

Chilean Photographer Captures Brooklyn's Many Changes


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Greenpoint Ave. and Provost St., Greenpoint, Brooklyn, NY, 2010

(Sergio Purtell)



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Chilean photographer [Sergio Purtell](#) immigrated to Ohio in the early '70s in the wake of Augusto Pinochet's CIA-backed coup d'etat. In the early '80s he moved from Ohio to Manhattan, where he was working at his commercial photography studio in Tribeca on the morning of 9/11. In an interview last week, Purtell told us that both the Chilean coup and the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 left him with "a huge sense of loss." As a result, his photography is largely influenced by "violent and radical change." His current subject is Brooklyn.

It's unsettledness that Purtell, who studied photography at both RISD and Yale, aims to capture across the borough, with his four-and-a-half-inch handheld film camera. He moved to Cobble Hill in 2002, and since then has been exploring by car and foot, photographing landscapes and people—"I don't have a fixed compass. It's more elliptic the way I move. I get in the car, and I drive until I find a place. I don't do quadrants. It's all instinctual."

Purtell is particularly drawn to bodies of water, and both the Gowanus Canal and Newtown Creek, notoriously dirty, and are now being "pulled towards gentrification." There's plenty of change to be captured at their edges. And the man behind the lens has no illusions about his place in it all: "I'm an artist. Like most artists, I tend to gentrify areas."

Purtell's latest exhibition, [In Brooklyn: Architectures of Disappearance](#), opens on Wednesday at [Art 3 Gallery](#) in Bushwick. It features 26 photographs snapped from Bushwick (his studio's home since 2010), to Greenpoint, to Gowanus. One, from 2008, entitled "3rd St., Gowanus, Brooklyn, NY," depicts a couple canoeing on the Gowanus Canal, headed for the [now defunct Kentile Floors sign](#) on the horizon.

Despite his preoccupation with changing landscapes, Purtell has not set out to make gentrifiers feel wistful, or guilty. Instead, "I'm giving my viewers a lot of room to find things in the pictures that will tell a deeper story." Each scene, dissectible at close range, is open to interpretation.

Art 3 Gallery is located at 109 Ingraham Street, between Knickerbocker and Porter Avenues, studio 102, in Bushwick. The opening reception for Brooklyn: Architectures of Disappearance, is on Wednesday, at 6 p.m.

Contact the [author](#) of this article or email tips@gothamist.com with further questions, comments or tips.