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## How Joachim Brohm set the world of landscape photography on fire

The German pioneer of colour photography, currently on show at London's Brancolini Grimaldi, finds beauty in the forsaken fringes of society, whether in America or on a Portuguese island

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The first print on the wall in Places and Edges, the first British show devoted to the German photographer Joachim Brohm, is a photograph of car ablaze on a quiet, tree-lined city street. It is an image both mysterious and deadpan, like much of Brohm's work, which conveys the ordinary and the everyday in landscapes that - even when they show people doing things - seem oddly empty. Brohm is a European pioneer of colour photography and his images sometimes echo the work of the great American colourists he was inspired by back in the 70s, most obviously Stephen Shore and, to a lesser degree, William Eggleston.

At Brancolini Grimaldi, a big room drenched in natural light, the large-scale prints that take up two walls can be viewed image by image or as two big composite pieces unified by their rich colour tones and brilliant detail. This is Brohm's most recent series, Culatra (2008-2010), a kind of heightened visual record of the things - buildings, back yards, vehicles, walls, boats, sheds - he saw while walking around the Portuguese island of the same name. Out of this everyday inventory, Brohm has evoked a sense of place that is almost palpable: sun-faded shacks and abandoned objects lend the island a kind of desolate beauty made all the more eerie by the absence of humans.

The other two walls are given over to two earlier series: Ruhr (1980-1983) and Ohio (1983-1984), both of which play with our received notions of German and American landscapes - and German and American landscape photography. Brohm made some of the work that comprises Ruhr while still a student in the early 80s. It baffled his tutors, who did not share his fascination with Lewis Baltz, another of Brohm's American influences. Here, the subject matter is the hinterland between the urban and rural in an area of Germany then beginning to undergo a period of industrial decline. Many of the scenes are captured from above and are painterly in composition, but in a different way from the tonally rich prints in Culatra. Here, the elevated perspective increases the sense of detachment, as if Brohm is recording a way of life in all its small, everyday abundance while wider forces - political, social - hover beyond the edge of the frame.

Having seen Ohio in book form, I was surprised at the relatively small scale of the prints (50x60cms), but intrigued by the often beautiful emptiness - literal and metaphorical - that Brohm captures in his version of the American vernacular landscape. His outsider's eye renders these scenes familiar - shades of everyone from Walker Evans to the aforementioned Shore - and oddly alien. These are photographs of everywhere and nowhere, as unspecific in their way as the large, up-close images in Culatra, but evocative all the same. Spanning more than 30 years, Brohm's places and edges are all his own, even if they seem oddly and enigmatically familiar.