

GALLERY

*Photograph by***PAUL GRAHAM**

IN PAUL GRAHAM'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF Northern Ireland, made against the backdrop of The Troubles in the mid-1980s, it is the land that speaks. Political loyalties are written, splashed and hung upon the very fabric of the landscape. In the absence of people, fealty is revealed on the trees and roads.

At the time, "serious photography", especially war photography, was black and white. "Colour was seen as something that trivialised," Graham tells me. "But clearly, if you're talking about the small signs that mark the landscape - the colour of flags, curbs, paintings - their allegiances need to be seen." Using colour photography was a progressive choice, but in his framing and composition, Graham references a documentary tradition that goes back more than a century. In the hushed, seemingly gentle images of his series *Troubled Land*, there are echoes of Roger Fenton's work from the Crimean war in the 1850s, where the violence and terror was also revealed through the landscape.

Graham's images are unsettlingly quiet. The formal balance provided by the horizon, which runs through the centre of nearly all the pictures in the series, seems at odds with the volatile politics of the country itself, lending the work a quivering, electrical charge. In this image from the Gobnascale estate on the outskirts of Derry/Londonderry, red, white and blue paint splatters the road in a clear sign of unionist allegiance. In others, we see the colours of the Irish tricolour subtly daubed on the kerbside, or a union jack flying in a distant tree. If you look hard enough at a bucolic seaside image, you'll see a roadside stop-and-search. "This is the central paradigm of the work," Graham says, "blending seductive landscape photography with conflict photography." **FT**

Words by Josh Lustig. "Paul Graham: *Troubled Land*" is at Huxley-Parlour, London, until March 1



'Paint on Road, Gobnascale, Derry', 1985