

REVIEW

EXHIBIT

The New
Old West

A John Wayne painting in Springerville, Ariz.



Wrecked cars are a roadside attraction in Conway, Texas.

PARTLY BECAUSE OF the satanic connotations, Route 666, which once ran from the Mexican border into Utah, had its route number changed in 2003 to 491 and 191. Veteran photographer Joan Myers uses its old nickname, “The Devil’s Highway,” as the title of her book of black-and-white photos from the American West.

In the introduction to the book, published by the University of Texas’s Briscoe Center for American History, Ms. Myers is frank about the challenges facing many small businesses and families in Western states. A 1986 photo shows the abandoned Romeo & Juliet cafe in Powder River, Wyo., a grim white building with a weed-strewn parking

JOAN MYERS (2)

lot. By 2020, the Eden store in Eden, Ariz., had also fallen from grace. In Mills, N.M., a tiny, collapsing house slants at a gravity-defying angle, while in Conway, Texas, a row of wrecked Volkswagen Bugs (above) seem to dive into the turf, part of a roadside attraction.

Still, Ms. Myers retains a sense of humor. A painting of John Wayne, wearing an eye-patch as in the movie “True Grit,” keeps watch on the wall of a building in Springerville, Ariz. (above left), while in Joshua Tree, Calif., a weather-beaten chair sports a sign: “Wait Here, Your Soul Wants to Catch Up.”

—Peter Saenger