



Hans van der Meer: European Fields: The Landscape of Lower League Football

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At the beginning of the 1995 football season, Hans van der Meer set out to take a series of football photographs that avoided the clichéd traditions of modern sports photography. In an attempt to record the game in its original form—a field, two goals and 22 players—he sought matches at the bottom end of the amateur leagues, the opposite end of the scale to the Champions' League. And he avoided the enclosed environment of the stadium and tight telescopic details and hyperbole of action photography. Preferring neutral lighting, framing and camera angles, he chose instead to pull back from the central subject of the pitch, locating the playing field and its unfolding action within a specific landscape and context. He was heavily influenced by the old tradition of photography in which a wide view of the action often resulted in elements of the locality being present in the image. Van der Meer began by focusing on sites within the Netherlands and in 1998 he published *Dutch Fields*, followed by a DVD, *Flemish Fields*, in 2000. His European odyssey has since taken him from small towns in the remote regions of Europe—from Biharia in Romania to Björkö in Sweden, from Torp in Norway to Alcsóörs in Hungary, from Bartkowo in Poland to Beire in Portugal—and to the fringes of the major conurbations of Greece, Finland, England, France, Germany, Scotland, Switzerland, Holland, Slovakia, Denmark, Ireland, Wales, the Czech Republic, Belgium, Spain and Italy. These acute and subtle observations of the poetry and absurdity of human behavior connect the game of football to the basic futility of the human condition. The small tragicomedies are dwarfed by the serenity and permanence of the natural or manmade world that surrounds them but in their pathos can be found the original passion and humanity of the game.

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