Joel Meyerowitz describes photographing the recovery effort at the World Trade Center site in the aftermath of 9/11.

The Speaker

Joel Meyerowitz is an award-winning photographer whose work has appeared in over 350 exhibitions in museums and galleries around the world. His book, Aftermath: The World Trade Center Archive, documents the nine months Joel spent at the WTC site photographing the recovery effort.

Review Questions

CHAPTER 1: Meyerowitz discusses where he was on 9/11, his actions in the direct aftermath, and the place of the World Trade Center towers in the New York City landscape.

1. What role did the World Trade Center towers play in Meyerowitz’s life, and as icons of New York City?

CHAPTER 2: Meyerowitz talks about his return to New York after 9/11 and his decision to document the recovery effort at the WTC site.

1. How did Meyerowitz come to the decision to start documenting the WTC site?
2. What do the challenges Meyerowitz encountered gaining access to the WTC site suggest about the general atmosphere in Lower Manhattan immediately after 9/11?

CHAPTER 3: Meyerowitz describes his emotions as he entered the WTC site, and how they directed his photographic choices.

1. What effect did Meyerowitz’s initial encounter with the WTC site have on his approach to the project?
2. Describe Meyerowitz’s encounter with the “sublime” at the WTC site.

CHAPTER 4: Meyerowitz remembers the team effort he witnessed at the WTC site and the challenges the team faced.

1. What were the conflicting concerns of recovery workers at the WTC site, as Meyerowitz saw it?

CHAPTER 5: Meyerowitz discusses his role as the only photographer at the WTC site.

1. What responsibilities does Meyerowitz describe taking on as the only photographer at the WTC site, and how did these responsibilities lead to artistic discovery?
2. How did Meyerowitz’s photography at the WTC site change as the site itself changed shape?

KEY REFERENCES

Bedrock
The archaeological heart of the site. The original foundations of the World Trade Center can be found at the bedrock level.

The Last Column
The Last Column was one of the massive steel columns still standing at the WTC site during the recovery effort. It stands 36-feet tall, weighs about 58 tons, and is covered in tribute placed by members of the construction trades, rescue personnel and family members. Removal of the Last Column marked the end of the nine month recovery effort at the WTC site. It was moved from the site in May 2002 to a climate-controlled storage facility at JFK airport in Queens, New York. On August 24, 2009, it was returned to the WTC site. There, it will be a key artifact in the future 9/11 Memorial Museum.

Slurry Wall
The concrete slab retaining wall that withstood the collapse of the towers on 9/11, and prevented the WTC site from being flooded by the Hudson River. The Slurry Wall will be the largest artifact in the 9/11 Memorial Museum. High strength steel cables, known as tie-backs, keep the wall from caving in or leaking.
Review Questions (continued)

CHAPTER 6: Meyerowitz talks about the transformation of the WTC site over the course of the nine month recovery effort.

1. What purpose did the Slurry Wall serve at the WTC site, both physically and, particularly after 9/11, as a symbol?
2. What does Meyerowitz see as the historical role of such key artifacts as the Last Column and the Slurry Wall?

CHAPTER 7: Meyerowitz describes the ceremonial removal of the Last Column from the WTC site and the experience of becoming a part of the recovery team.

1. Why was the removal of the Last Column accompanied by ceremony, and what effect did the ceremony have on Meyerowitz?

Questions for Further Discussion

How did the need for safety in Lower Manhattan in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 come up against what many saw as a responsibility to record and preserve history? How do you think a balance in such situations can be reached?

While at the WTC site, Meyerowitz describes finding beauty amidst the overwhelming destruction. Do you think there is a difference between art motivated by aesthetics (the appearance of beauty) and art motivated by emotions?

Meyerowitz describes the Slurry Wall as being a monolith on the WTC site. What message do you think the Slurry Wall will convey to future generations, as an artifact in the 9/11 Memorial Museum?

Meyerowitz suggests that “singular moments” in human history often yield an artifact that then becomes a reference point, using the pyramids of Egypt as an example. Do you think the Last Column will become such a historical reference point? Why or why not?

In describing his time at the WTC site, Meyerowitz mentions the “emergence of rituals.” What is the relationship between art and ritual?

Recommended Resources

http://www.phaidon.com/aftermath/

For renderings of the Memorial and Museum, and photos of the Last Column and Slurry Wall, visit us at: www.911memorial.org