CONSTRUCTION
BRIAN FINKE

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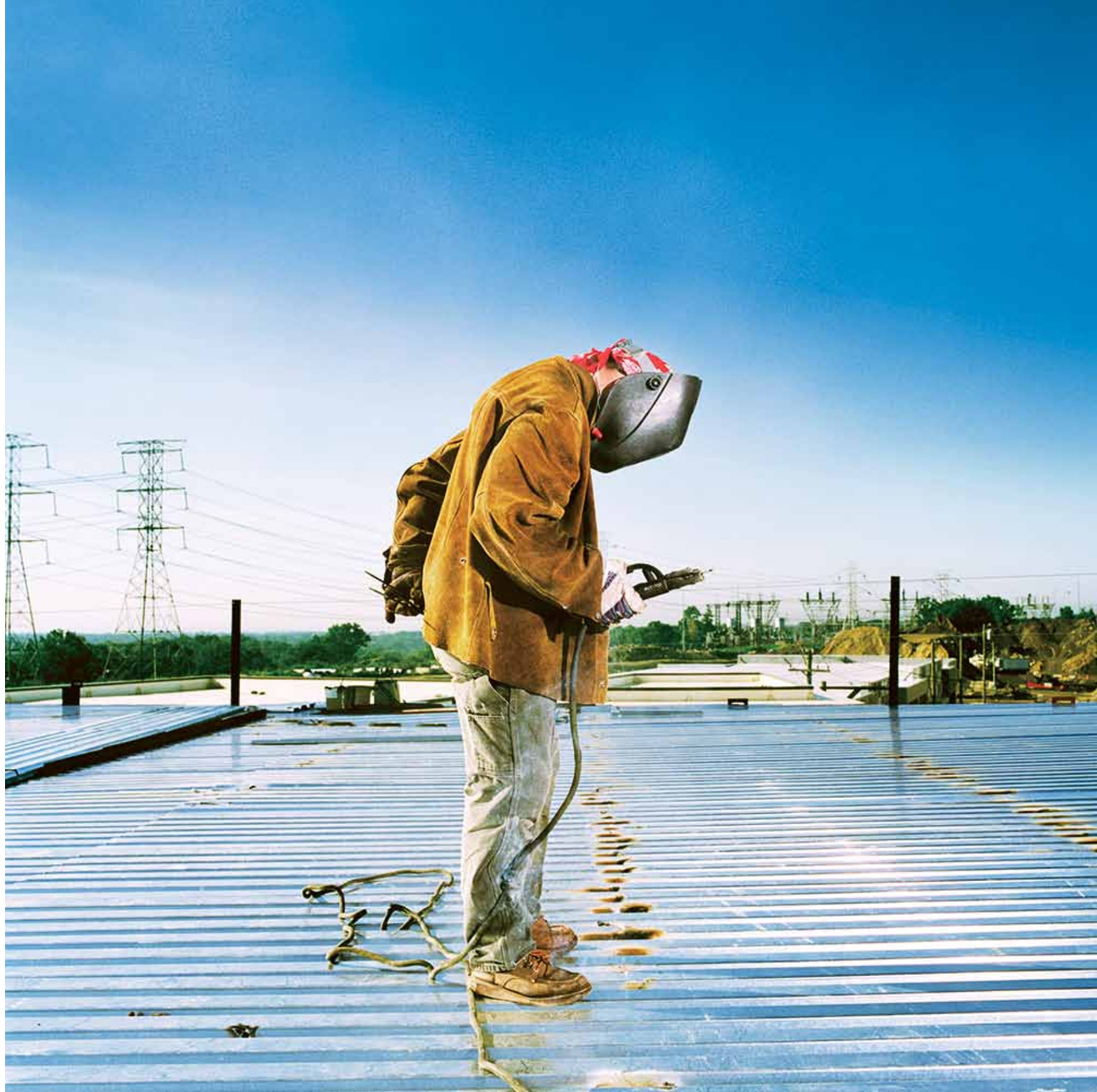
ESSAY BY WHITNEY JOHNSON

DECODE BOOKS

Ireland
FOUR Provinces
Mountain Dew
BFGoodrich



Long Island
Concrete

ICARUS, RECONSTRUCTED

WHITNEY JOHNSON

Eleven steelworkers, perched on an I-beam high above the Manhattan skyline, chatting and smoking cigarettes. A single figure wrapped around a cable wire, soaring high over the city. Charles C. Ebbets's *New York Construction Workers Lunching on a Crossbeam,* taken during the construction of the RCA, now GE, Building at Rockefeller Center, and Lewis Hine's *Icarus Atop the Empire State Building,* both shot in the early 1930s, are the images that emerge in our memory when we think about construction, particularly in New York City.

Photography, of course, repeats itself. So while Brian Finke sees these images as iconic, even epic, they did not serve as a starting point for his own project. For Finke, *Construction* is a continuation of earlier projects, most notably *2-4-6-8: American Cheerleaders and Football Players* and *Flight Attendants,* which began with a simple idea: to focus, obsessively, on a single group of people.

Finke's work is rooted in the documentary tradition. Early on, he was introduced to W. Eugene Smith, whose "photos and life completely blew me away, completely opened the world of social awareness." As the photographer for his high school newspaper, Finke could be found running along the sidelines of football games in the suburbs of Houston, Texas.

After art school, Finke wanted to develop his own style of documentary photography. He switched from black-and-white to color, and to the square format, adding artificial lighting