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**SUSAN MAY TELL IS A WOMAN OF MANY AND DIVERSE TALENTS.** Her artistic gifts developed early, taking her all the way to Carnegie Hall, where she played piano when she was just five. As a photojournalist, she worked in such varied locations as the Middle East and Paris. She has photographed everything from Kurdish rebels in Iraq to Auschwitz to the Katrina-ravaged Lower Ninth Ward.

She photographed her latest project, *SEEN AND FELT: Appalachia 2012*, during a six-week drive through parts of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio. The series was shot with a Leica and black and white film and portrays Appalachia differently than what one might expect, given common stereotypes of the region. These are not the usual images of coal miners and snake handlers, of endless green hills and Confederate flags. Instead, there are shuttered storefronts and empty main streets. Few of the photos contain people, and when they do, the people appear less as the photographs' subjects than as lonely ghosts, singular and divorced from their own time.

One can't help but notice the proliferation of windows and doors, dark and empty or boarded up. These images speak of decay, of abandonment, of good times lost. Even if the buildings weren't shuttered and their signs faded, the cracked streets and sidewalks would reveal that prosperity deserted these towns long ago.

One photo looks inhabited instead of empty, and almost seems

out of place among the images of pavement and signs and power lines. Titled "Appalachian Mist," it features a campground full of new-looking RVs. A man and a child stand separately near two 50-year-old automobiles. It feels strange—shouldn't those modern RVs be silver Airstream trailers? Mist obscures all but what is near, and one gets the sense that time is jumbled in this place. What is present? What is past? Is there a future?

All of the images in this collection evoke the same questions about past, present, and future. They represent time at a standstill: there's little to suggest when they were taken. Some seem as though they could have been taken any time within the past 50 years. And though many of us have never visited the out-of-the-way towns May Tell has captured here, we all know someplace they remind us of, heartbreakingly lonely and as familiar as childhood memories.

In the fall of 2013, Susan May Tell's photo of her friend and mentor, André Kertész, which Kertész used on the cover of his autobiography, was featured in an exhibition of Kertész's work. May Tell is the Fine Art Chair of the American Society of Media Photographers' New York chapter, and was honored as one of ASMP's Best of 2013 for *SEEN AND FELT: Appalachia 2012*. This series also appears in Roger May's fine press book *Testify: A Visual Love Letter to Appalachia*, available from Horse and Buggy Press as of December 2013.

— JENNY RESPRESS



*Odd-job Man*, Mingo Junction, Ohio, 2012.

Bicycling around town, doing odd jobs for people, the young man filled me in on the history of each closed or condemned building on the deserted main street of this former mill town. He asked if I knew Children's Hospital in New York. "It's near the World Trade Center," he said and implored me several times to please go there to thank the doctors for him when I got back to New York. He had spent two years in the hospital, from ages two to four. "I still have the cleft lip," he said, "but they fixed my palate."



*Spirit of Brownnton*, Brownnton, West Virginia, 2012.

A woman whom I met at a quilt exhibition in Grafton, West Virginia, recommended I visit Brownnton, a tiny, unincorporated coal town that she used to visit with her parents when she was a child. For her it evoked both the past and present. Since the town didn't appear on maps or GPS, it wasn't easy to find. When I finally got there I was greeted by this life-sized statue, a beacon of hope; it is outside the community center, which offers a variety of social services. I learned that popcorn sales from the center's family movie nights are used to help offset its utility bills.



*Time Out*, Wheeling, West Virginia, 2012.

Late one afternoon, I was having dinner at a Wheeling restaurant. The woman, in black fishnet stocking sitting in a booth near mine, repeatedly counted the money in her purse. Then she opened a Goodwill bag and took out two dresses, folded them and put them back in the bag. She never looked at me.



*Reunion, Grafton, West Virginia, 2012.*

Three generations on their way to a family reunion were camped out in the site adjacent to mine. The woman in plaid offered me iced coffee and apologized for not having pancakes left. She took a camera out of her shirt pocket and showed me family pictures taken on their trip: spontaneous moments, beautifully seen, of her grandchildren. On the same camera were images taken by other family members as well. One of the granddaughters, a pre-teen about 12 years old, pointed out some of the images she had taken, and they were wonderful; the sun peeking through the forest canopy was particularly interesting. I suggested she pursue photography, believing she had the eye for it. "That's just what I plan to do once I'm in high school," she said.



*Appalachia Crossroads, Altoona, Pennsylvania, 2012.*

The utility wires and clouds present in rural Appalachia and the Rust Belt visually link the states of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. As I crisscrossed this area, I began to see them also as a metaphor for the hard times that tie this region together.



*The Candy Store, Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 2012.*

Although this Johnstown shop owner stayed outside, he insisted I go inside to choose some candies from his store—and then wouldn't let me pay for them. I selected the Tootsie Rolls I remembered from my childhood. He let me know that he had visited 57 countries, spent a long time in Singapore, and had lived on Charles Street in Greenwich Village, which made him my neighbor.

*Weirton Steel Mill*, Weirton, West Virginia, 2012.

This iconic photograph embodies the relationship between a photograph's formal composition and its emotions. My compositions consist of lines, angles, and dividing what is within the frame; the emotions they evoke are of isolation and melancholy. Taken together, these seemingly disparate elements create a photograph that is direct and poetic, while also being mysterious, quiet and understated.

In the 1970s, the Weirton Steel Mill, located in the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia, took in 12,000 workers a day; today 1,200. The mill personifies the strength of American industrialism that is now a mere remnant of its former self.



*Appalachian Mist*, Altoona, Pennsylvania, 2012.

About to leave the campgrounds, after spending the night, I turned for one last look and saw the early-morning haze surrounding the vintage cars. Historically, the sole economic force driving the growth of Altoona into a City had been the Pennsylvania Railroad. While the various local railroad shops still employ over a thousand people, they are no longer the driving economic engines of the area.

The journey evoked the dictum of imagist poet William Carlos Williams: "No ideas! But in things." — and it increasingly felt like a six-week eulogy to what no longer exists.



*S&P Carpet*, Mingo Junction, Ohio, 2012.

S&P Carpet is one of many condemned or closed buildings on Mingo Junction's main street. On the left and in the background is what used to be Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel's main hot metal steel mill. Now idled, it is currently owned by Frontier Industrial Corp. and will probably be sold for scrap.

