



Joachim Brohm, *Bochum 1983*, from the series *Ruhr*. ©Joachim Brohm 2018

We asked **Simon Roberts** to tell us about a picture that means something to him, and why. Simon Roberts: *Homeland is on view at Flowers Gallery in New York through January 12, and his photographs are included in the traveling exhibition Civilization, on view through February 17 at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul.*

A silent majesty. This is one way I would describe this wonderful photograph by Joachim Brohm, from his series *Ruhr*, made between the late 1970s and the mid-1980s. Brohm was interested in the cultural landscapes of the Ruhr District, an industrial region of West Germany, which at the time was in the midst of severe economic decline. The photographs explore that liminal edge between urban and rural life and feature landscapes marked by footpaths, fences, and boundaries. He often photographed people in pursuit of leisure, the landscape as a playground.

One element of this photograph I find

so compelling is how Brohm situates the scene in a pictorial vista from an elevated viewpoint, familiar from landscape painting. Discreet distance places us on the edge of involvement, and as a result, we are not part of the action but detached, critical viewers. There is an element of abstraction here, an image preoccupied with layers of form and space. It's a banal landscape that lacks any grand natural or architectural features; however, it is transformed into a tableaux with countless narratives on offer to the keen eye. I'm also drawn to Brohm's use of a restrained pastel palette (the photograph was shot on Kodak Vericolor, a negative film formulated for low contrast), which lends a pervading sense of melancholy.

Brohm was one of the first German photographers to engage with the issues raised by American landscape photography of the 1970s and, along with members of the Dusseldorf School, he provides an integral link between U.S. and European art photography.