

Alex Bland

Hinterland

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The word ‘hinterland’ refers to a region removed from the urban area. These regions have for many years been an idyllic space left alone by man. Urban development has interrupted the rural landscape, pushing these areas into a state of in between. It is this space that Bland explores in his work.

His images draw upon a series of thematic layers. Firstly, the rural area itself: Bland was careful to select areas that are in a stage of pre-development. Secondly he has placed emissaries of Western culture into the frame: the takeaway restaurants and convenience store.

By compiling these two totems together Bland heightens our sense of the uncanny. Composing with long exposures, Bland has replicated dusk and its corresponding lighting, crafting a time when nature is at its most unrealistic.

There is a sense of darkness crowding in, surrounding these small outposts of culture, glowing fireflies of refuge situated in a night that has become a thing to be survived.

In his artist statement Bland points out that this series is about “the destruction of natural environments [making] room for urban sprawls.” I think this, coupled with the way in which he has composed his images, suggests that he thinks urban sprawl is something also to be survived.

The time setting is similarly in a state of in between: it is neither night nor day. The introduction of urban culture through the convenience store and takeaways into this space brings with it the imposition of human law on natural chaos. In cities you tap into a 24-hour lifestyle; whole infrastructures are designed to follow that way of life. You will find none of this in the hinterland. In this area nature retains control.

Looking at Bland’s photographs it is clear that location scouting is of the utmost importance. The careful placing of trees in the foreground and background, dried leaves on the floor, grass growing up around the building edges – these help to construct the image. Buildings become alien as they sprout up from pre-existent, natural foundations.

Without such a complex arrangement the concept of the uncanny would be less perceptible. By using flashguns Bland has artificially reproduced the natural lighting not only on the buildings themselves, but also on the trees and plants, so that it looks like the convenience store and takeaways are embedded within this environment. To create such an image and make it believable takes days of editing and precision.

To close, Bland has used well-developed technical lighting, editing and photography skills to produce a series of images that present an area undergoing a transformation: spaces captured in the 'in between.' Born out of this comes the uncanny, the quest to identify and maintain the separation of 'rural' and 'urban'. We are called upon to question our role and responsibilities of stewardship over our rural areas. The future of the hinterland that is, in a sense, bleeding into the now.