

That was then



Ground Zero 2001-2002

AT 6.45AM ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2001, Bronx-born photographer Joel Meyerowitz was out shooting early-morning pictures on Cape Cod. 'It was spectacularly beautiful; all the tourists had gone, it was late summer. Then my wife called to say "Get to a TV, something huge is going on in New York".'

Four days later they went back to their apartment in the West Village. 'It was easy by then, so many people had fled. I made my way down to Ground Zero, five blocks from the North Tower. Then a cop said to me, "The press are never going in. No photographs." Well, no photography means no history. So I decided to do an archive, as they did during World War II. But the security was massive, layer upon layer of different authorities, each thinking they owned the site.'

Eventually, Meyerowitz got a worker's pass. He spent the next eight-and-a-half months working alone, shooting the clean-up on a 1946 large-format camera with a wooden case and leather bellows. 'I wanted

to give a sense of being there, as a surrogate, a resident eye.' He was thrown out daily by police, firefighters, Port Authority workers, medical personnel, federal units and state police: 'They were shooting like crazy



Photographer Joel Meyerowitz. Clockwise from top left: the Millennium Hotel; heavy-duty cranes; resting firemen; a subway train is removed

themselves; they just didn't want a professional there.' He documented workers dismantling buildings, clearing debris, searching for remains. 'They sifted the dirt, looking for a tooth, a knucklebone, anything that might identify a person.'

Four hundred of the resulting 3,000 images appear in his book, *Aftermath*, published this month. Meyerowitz is still angry about the lack of access to the site for New Yorkers who, he feels, needed to understand the scale of the destruction and grieve for their city; but his overall feeling is optimistic. 'They closed it on 30 May 2002. But I went back. I was walking around in that pit alone, as I had done for months, getting lower and lower. Then I saw a little clump of grass at my feet. Seeds buried 30 years before had begun to grow again. They were indestructible.'

SOPHIE CAMPBELL

Aftermath: World Trade Center Archive is published by Phaidon, £45