



In the foreword of Sylvia Plachy's new book, *Signs & Relics*, Wim Wenders writes: "Whoever came up first with that saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' didn't understand the first thing about either one." He goes on to describe a personal revelation that it wasn't until seeing this book that he understood that photographs could do "all sorts of things" he never thought of.

Wim Wenders has it right. *Signs & Relics* has the breath and depth of a book that is uncommon in our fast-forward culture, overwhelmed as it is with pretentious images. This is not simply because Sylvia Plachy touches all the bases of making good photographs consistently. In fact, it could be argued (successfully) that she is not interested at all in what we think of as good photography. Rather, she is that rare photographer whose work is soulful and honest, with a visual vocabulary so steeped in the poetic, that her images celebrate her subjects as well as the medium of photography she loves so much. All this, combined with the courage to share her humor, her sadness and her delight in seeing the world, creates a body of work which truly amplifies the definition of what good photography is.

I cannot remember the last time I've felt so excited by a book of photographs. Indeed, *Signs & Relics* has become required viewing (and reading) in my classes. In a recent lecture about my own work, I surprised myself by holding this book up, assuring the audience that it contained everything anyone needed to know or understand about photography. And it does.

My enthusiasm aside, after spending time with *Signs & Relics*, you will never look at a fork in the same way. Or a chair. Or trees, frogs and roads. And perhaps you too, will someday look at the smoke billowing out of a train and see its connection to the moon on a cold winter night in an otherwise ominous setting.

Signs & Relics by Sylvia Plachy

Written by Nubar Alexanian

Best known for her work at the Village Voice, her first book, Unguided Tour, is a wonderful collection of photographs from her tenure as a staff photographer there. Her second book, Red Light, was published in 1996 and is a bold and daring look at the sex industry.

But Signs & Relics is by far her best work. And though I am tempted to compare it to the proliferation of pretentious photographic books being printed by the pound these days, this personal agenda of mine would unfairly burden this treasure.

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