstantial. Similarly, American artists such as Thomas Cole provided alternating images of pastoral bliss and cautionary tales about the limits of imperialism. However, Romantic paintings of ruins, including Cole’s painting Destruction (1836), appeal to viewers in part because they portray disasters as remote prospects. They place the present in a privileged relationship to collapsed civilizations and encourage the viewer to believe that more enlightened choices can avert catastrophe.

In contrast, Moore’s Detroit Disassembled images dramatize crises taking place at the core of the current American economy and culture. Traveling to the margins of society, whether to locations in the heartland of America or the boreal reaches of Siberia, Moore reveals the limits of contemporary engineering and social planning and the scope of poverty. Collectively, his works caution us against false notions of superiority. Demonstrating the redemptive beauty of tenacity, empathy, and discernment, they also take comfort in the resilience of nature.

NOTES

3. Michigan Modern: http://michiganmodern.org/about/history
4. Alex Quig’s interview with Andrew Moore: http://www.alecquig.com/Interview-with-Photographer-Andrew-Moore
5. ibid.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We are grateful to Andrew Moore for lending works to this exhibition. I would also like to thank Emmet Gowin, the 2012 Donald J. Gordon Visiting Artist, who first introduced me to Andrew Moore’s artwork.

REPRODUCTIONS

All works are digital pigment prints produced from scanned film negatives and printed in variable sizes in limited editions. Works appear courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York.
Restoration Room, St. Petersburg, Academy of Fine Arts, 2002 / Page 17

This studio in the St. Petersburg Academy of Fine Arts was used by the painting department to teach restoration and conservation techniques. The works on the walls are copies of paintings in the nearby Hermitage Museum. Students learn techniques of restoration by making these copies, despite rumors that some paintings in the Hermitage are forgeries.

Motherland, Kiev, 2003 / Page 18

Built by Leonid Brezhnev in the early 1980s, this 100-meter-high titanium statue, is called Rodina Mat, or “The Homeland is Mother.” One of many such monuments personifying the Soviet Union, it faces Moscow, a not too subtle reminder to Ukrainians about where to direct their fealty.

Green Trucks, White Nights, Solovki, 2002 / Page 19

Beyond the Soviet era radar trucks on the island of Solvki, lies the 16th Century Orthodox Solovetsky Monastery. Solovki’s remote location on an archipelago in the White Sea in northwestern Russia made it a spiritual refuge but it also had great military value as the northernmost fortress of the Russian empire. The Russian Tsars employed Solovetsky as a prison, but its greatest notoriety comes from it being the site of the first Soviet labor camp. It was later incorporated into the Gulag (Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei, or Main Administration of Labor Camps), a chain of corrective facilities primarily located in Siberia and the Far North, and documented in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s masterpiece The Gulag Archipelago. This photograph was taken at 2 a.m., the dimmest point of the evening during the White Nights, a period between late May to early July when the sun barely dips below the horizon.

ARTIST’S NOTES

Abandoned Missile Base, Skripieva’s Island, Far East, 2003 / Page 2

A lighthouse keeper and his family are the only residents of this small barren island in Vladivostok’s harbor. Previously, the island housed a nuclear missile silo attended by an all-female military staff. According to legend, residents were told that the base was a mental hospital. The ruins of the barracks are visible in the background.

Birches Growing in Rotted Books, Detroit Public Schools Roosevelt Warehouse, 2009 / Page 10

Located next to the Michigan Central Station, this building was originally used as a post office, and later as a book depository by the Detroit Public Schools. In the 1980s it was destroyed by a fire set by a disgruntled employee. Afterward, the D.P.S. abandoned the building along with vast piles of books and school supplies. Battered by the elements, subjected to repeated vandalization, set afire, and rained upon, the piles of books have slowly dissolved into organic matter. On the top floor of this building, where a skylight has broken away, a grove of birch trees grows from the mound of rotting books.

Misha and Vladimir, Lake Baikal, 2003 / Page 15

This private zoo began when its owners found two bears on their doorstep. This five-week-old cub was separated from its mother because the owners feared it would be crushed in its parent’s cage. It was called Misha, a diminutive of Michael, a common name for bears in Russia.

Opera House, Irkutsk, 2003 / Page 16

The Opera House in Irkutsk, one of the largest cities in Siberia, stands in contrast to the surrounding boreal wilderness. After the failed Decembrist uprising of 1825, subversive members of the military aristocracy who had opposed Tsar Nicholas I were exiled to the city. In the 19th Century, the journey to Irkutsk from St. Petersburg took many months, but the exiled Decembrists and the many others who were exiled there helped turn this provincial capital into the “Paris of Siberia.”
Supermarket, Gorazde, Bosnia, 2001 / Page 20
Although Gorazde was designated as one of the United Nations’ “Safe Areas” during the Bosnian War, it was heavily shelled and assaulted during the conflict and residents were without power or water for five years. This structure’s futuristic metal façade, a design that was popular in the East Bloc in the 1980’s, shows the open wounds of artillery rounds. When this picture was made, the ground floor space had recently reopened as a supermarket.

Gypsy Camp, Sarajevo, 2002 / Page 21
Although pockmarked by countless bullet holes, the bright Mediterranean colors of the extant buildings reveal their former use as geriatric homes, which were completed just before the start of the Bosnian War in 1992. Because of its location at the frontlines near Sarajevo’s airport, these buildings were the scene of intense fighting and destruction. After the war’s conclusion, the buildings remained derelict and were occupied by several gypsy families.

Couch in the Trees, W. Grand Ave., Highland Park, 2008 / Page 22
For many years, Highland Park, which went bankrupt in 2001, has been too poor to demolish burnt-out buildings. In this scene, the interior of a former home was lifted off the ground by growing vegetation while the exterior disintegrated.

Walden Street, East Detroit, 2008 / Page 23
This masterpiece of serendipitous topiary is actually the side view of a home occupied by an elderly woman who had been hospitalized for a long period.

Shelter and Vent, Detroit Dry Dock Building, 2009 / Page 24
Detroit Dry Docks, also known as Globe Trading Company, is located on the east Riverfront area. The main building was built in 1892 and is all that remains of the Engine Works Machine Shop. The building had an unusual structure for its time: the outer shell is brick, and a load-bearing steel frame buttresses the interior. Detroit Dry Dock Company and the Dry Dock Engine Works merged in 1899. The company produced marine engines and portable steam engines. Henry Ford, its most famous employee, worked at the facility before moving into the automotive industry. Unfortunately, part of this landmark building was recently demolished, while the remainder is slated for redevelopment by the Department of Natural Resources.

Ice Alley, East Methodist Church, Detroit, 2008 / Page 25
This small passageway divided the sanctuary from the school/gymnasium part of the church complex. Access to the church itself was down an icy metal ladder into the basement, and coming up into the sanctuary, one immediately saw on the balcony of the church, in gold gothic letters, the inscription: “And You Shall Say God Did It.” This was the very first location I photographed in Detroit, and the surreal setting provided many clues as to what I would encounter during my subsequent years of work in the city.

Peacock Alley, Lee Plaza Hotel, Detroit, 2008 / Page 26
The Lee Plaza Hotel was an upscale residence completed in 1929. Over many years, the hotel declined and it was finally closed in the 1990s. This lobby was nicknamed Peacock Alley by its residents for the many mirrors which line its walls; they used to preen in front of their multiple reflections before heading out.

Bob-Lo Boat, Ecorse, MI, 2009 / Page 27
The SS Columbia was built in 1902 and was a steam-powered vessel that took generations of Detroiter’s to the amusement park on Bois Blanc Island. For many, it led to a joyful rite of passage, whether it was a first kiss or first acid trip. After its retirement in 1991, the Columbia was shrink-wrapped to prevent further damage. It is currently under full restoration with the intent of using it for excursions on the Hudson River in New York.
ANDREW MOORE

Born in 1957 in Old Greenwich, Connecticut, Andrew Moore received a B.A. from Princeton University where he studied with the seminal photographer Emmet Gowin. He has gained international recognition for his distinctive series of large-scale color photographs. In addition to his current series, Dirt Meridian (2011 to present), he is noted for his urban scenes: Detroit Disassembled (2008–2009), Vietnam (2006–2007), Russia/Ukraine (2000–2004), Bosnia (2001–2002), Times Square (1995–2000), and Cuba (1998–2002). He has mounted over 39 solo exhibitions nationally and internationally including exhibitions at the Queens Museum of Art, the Akron Art Museum, Paris Photo, and Reflex Galerie, Amsterdam. His numerous awards include a Michigan Notable Books Selection for his collection Detroit Disassembled, a Cassy Patterson Foundation Grant, and N.Y.S.C.A. grants. Moore’s other publications include Russia: Beyond Utopia, Inside Havana, Governors Island: Photographs By Lisa Kereszi & Andrew Moore, and Andrew Moore: Making History. He was the cinematographer and producer for How to Draw a Bunny, a documentary about the artist Ray Johnson that won a Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and was named one of the best films of 2002 by New York magazine. Moore’s photographs have been collected by distinguished institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the L.A. County Museum of Art, Yale University Art Gallery, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, and the Library of Congress. Moore is represented by Yancey Richardson, New York.

Additional images by the artist can be viewed at: andrewlmoore.com