

TANK



HEAVEN IS A PRISON

Desire is measured in absence. We are intoxicated by the splendour of the world and its inhabitants because whatever they offer, it is always insufficient, never quite enough to offer a final sense of satisfaction. Because desire is endless, it is also never enough; to get what we want is always to give up the pleasure of wanting it. Emptied-out but charged with eroticism, Mark McKnight's photographs of entangled queer bodies in desolate landscapes make present this absence which paradoxically makes possible our most enlivening experiences of longing. In [a recent *New Yorker* profile](#), he described his process as "standing at a distance and quietly observing things that I want to take part in", going on to explain that his photographs investigate how an experience of "unrequited desire becomes part of the desire itself".

Heaven is a Prison, a new book of McKnight's work [published by Loose Joints in collaboration with Light Work](#), explores these contradictions through merging the sublime wonder of rural America with the intensity of corporeal desire. Presenting his stark, black and white images without an overt narrative or establishing context, McKnight establishes a strange equivalence between wide-open shots of clouds, plains and mountains and explicit close-ups of contorted torsos and bodies bound together in pleasure. The pastoral and the pornographic are held together in an unresolved union which, as Garth Greenwell notes in his accompanying essay, acquires its power precisely through the strange vacillation it induces. Ethereal and immediate, vacant and visceral, these are images which compel because they refuse to give themselves away. ●