

Horse fairs, Montreal's metro, a Russian childhood, icons of the Wild West and an ongoing visual conversation inspire photographers from around the world in this month's Projects. Interviews by Gemma Padley and Tom Seymour



Ben Alper's image [left] was part of a visual dialogue with Nat Ward, whose response [right] set the tone for a project that attracted other pairs of photographers

BEN ALPER AND NAT WARD

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In autumn 2014, friends Ben Alper and Nat Ward decided to test out the truism that "photography is a language" by starting a dialogue based solely on images. The pair set up a website called *A New Nothing* and uploaded their own images, inviting other photographers to respond and create further chains of interconnected work. "We wanted to create a social space where photographers could play," says Ward, who is based in New York. "We posed the question: 'What if we created a space for people to communicate with a partner through the immediacy of images alone?' We were both pretty excited to try it ourselves to see if it would even work."

Alper, who lives in Carrboro, North Carolina, says the site is built around collaboration, and functions

as "a platform that embraces the chance encounter". He hopes it promotes openness and what he calls "thoughtful looking".

"There's very little room for predetermination," he says. "We wanted to create something that was a conduit for conversations through images. The site is really a shell within which people have cultivated rich, engaging and diverse dialogues."

Alper shot most of the photographs he has contributed in and around his home in the southeastern United States but he also incorporated existing images from his archive. "The places I photographed derived directly from my responses to Nat's images. In that way, geographic specificity was less important to me than the associative relationship between our linked photographs."

Likewise, Ward responded directly to his friend's images. "I would have these immediate reactions where

I would think, 'I have just the right image for that in my archive', or in a group of negatives I had just scanned. Other times I would be out and see an image I needed to make as a response. Some of the images are [taken in] my bedroom and others are from as far-flung [places] as northern Israel, Joshua Tree in California and Montreal."

What kept the project exciting, says Alper, were the different reactions the images provoked. Sometimes he responded to the formal aspects of a photograph and at others he was drawn to a more conceptual or poetic element; other photographers who got involved – among them Aleix Plademunt and Louis Porter, as well as Matthew Connors and Jason Fulford – seem to have done the same. "There were also instances where the subject or some discreet object in the photograph prompted a kind of visual echo," he says. "Ultimately it was really liberating to respond to images with such immediacy and playfulness." *BJP*