



Shawn Records // **From the Bottom of a Well**

Shawn Records' beautifully complex photographs are woven together here in *From the Bottom of a Well*, a poetic and tragically humorous account of a Chinese government-sponsored trip for a select group of American fine-art photographers. For two weeks, they traveled by bus with a government escort to pre-determined locations, including wetlands, oil fields, coal museums, and re-enactments of Mongolian village life. Wrapped up in a web of politics, propaganda, environmental whitewashing, and good-old romanticism, this work plucks at the tension between the photographer's passive role as recorder of sanitized "facts," and the impulse to subvert that role. Taking his title from the Chinese saying, *zuijing guantian* (like looking at the sky from the bottom of a well), Records recognizes his own limited capacity to know his subjects in a meaningful way. Instead, he accepts the veneer of his own understanding while demonstrating a keen ability to scrape wit, beauty, and empathy from the surface of things.

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