

Vlachos' Views

Paul Vlachos is a New Yorker who understands The West. He also understands New York. His work celebrates the differences and the similarities.

Here is volume #5 of Vlachos' Views...



The Hotel Monte Vista, in Flagstaff. I know nothing more of the place than that, one night I was passing through Flagstaff on my way somewhere, probably East, but it could have been any other point on the compass, and I saw this sign from the corner of my eye. Since it was 1999, before the day of hand-held night shots – or before I got lazy, depending on how you see it – I pulled out my tripod and took a few shots, bracketing the exposure time a bit. It has sat around in my pile of photos ever since, that pile slowly growing higher out by the old tree stump. One person was once smitten by and and asked for a copy. That's about it. Still, something always grabs me from this photo, this sign. When I just went to confirm that it was Flagstaff and that it wasn't my head playing tricks on me, the first search hits returned links on how it is supposedly haunted. Is that a marketing ploy? Will some places stop at nothing in order to drum up business? I'll bet there actually is a large enough pool of interested parties to sustain a ghost tourism economy. Either way, the sign certainly has some spirit to it. Flagstaff, itself, always seems cold and snowy. It's the elevation. It's a lesser, but still significant crossroads for me. If I'm not passing through, I'm usually stopping there to shop on my way north, towards the Grand Canyon.



U.S. Route 395 runs the length of California, from top to bottom, and then continues northward to greater glory and Oregon. It's a well-used road and you can often find truckers, hunters, vacationers, and pilgrims of all sorts going somewhere, usually fast, sometimes slowly. When I am on 395, it usually means I'm soaking or on my way to soak or see something interesting. I'm usually quite happy to be there. This stretch is below the military base town and overnight oasis of Ridgecrest and above the junction with California Route 58, the Barstow Bakersfield Highway, a desert crossroads that goes by a few different names. Anyway, these high tension line towers follow the road for a long time, essentially making it a power line road, but that's a bit of an insult to a major US highway, isn't it? Either way, I like the harshness and geometry of the towers and the desert country, even if they do introduce some hideous man-made ugliness into the picture.



Remnants of a once-proud strip, between 13th and 14th Streets on 8th Avenue.

I used to go by the Lumber Store here every other day, on my way home from work, and collect scraps – really nice clear pine pieces and oak trim – and then bring them home and keep them for small projects. This was in the 80’s and I was married and there were other problems with life at the time. Eventually, a lot of wood piled up and my wife – long since my ex-wife – would scream “ENOUGH WOOD...NO MORE WOOD.” It was a family operation and there was always drama at the Lumber Store. The saw guy was named Lenny and he, unlike many saw guys, had somehow retained all of his fingers. I could go on, but I’ll save it for another day. This pizza place and deli, though, remain, unlike many of the other small businesses in the far west of Greenwich Village, which has long since given up the ghost to the super rich, who don’t seem to need delicatessens, and tourists, who don’t seem to need anything but high-end fashion stores. The only concession to real residents has been the incredible increase in super discount drugstores and small bank branches which, I am convinced, are a massive, international money-laundering scheme.



There is a line between shooting old stuff, decayed stuff, even ruins - and shooting stuff that’s falling in on itself or so overgrown that you can’t tell what it is anymore, as was the case with an amazing billboard I recently saw in South Carolina, but which was so overgrown that it looks like a Jackson Pollack. Still, I’ll post that at some point, just out of abstract interest. When I saw THIS, though, on a back road in Georgia, I had to stop. Even though the building was just beams and rafters and the glass neon tubing is obscured by vines, a heart-shaped sign that says “Georgia Girl Drive In” is just too special to pass by. Had “Te Te’s Take Out,” a few miles down the road, not been so stuck in a dark stand of trees, I would have gotten that, as well. Something about the South...

For more images and observations from Paul Vlachos, visit the WordPress version of The Zephyr



JOIN THE ZEPHYR BACKBONE
 AND RECEIVE A COMPLIMENTARY SIGNED COPY
 OF
BRAVE NEW WEST
 BY JIM STILES



download ned mudd's music
FREE
www.highplains.films.org



WE PRIDE OURSELVES ON OUR FOOD!

Our genuine Mexican Cuisine comes from traditional recipes & methods from BAJA, CALIFORNIA & other states in MEXICO.

**51 N. MAIN ST
 MOAB, UTAH
 435.259.6546**

Our Claim Stays the Same:
 FART-FREE BEANS

www.miguelsbajagrill.com