

JEFF BROUWS



Jeff Brouws has been nominated for the fourth cycle of the Prix Pictet, the world's leading photographic award in sustainability. Brouws's *Proximity* series (part of his larger *After Trinity* project that deals with nuclear weapons from an anthropological and contemporary perspective) was selected by Francis Hodgson, photography critic for the Financial Times and former head of the photographs department at Sotheby's.



Proximity 1 Grain elevators near business district, 22.5 miles from ICBM Minuteman missile silo J-5, Stanley, North Dakota 2009



Proximity 1 ICBM Minuteman missile silo J-5

Artist Statement

The *Proximity* series is part of a larger project concerning nuclear weapons entitled *After Trinity*. Atomic weaponry entered my consciousness after I read *Hiroshima* as a student. This “crime against humanity” as written by John Hershey stunned me. Unfortunately, his words haven’t had the same effect on the world stage. Sixty-seven years after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan, the possibility of nuclear holocaust remains. With this photographic project I hope to generate discussion about this on-going global threat and the world powers that continue to utilize these methodologies of “deterrence.”

By photographing active ICBM Minuteman Missile silos and their adjacency to everyday places in North Dakota, I want to document the shocking proximity of these weapons of mass destruction to small-town American environments. By pitting routine daily life—the working of the grain elevator, the keeping of bees, the ebb-and-flow of the local convenience store—against the industrialized missile silo sites I want to contrast the surreal destructive power these weapons have when compared to the fragile and familiar everyday prairie landscapes that lie just a few miles distant from them. While these missile silos and their nearness to the commonplace lives of ordinary citizens aren’t the dramatic visual equivalent of a tsunami or earthquake, they still represent a below-the-radar disaster waiting to happen. If ever used their impact on humanity would have a devastating effect, far exceeding the carnage of any natural disaster.

I also want to highlight the hegemonic power the U.S. Government possesses in making unilateral decisions when locating these weapons within the landscape. With all ICBM Minuteman missile silos placed in areas of low population density, do rural Americans ever feel a sense of powerlessness when contemplating a government that would sacrifice their lives in the event of a nuclear war? As citizens on the front line of conflict, were they ever consulted?

The photographs also ask additional questions and challenge prevailing notions of absolute power and military might. In political terms: will nations with nuclear capability finally conclude these weapons have never been the means to a peaceful world, just the eager armament of a war without winners? Or in economic terms: is the six trillion dollars expended on nuclear weapons development since 1941 by our military-industrial complex worth it? What is the price we have paid, in human costs, for this illusion of safety?



Proximity 4 Bee hive in field, 2.2 miles from ICBM Minuteman missile silo M-6, near Lombard, North Dakota 2009



Proximity 5 ICBM Minuteman missile silo M-6



Proximity 6 Freight yard and abandoned vehicles, 2.7 miles from ICBM Minuteman missile silo M-6, near Rosam, North Dakota 2009



Proximity 7 ICBM Minuteman missile silo M-6