

Road Works

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New York

September 9 - October 29, 2021

I was on the phone with my father on a Saturday, it was summer and the sun was out of view, but I could see sky on a block that had not seen any in ninety years. Dancing around on the street, which was closed to the public, were cherry-pickers with small men jolting and bouncing in their baskets, removing the overpass.

Flames were tearing through steel - sparks were pouring and the road, which was wet from hosing, was reflecting the falling lights until they hissed and rose again as smoke and steam.

It was, as I said to my father, “a symphony.” There was no way to describe it, as they say, but I was having a ball.

Two riggers from skyscraper history torched a twelve-foot steel track cabled to an excavator basket, its arm bent above the crew. There was a moment - the steel hovering - that gravity forgot. The steel loosened, the arm braced and lowered the severed track to the ground. Minutes later an entire wall of the overpass, one block wide, separated from its anchors and fell to the street without a sound.

I said “wow” more than once, hung up the phone, and walked over to a brick ledge to confirm with the foreman bouncing his heels against it that this block had always lain under an overpass.

“For ninety years,” he said. He was glowing medium-rare with the long day, the sky, the good work and the wet road. He also called the sight “a symphony.”

I told him how nice it was to watch. He said people never say anything nice about demolition.

The cherry-pickers folded up and beeped into a lot nearby. Most of the guys walked off the site - the few behind hosed it down and swept the metal away somewhere.

The crew sat in a slant on the curb of an inclining driveway across the street and smoked cigarettes in an analytical European style. Their voices sounded timeless and poetic as they watched the water rinse the road and discussed bringing back the sky.