

October 23, 2012 Written by [Randall Miller](#)

ALLEYS AND PARKING LOTS Joel Ross in collaboration with Jason Creps at moniquemeloche



"In The Future (Installed and Abandoned, Bradley, IL)" 2012.
Archival pigment print; 42.5 x 55 inches.
Courtesy of the artists and moniquemeloche.

In the foreground of one of Joel Ross and Jason Creps' photographs, the artists installed a sign that reads "At the beginning of the story I will say to you 'This is how it happened' and then we will proceed, okay?" This statement could be the thesis for the artists' exhibition of cinematic photographs titled "Alleys and Parking Lots" at moniquemeloche, a show in which text-based interventions re-characterize the peripheral spaces of the urban environment.

The artists install signs and placards near dark alleyways, outside of abandoned shopping malls, and in empty parking lots. They then photograph these places – often at night – setting up a dialectic between the pictures as documentation

of the artists' interventions, and the theatrical context produced by the addition of the signs and the framing of the photographs. The artists' work with existing lighting conditions and do not manipulate the alleyways and parking lots they photograph beyond the addition of the signs, yet the images are highly stylized, like story-boards or pages from a noir graphic novel. Rich blacks amplify a sense of mystery and menace, particularly in nighttime images. Image-making and narrative construction take clear precedence over documentation and intervention within the artists' practice as the photographs demonstrate unmistakable evidence of craftsmanship and finish, while the installation of the signs appears to be more like a step in the process rather than an end in itself. After that first shutter click, we are never shown what happens to the signs or how the people who utilize these spaces interact with them.

"Do Don't (Installed and Abandoned, Chicago, IL)" 2012. Archival pigment print; 55 x 80 inches. Courtesy of the artists and moniquemeloche.



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Like great cinematographers, Ross and Creps find locations pregnant with mood and dramatic potential, often focusing their attention on urban industrial locations devoid of people, though never lacking character. In a piece titled *Do Don't (Installed and Abandoned, Chicago, IL)* (2012), an alleyway beside an anonymous brick building is buttressed by a security barrier and chain-link fence. Leaning against the barrier is a sign that says, "Whatever you do don't arouse suspicion." Yet the stillness of the tableau, the long shadow of the building, and the unseen pathway just around the corner all arouse plenty of suspicion. The addition of the sign amplifies an already palpable sense of peril and suspense, feeding off not only the seedy darkness and seclusion of the street corner, but also popular mythologies about urban danger from movies and sensational "if-it-bleeds-it-leads" journalism.



"Quiet Voices (Installed and Abandoned, Champaign, IL)" 2012.
Archival pigment print; 56.25 x 80 inches.
Courtesy of the artists and moniquemeloche.

In a number of the photographs, the places depicted become both character and setting for the larger noir stories implied by the signs. In a piece titled *Quiet Voices (Installed and Abandoned, Champaign, IL)* (2012), an empty parking lot in front of a shuttered shopping mall is flooded with light from a single lamppost. On the lamppost is a sign that reads "When strange quiet voices are telling you something is wrong you should listen." The strange quiet voice could be coming from the lot itself, again warning of the dangers in the dark cement jungle. Or, the sign could also be read as an epitaph for the businesses and bank accounts that were washed away since the start of the financial

crisis in 2008. Next to the corpse that is the failed shopping center, the sign becomes like a banner across a memento mori and a hard-earned lesson about hindsight and intuition.

If the scene in *Quiet Voices* compresses the space between early decisions and late consequences, *In The Future (Installed and Abandoned, Bradley, IL)* (2012) further mashes together distant moments in time, again using a closed business as a backdrop. On the wall of the building, the word "famous" is a still legible remnant of the building's now missing signage. In the parking lot below, the artists have added the words "in the future." Long, late day shadows rake across the parking lot and creep up the façade. The image speaks of failure and rebirth, a return to glory that may yet come or may just be empty hubris. In expanding on the existing signage, this image represents one of the most successful combinations of an existing space and the artists' intervention. The added words alter the perception of the place without imposing a pre-assigned narrative.

In their best pieces, the signs add just enough tension to existing spaces in order to shape the conditions of their meaning without becoming heavy handed. In Ross and Creps' work, reality is filtered through fiction, creating sublime noir that almost feels real.

"Alleys and Parking Lots" will be on view at [moniquemeloche](http://moniquemeloche.com) in Chicago, IL through October 27, 2012. <http://dailyserving.com/2012/10/alleys-and-parking-lots-joel-ross-in-collaboration-with-jason-creps-at-moniquemeloche/>

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