

# A Fresh Look At...Trees?

Mitch Epstein's New York Arbor is a quiet, thrilling black and white typology of New York's diverse foliage

By John Mahoney on May 7, 2013 0 Comments Like { 67 Tweet 2 8+1 0



From New York Arbor

© Mitch Epstein

In cities, trees are inevitably secondary to the man-made landscape that surrounds them. They're a garnish-something you're happy is there (and whose absence would be troubling), but often a backdrop. A non-participant.

But in Mitch Epstein's stunning New York Arbor, this pattern is inverted. In describing this project, which was recently published by Steidl, Epstein writes:

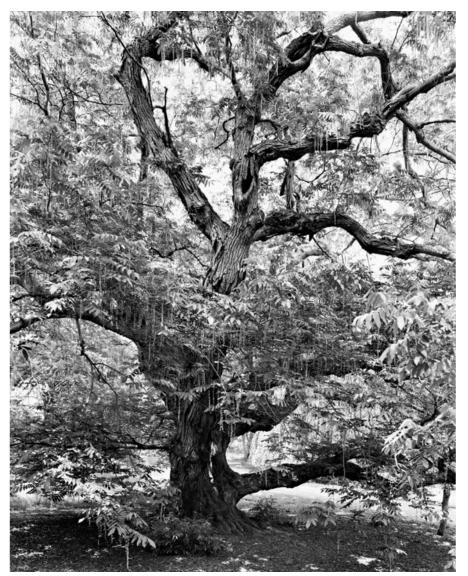
Safari Power Saver Click to Start Flash Plug-in "The cumulative effect of these photographs is to invert people's usual view of their city: trees no longer function as background, but instead dominate the human life and architecture around them."



From New York Arbor © <u>Mitch Epstein</u>

 $\bigcirc$  <u>Mitch Epstein</u>

What is breathtaking to me about these photos is how skillfully he succeeds at this. Each photograph in *Arbor* is a masterful study of composition and focus. The trees all sit dead center in their vertically oriented frames, the rich large-format hues practically glowing with energy (an effect that's even more prominent when viewed off-screen). Despite a number of different backdrops—some are alone in parks, others on sidewalks, growing around buildings—every ounce of focus is on the life form in the center.



#### From New York Arbor

From <u>New York Arbor</u> © <u>Mitch Epstein</u>

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What draws me to this project is the skill required to make such an expressive, focused study, with such a discernible style, out of something so seemingly pedestrian. These photos are almost anti-conceptual. What you see is what you get. But then there's that realization that you've never really actually *looked* until now—and that's entirely the point. In an image culture where it's easy to feel like there's *nothing* we haven't seen, I think it's amazing that a masterful, old-school take on an age-old subject has the capacity to show us something that feels brand new.

If you are in New York, Epstein will be signing copies of *New York Arbor* at <u>Dashwood Books</u> tonight.

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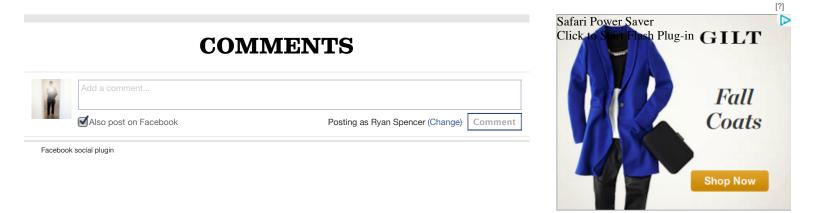
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