

# The Sun

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## ARTS & LETTERS

PHOTOGRAPHY

### A Segmented View of America

By WILLIAM MEYERS

America is a big place with lots in it. Joshua Lutz, a young photographer being shown at the Gitterman Gallery, is figuring out how parts of this big country can be segmented into works of art.

The 11 pictures here are from California, Florida, Nevada, Pennsylvania, New York, Arizona, Ohio, and New Jersey. They are as varied in subject matter as they are in location but unified by being the work of a sure eye and skilled technician. Because each picture tackles a different situation, none could fairly be called typical, so I will describe one that particularly appealed to me.

"Another Six Houses, Pennsylvania" (2003), a 30-by-35-1/2-inch pigment print (as are all the pictures), deals interestingly with the mundane. The exact location might be Reading or Allentown or Bethlehem, one of the working-class, industrial cities in the eastern end of the state, surrounded by the scrubby hills of the Alleghany Mountains. We are in the backyard of a neat but unprepossessing house, looking past a leafless tree, past the turquoise plastic slide and swing set, and over the garage at the gabled ends of six neighboring houses. The six march downhill, and though they are of uniform construction, they are painted different colors: red, yellow, pink, gray, pale green, and red again. Beyond the houses is a low hill covered with a forest of steel electrical poles and the tangle of wires they support.

Why is this such an attractive picture? The subject matter would not strike most people as intrinsically interesting, and the inchoate elements would seem impossible to arrange in a significant way. But Mr.



Joshua Lutz, 'Another Six Houses, Pennsylvania' (2003).

Lutz has an eye for color, composition, and cultural valence.

The picture was shot on an overcast day that provided even, shadowless illumination. The house and garage in the foreground are probably white, but they appear a muted gray-blue in the picture, as do the sky and the steel poles. The hills are a band of dull browns across the middle of the image. Against this neutral backing, the two bright red houses, the pastel houses in between, and the turquoise play equipment provide just the right amount of color. Similarly, the organization of shapes in the receding space, from the house in the foreground to the far distant hills, creates a drama of location.

Mr. Lutz seems to have a feeling for the people who inhabit these houses. By way of contrast, I thought of Walker Evans' several pictures of working-class housing in Pennsylvania mill towns, many of which also

feature receding rows of identical units: One senses the lives in those black-and-white houses were mean. Mr. Lutz's neighborhood is not so grim: Though far from swank, it is well above poverty. The people can only afford tract housing, but color individualizes the houses, and one homeowner has added shutters. The turquoise slide suggests a family, and the general state of repair an ordered, productive existence. The people we don't see are nonetheless palpably real.

I also particularly liked "America's Choice, New York" (2000), a picture of the Alexander Hamilton Bridge over the Harlem River, looking from the Bronx towards Manhattan.

*"Joshua Lutz" at the Gitterman Gallery until August 7 (170 E. 75th Street, between Lexington and Third Avenues, 212-734-0868).*