FRAMING IDEAS

Landscape and Place
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Ansel Adams

Bridalveil Fall, Yosemite National Park, California, n.d.
Ansel Adams
Gunlock, Washington County, Utah, 1953
Ansel Adams
El Capitan, Yosemite National Park, California, 1956
Ansel Adams
(American, 1902-1984)

Ansel Adams’ documentation of the western landscape has taken on iconic significance as one of the defining purist visions of both the American West and of the photographic medium. Images such as this one, taken within the National Park System, have frequently been used to promote tourism and preservation of the landscapes they portray. El Capitan is a subject Adams photographed repeatedly, using the mountain’s towering presence to signify the sublime and unfathomable vastness of nature. Compositionally, Adams tends to frame these monuments of nature so that their iconic character is evoked, and to this aim, he avoids including the tourists and signs of habitation that surround the sites.

Born in San Francisco in 1902, Adams began working as an official photographer for the Sierra Club in 1928. In 1932 he and other California-based photographers, including Edward Weston, founded the group f64, which maintained an interest in the technically perfect photographic print. The name f64 is a reference to the smallest standardized aperture setting on the camera’s lens; photographs taken on this setting have the greatest depth of field meaning that nearly every object in the picture plane is in perfect focus. Adams developed a means of explaining exposure and development control known as the “zone system,” publishing his first book on how to master photographic technique in 1935. Over the next several years, Adams published a number of books and articles detailing his photographic approach; his titles include The Camera and the Lens (1948), The Negative (1948), The Print (1950), Natural Light Photography (1952), and Artificial Light Photography (1956). In the 1930s, Adams printed the photographs of Dorothea Lange, with whom he would collaborate with on several assignments including a study of the wartime shipyards in Richmond, California (1945), a report for Life on the Mormons in Utah, and a project on agriculture in the San Joaquin valley for Fortune (both published in the 1950s). His photographs of Yosemite Valley – a lifelong inspiration to Adams – and other subjects have been frequently reproduced, published as portfolios, and exhibited internationally. Adams was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and was critical in the founding of The Friends of Photography, the Ansel Adams Center for Photography, San Francisco, which existed from 1967 to 2001. In 2002, John Szarkowski organized a traveling exhibition of Adams’ work commemorating the 100th Anniversary of his birth. In 1985, a year after Adams’ death, an 11,760 foot mountain in Yosemite National Park was named Mt. Ansel Adams.

-- ed. Ashley Siple
Eliot Porter

Spruce Trees and River, Colorado, from the portfolio The Seasons, 1959, portfolio 1964
Eliot Porter
Maple Blossoms In A Woodland Pool, New Hampshire,
From "Portfolio One: The Seasons Sierra Club, San Francisco" Portfolio, May 1961, portfolio 1964
Eliot Porter
(American, 1901-1990)

Until he saw the photographs of Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter was a scientist and teacher. Influenced by Adams and Alfred Stieglitz, Porter decided to devote himself to photography and eventually became one of the best-known documenters of the unspoiled outdoor world and its creatures, especially birds. Spruce Trees and River, Colorado attests to Porter’s profound interest in – and mastery of – the exquisite color and patterns found in the natural world.

In 1979 the work of Eliot Porter was exhibited in Intimate Landscapes, the first one-person show of color photography at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. This exhibition earned Porter praise as the individual who brought credibility to color photography as a medium of fine art. Porter developed new technical methods of photographing animals, birds, and insects. He was a scientist as well as an artist: he graduated from Harvard’s School of Engineering in 1924, and from Harvard Medical School in 1929. Born in 1901 in Winnetka, Illinois, Porter died in 1990.
Robert Adams
Expressway near Colton, California, 1982
Robert Adams
*South From the Rocky Flats, Jefferson County, Colorado*, 1977, printed 1989
Robert Adams

*Clear-Cut and Burned, East of Arch Cape, Oregon, 1976, printed 1982*
Robert Adams
Robert Adams
(American, b. 1937)

Robert Adams’ photographs offer views of natural landscapes transformed by their intersection with civilization. Adams was one of many photographers to challenge the romanticized view of landscape photography dominant in the first half of the 20th century, and his work is as much concerned with the modern post-war landscape as it is with beauty and form. His work was included in an exhibition titled, New Topographics: Photographs of Man-Altered Landscape curated by William Jenkins for the International Museum of Photography, Rochester, New York in 1975. The exhibition ushered in the new era of landscape photography and it showcased the ideals of the new approach: landscape could not be artificially separated from cultural and social counterparts, and landscape photography had to abandon the hollow sense of style it had inherited from the previous half century. The exhibit was a milestone for a new generation of landscape photographers and it drew attention to the novel idea of a social landscape. Calm and Somber, Adams’ images are an aesthetic articulation of a concern regarding man’s shifting conception of place and environment. Like most of his photographs, Expressway near Colton, California shows discreet traces of man’s presence, which illustrates the new all-inclusive approach to landscape photography. Adams’ art is devoted to the belief that all land, no matter what has been done to it, retains an enduring significance best expressed through a straightforward approach.

Born in Orange, New Jersey in 1937, Robert Adams has spent much of his life photographing the developed American West. A writer as well as an artist, he earned a BA in English from the University of Redlands, California and a PhD in English from the University of Southern California. Adams has published a number of books featuring his writing and photographs, including West from the Columbia: Views at the River Mouth (1995), Listening to the River: Seasons in the American West (1994), To Make it Home: Photographs of the American West (1989), and Beauty in Photography: Essays in Defense of Traditional Values (1981). His work has been widely exhibited, including in a major retrospective exhibition at The Philadelphia Museum of Art (1989). Adams is also the recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts Photographer’s Fellowships, two John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowships, and the Peer Award of The Friends of Photography.

-- edited by Ashley Siple


William Christenberry
Kudzu and House, Tuscaloosa County, AL, 1991
William Christenberry

*Site of Kudzu and House, Tuscaloosa County, AL (view II), 1992*
William Christenberry

(American, b. 1936)

With the encouragement of noted photographer Walker Evans, William Christenberry began to pursue photography seriously and focus on the landscape of Hale County, Alabama, which he has photographed for more than twenty-five years. Christenberry is devoted to the heritage of the South and, using his training as a sculptor and painter, interprets it in a range of media. This series focusing on a small shack, Kudzu and House, Tuscaloosa County, AL, is a meditation on the passage of time, the ebb and flow of seasons, and the spirit of rural Southern life.

William Christenberry was born in Alabama in 1936. He received his BFA and MA degrees in painting from the University of Alabama and is currently a professor of art at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. Christenberry’s work has received honors and awards, and has been exhibited extensively throughout the United States and Europe.


Terry Evans

Indian Sand Dunes, April 2001, 2001
Terry Evans

Terry Evans
*Montana, Great Falls vicinity, (striped fields), September 28, 1999, 1999*
Terry Evans
(United States, b. 1944)
For a large portion of her career, Terry Evans has photographed the prairie, from its natural, untouched state to its care, development, use, and abandonment. Photographing from both ground and aerial perspectives, she focuses on the issues of specific places and how ecological, economic, agricultural, and cultural patterns physically shape the landscape. As her documentation ranges from responsible land management like cattle rotation and erosion prevention to careless industrial pollution in her aerial pictures, Evans is consistently interested in the tension between specificity and abstraction. The distanced perspective offers a wide-reaching, detached, and revealing view of the landscape. Her images clearly articulate this duality inherent in the relationship between the landscape and those who live in it. Around the turn of the century, Evans began to photograph animal and plant specimens, examining the relationship between science and art and once again challenging us to define our place in nature.

Terry Evans was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1944. Her solo exhibition In Place of Prairie appeared at the Art Institute of Chicago in late 1998, and she has exhibited other works at the National Audubon Society Headquarters, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Society for Contemporary Photography, Kansas City, Missouri, among others. Her work is included in many permanent collections, such as those at the Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Baltimore Museum of Art. The recipient of a 1997 Guggenheim Fellowship, Evans currently lives and works in Chicago and frequently guest lectures at Columbia College Chicago.


Frank Gohlke
*Grain Elevator, Series III, Bison, Oklahoma, 1973*
Frank Gohlke

Aerial View: Logs and debris in south end of Spirit Lake-4/5 miles N or Mt. St. Helens, Washington, 1981
Frank Gohlke
*Drive-In Theater, Great Bend, Kansas, n.d.*
Frank Gohlke

(American, b. 1942)

I was clear, however, about one thing: the grain elevators could not be considered in isolation from the landscape; the building and its context were inseparable. At the same time, I was beginning to realize that the landscape is not a collection of fixed objects on a static spatial grid but a fluid and dynamic set of relationships. – Frank Gohlke in Measure of Emptiness, 1991

Frank Gohlke’s black and white pictures of the American landscape confront the enduring and the transient elements of our surroundings. Within a year of moving to Minnesota, Gohlke’s fascination with a landmark of Midwestern landscape led to begin the grain elevator series. The pictures in the series, which lasted from 1972 to 1977, quickly evolved from a strictly aesthetic appreciation of forms to a rich reflection on the symbol and place of the elevators in a larger context. As in Grain Elevator, Series III, Bison, Oklahoma, Gohlke made a point of holding the camera straight and level in order to emphasize the strong vertical and horizontal axes of the region’s landscape, while minimizing lens distortion and other artifacts that would suggest the vision as a photographic construction at the expense of its power as a document. Over five trips in the decade following the 1981 eruption of Mount Saint Helens, Frank Gohlke produced quietly dramatic photographs of this natural disaster. A precise description of a post-apocalyptic landscape, Young trees killed by heat and downed by blast documents destruction as well as the photographer’s concern for the fragility of the earth.

Frank Gohlke was born in 1942 in Wichita Falls, Texas. A student of English literature, he received his BA from the University of Texas in Austin and his MA from Yale University (1966). Gohlke’s work gained special attention with its inclusion in the 1975 exhibition New Topographics: Images of a Man-Altered Landscape at the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York. Today his work is represented in numerous national collections and has been shown in numerous solo exhibitions. the traveling exhibition Landscapes from the Middle of the World (catalogue 1998), organized by The Museum of Contemporary Photography.
Mark Klett
Looking Through the Snow Tunnel Above Goat Lake, Sawtooth Range, 1981
Mark Klett
Goat Lake Ice Cavern, Sawtooth Range, Idaho, September 9, 1981
Mark Klett
(American, b. 1952)
Trained as a geologist, Mark Klett established his artistic perspective on the Western American landscape as the chief photographer for the Rephotographic Survey Project (1977-79), which rephotographed scenes visited by the first photographic surveys of the West in the 1860s and 1870s. Nineteenth-century photographers found transcendence in the vastness of the American West; Looking Through the Snow Tunnel Above GoatLake, Sawtooth Range is a contemporary celebration of the region’s grandeur with references to 19th century landscape photography, including Klett’s inclusion of a figure in the scene to provide a sense of scale.

In 1878 Eadweard Muybridge climbed with his cumbersome wooden view camera to the top of California Street in San Francisco to make a 360-degree panorama of the city. In 1990 Mark Klett revisited the idea with Panorama of San Francisco. Klett’s goal was to match Muybridge’s photographs – something no longer possible in 1990 from the same spot because of the skyline created during the century spanning the two projects. These two carefully planned San Francisco panoramas, presented together in the accordion-fold book One City/Two Visions (1990), reveal the evolution of a city.

Mark Klett was born in 1952 and holds a BS in geology from St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York (1974), and an MFA in photography from the State University of New York at Buffalo, Program at the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York (1977). His documentary photographs reveal the diversity of the land of the Southwestern United States. His work has been shown in one-person exhibitions at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC; and the Phoenix Art Museum. Klett lives in Arizona, where he teaches photography at Arizona State University, Tempe.
An-My Lê

29 Palms: Colonel Greenwood, 2003-2004
An-My Lê
29 Palms: Colonel Folsom, 2003-2004
An-My Lê
29 Palms: Night Operations #7, 2003-2004
An-My Lê

(United States resident, born Vietnam 1960)

Though An-My Lê’s petition to be an embedded photographer in Iraq was denied, in 2003 she was granted permission to photograph U.S. military training exercises in preparation for deployment to Afghanistan and Iraq. The series 29 Palms takes its name from the Marine base in southern California’s Mojave Desert where Lê photographed American soldiers both rehearsing their own roles and playing the parts of their adversaries. As seen in Stability Operations (Iraqi Police), their practice includes dressing as Iraqi police (complete with home-made armbands) and tagging former military housing with mock anti-American graffiti. Lê works with a large-format camera to capture these images of staged war, in compositions that give equal weight to the landscape in which the theater occurs. Her equipment and working method are reminiscent of those employed by the Civil War photographers, though Lê’s pictures address issues of war by looking at the preparation for combat instead of its aftermath. 29 Palms follows Lê’s 1999 to 2002 Small Wars series, a study of Vietnam War reenactments in the United States.

An-My Lê was born in Saigon, Vietnam in 1960 and came to the United States in 1975 as a refugee. She holds a BAS (1981) and MS (1985) from Stanford University and an MFA from Yale University School of Art (1993). Recent solo exhibitions of her work include 29 Palms at Murray Guy, New York; Small Wars at PS1/MOMA Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York; and Vietnam at Scott Nichols Gallery, San Francisco. She is the recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship (1997), and her work is held in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; and Sackler Gallery, The Smithsonian, Washington DC.

- Kendra Greene
O. Winston Link

NW 720-Livingroom on the Tracks, Lithia, Virginia, 1955
O. Winston Link

NW 1103-Hot Shot East Bound, Laeger, West Virginia, 1956
In the early 1950s O. Winston Link read in a magazine for train buffs that diesels would soon replace steam locomotives. Hearing that Norfolk & Western Railway planned to phase out steam engines, Link proposed taking pictures along the line’s 2,500 miles of track through Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. He took the first picture of the project in January 1955, and had created some 2,400 images documenting America’s remaining steam-powered trains and the communities they were a part of by time the trains ceased operation five years later. (When he began all trains on the line were steam-powered, the last of which ran in May 1960, and the line itself would end in 1963.) From 1955 to 1960 Link made at least 17 trips from New York, concentrating on the 238-mile Shenandoah Valley Line from Hagerstown, Maryland to Roanoke, Virginia, a line dating back to 1870.

At first Link concentrated on what he called “hardware shots,” shots of stationary locomotives that were mostly a record of their physical construction, but he soon transitioned to the features for which his photographs are famous: trains moving at full steam, contextualized by regional landscape and trackside towns, most often at night. Nothing about making these pictures was easy. It was hard to count on train speed and he could never be sure what the wind would do with the steam, but Link claimed it was the sun that was “too hard to control.” Photographing at night restored a certain amount of control to the photographer, but it came at the price of intense technical demands. Most exposures are 1/200 or 1/100 of a second, shot usually with a 4x5 Graphic View Camera and sometimes as many as three cameras synchronized. The synchronized flash system necessary to freeze a train on film was custom built by Link and included up to 60 flashbulbs per picture. One broken connection and the entire system would fail, and it was prohibitively expensive to do any test runs.

Link did the project completely at his own expense. When Norfolk & Western realized the magnitude of his project, however, they did provide him with a key to the phone boxes along the tracks. This communication allowed Link to not only check on train times, but sometimes ask trains to change speed, clean the engine to produce whiter steam, and even reverse and pass again. Link meticulously planned both composition and narrative in his photographs, and just setting up a picture could take from several hours to two full days. It took enormous collective effort to make these pictures, and they reflect Link’s many friendships with train personnel and members of the communities in which he photographed. It is important to remember that Link’s pictures do not record simply steam trains but the trackside rural America that would disappear with them. Indeed it seems his fascination with steam trains was equally matched by his affection for the people and small towns connected to them.
Lewis Baltz

New Industrial Parks #45, from the portfolio "New Industrial Parks Near Irvine, California", 1974
Lewis Baltz

*New Industrial Parks #10, from the portfolio "New Industrial Parks Near Irvine, California", 1974*
Lewis Baltz
(American, b. 1945)
Lewis Baltz documents the changing American landscape of the 1970s in his series *New Industrial Parks Near Irvine, California.* The project’s 51 pictures depict structural details, walls at mid-distance, offices, and parking lots of industrial parks. Contrast and geometry are important in these pictures, but what marks them uniformly is Baltz’s attention to surface texture and lifeless subject matter. Often displayed in a grid format, it is important to Baltz that his pictures be seen collectively as a group or series. The series format suits his desire that no one image be taken as more true or significant than another, encouraging the viewer to consider not just the pictures but everything outside of the frame as well, emphasizing the monotony of the man-made environment. The pictures themselves resist any single point of focus, framed as they are to present the scene as a whole without bringing any attention to any particular element in it. Shot with a 35mm lens on a 35mm camera, usually at eye level, and stopped down for maximum depth of field; Baltz chooses his materials for maximum clarity and precision. Indeed, he takes care to title his pieces so exactly that the viewer could return to the same exact site.

Lewis Baltz was born in Newport Beach, California in 1945. He currently lives in Saulsalito, California and Milan, Italy. He holds a BFA from San Francisco Art institute (1969) and an MFA from Claremont Graduate School (1971). Baltz was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1973 and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1977. He has exhibited at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. His work is in the collections of numerous institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; and the Art Institute of Chicago.

--Kendra Greene


Richard Misrach
White Man Contemplating Pyramids, Egypt, 1989, printed 1991
Richard Misrach
*Salton Sea with T.V. Antennae*, 1985, printed 1992
Richard Misrach
*Windmill Farm, San Gorgonio Pass, 1984, printed 1994*
Richard Misrach (American, b. 1949)

Richard Misrach’s dedication to the Southwest’s desert at first seems to echo a landscape documentary tradition more than the social-documentary work with which he began his career. Yet Misrach’s lifetime project, the Desert Cantos series, with its individual segments divided up between the terrain, events (the landing of a space shuttle, military testing), floods, and fires, has as much to do with social issues as with man’s presence within nature. Begun in 1979, the Desert Cantos series takes its name from its location and the structural term for a subsection of a long song or poem. The cantos vary in subject matter, the amount of time they span, and the number of works in the final grouping. Misrach thinks of all his desert pictures as part of a single great work, divided into cantos by smaller themes, each canto numbered as it is completed. The first fourteen cantos, in order, are: The Terrain, The Event, The Flood, The Fires, The War (Bravo 20), The Pit, Desert Seas, The Event II, Project W-47 (The Secret), The Test Site, The Playboys, Clouds, The Inhabitants, and The Visitors. The photograph Stranded Rowboat, Salton Sea is from the third canto, The Flood. The Salton Sea was an ancient, dried-up lake before it was purposely flooded in the early twentieth-century as part of local land-management policies. Misrach uses the lush desert palette to paint an elegant picture of the strangeness and upset balance of human activity in an alien landscape.

Misrach works primarily in the deserts of the American Southwest compiling a sequence of monumental photographic studies that scan the ebb and flow of human intervention in the landscape, but White Man Contemplating Pyramids, Egypt maintains these concerns while taking them to another continent and another culture. As a historical site, the pyramids in this picture have a legacy of construction and destruction. Pyramid builders leveled the site for the tomb of Chafra (the pyramid whose northwest corner is in the foreground), leaving a ten meter drop between the original plateau and the man-made terrace below. Though the smooth blocks of limestone that originally cased the pyramid have since been stripped away, the pavement marks the pyramid’s original footprint. In the distance stands the pyramid of Menkaure, a great gash still visible on the north side where 12th c. explorers attempted to find the entrance to the royal tomb.

Born in 1949, Misrach received his BA in psychology from the University of California, Berkeley. He first saw photography as a means to social change, an ideology evident in his first major photographic project, Telegraph 3AM which documented Berkeley’s homeless population. Misrach’s work is represented in over fifty institutional collections, including that of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Musée National d’Art Moderne, Paris. His photographs have also been exhibited worldwide, including his first major retrospective, a touring exhibition organized in 1997 by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
Lee Friedlander

Chicago, 2003
Lee Friedlander
Washington D.C., 1973
Lee Friedlander
Washington D.C., 1973
Lee Friedlander

(American, b. 1934)

Lee Friedlander’s unique vision underscores the two-dimensionality of the picture plane and the potential for photographs to contain varying levels of reflection, opacity, and transparency. In Friedlander’s street photographs shadows of figures (usually Friedlander himself) and other subjects overlap in the photographic image. The projected outline of Friedlander’s body as within the picture frame implies the notion that the photographer can be both behind the camera and in front of it. Interpreted further, Friedlander’s shadow can be taken to represent the imposition of the photographer upon his world and his subject.

Washington, DC is an image from Friedlander’s The American Monument project executed in the planar style for which he is known. Collapsed into the flat photograph are a car window, a side mirror, and a boulevard that extends into the distance, dividing the space of the frame. The American Monument project documents how nondescript memorials in the United States are folded into changing landscapes. As the context and environment of these objects has changed over time, many have not retained their initial meaning or significance.

Lee Friedlander was born in 1934 in Aberdeen, Washington. He began photographing in 1948 because of a “fascination with the equipment,” in his words. He later attended the Art Center School in Los Angeles to become a professional photographer, but soon left. He moved to New York in 1956 and began freelancing. As he sought out magazine assignments, he eventually met a group of photographers who would change his life: Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, Garry Winogrand, Louis Faurer, Helen Levitt, Richard Avedon, and Walker Evans. Friedlander has been awarded John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowships and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. His work has been widely exhibited and is included in the collections of the Baltimore Museum of Art; Tucson; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, among other international collections. The Museum of Contemporary Photography exhibited his series At Work and Sticks and Stones in 2005.

--ed. Ashley Haine Siple, with text adapted from Rod Slemmons
Bob Thall
*Downers Grove, IL, 1992*
Bob Thall
Bartlett, IL, 1993
Bob Thall
(American, b. 1948)

Bob Thall is known for formally rigorous and deadpan portrayals of the urban and suburban landscape in Chicago, photographing in black and white and using a view camera. Chicago (Near O'Hare) is part of a series he produced in the 1990s focusing on the "edge cities" of Chicago — the quickly constructed suburban communities near O’Hare International Airport surrounding both Chicago and its older ring of suburbs on the northwest side. Capturing the sleek artificiality of these recent developments, the image conveys the power, pervasiveness and emptiness of suburban corporate architecture. This work was featured in a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in 1999 and published in the monograph The New American Village (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

In the mid-1980s, Thall participated in the Changing Chicago Project, one of the largest documentary photography projects ever organized in an American city. The project was sponsored by the Focus/Infinity Fund of Chicago, founded by photographer and philanthropist Jack Jaffe, and launched in honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the Farm Security Administration documentary project. Thirty-three photographers of various styles were employed to create a multifaceted record of the city's diverse urban and suburban neighborhoods and inhabitants, culminating in concurrent exhibitions across Chicago’s major museums and a book entitled Changing Chicago: A Photodocumentary (University of Illinois Press, 1989). Many of Thall’s photographs documenting infrastructure and architecture on the south side of Chicago are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Contemporary Photography and formed part of the Changing Chicago Project.

Bob Thall was born in Chicago in 1948. He completed a BA and MFA in photography from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has been on faculty at Columbia College Chicago since 1976 and is currently chair of the photography department. Thall is a recipient of a John F. Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (1998). His work is held in many collections, including the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal; J. Paul Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Los Angeles; Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. In addition to The New American Village, monographs include The Perfect City (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), City Spaces: Photographs of Chicago Alleys (Center for American Places, 2002), and At City's Edge: Photographs of Chicago's Lakefront (Center for American Places, 2005).
Alec Soth
Alec Soth
Venice, LA, 2002
Alec Soth
(American, b.1969)

Alec Soth creates color photographs of the disparate scenes and people he discovers during meandering journeys along the Mississippi River. Beginning his voyages in the frozen winters of Minneapolis and ending in the sultry heat of New Orleans, Soth’s pictures trace a cultural gradation along the largest and most storied river in the United States.

Patrick, Palm Sunday, Baton Rouge, LA, 2002; Luxora, AR; and Sunshine, Memphis, TN, 2000 are part of Soth’s Sleeping by the Mississippi series. They are rich in symbolism, touching upon the themes of adventure and home. According to Soth, the key to his photographs can be found in the following quote by Charles Lindbergh, written about the twenty-second hour of his transatlantic flight in The Spirit of St. Louis:

*Over and over again I fall asleep with my eyes open, knowing I’m falling asleep, unable to prevent it. When I fall asleep this way, my eyes are cut off from my ordinary mind as though they were shut, but they become directly connected to this new, extraordinary mind which grows increasingly competent to deal with their impressions.*

Like Lindbergh, Soth is fascinated by the mind’s ability to function at varying levels of consciousness, to “see” without really seeing, and to process without the faculty of reasoning. Letting his body and mind wander along the river, Soth creates a series of lyrical images that capture the spirit of the region that, in many ways, forms the cultural marrow of this country.

Lurking below the surface of Soth’s images are issues particular to the history of this corridor of the country: slavery, economic boom and bust, and a deep religious undercurrent. The river, symbolically a place of baptism and renewal, serves as a metaphor for Soth’s photographic pursuits. As he drifts from one location to another, he documents rituals – spiritual and secular, private and public – that he finds along the way, from portraits of devout prison inmates and parishioners on Palm Sunday to mantelpieces adorned with family photographs and pictures of religious and political icons. Other scenes littered with pornography and empty liquor bottles speak to more seedy forms of ritual. Soth poignantly touches the racial tensions of the history of this region in a picture of a vulnerable African-American teenage girl reclining sensuously on a hotel bed, and a disturbing close-up of the face of a wax figure of Huckleberry Finn’s friend, runaway slave Jim. Like the river itself, Soth’s pictures flow through stories but don’t form a linear narrative. Soth says that his intention was to create a series of photographs that feel like lucid dreaming.

Alec Soth was born in 1969. He received his BA from Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, NY. His works have been exhibited at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design Gallery; Carleton College Art Gallery; the Weinstein Gallery; and the 2004 Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial. He is the recipient of a McKnight Photography Fellowship, a Minnesota State Arts Board Grant, and the 2003 Santa Fe Prize for Photography.
Christina Seely

Metropolis 41° 54'N 87° 39'W (Chicago), 2005-2009
Christina Seely
Metropolis 40° 25' N 3° 41' W (Madrid), 2005-2009
Christina Seely
Metropolis 35° 00′ N135° 45′ E (Kyoto), 2005-2009
Christina Seely
(American, b. 1976)

Christina Seely’s series Lux, titled after the system for measuring illumination, examines the disconnect between the immense beauty created by human-made light emanating from the earth’s surface and the environmental impact of the world’s wealthiest countries—evident as the brightest areas detected on a satellite map. The three regions most visible in NASA images are the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, which together emit approximately 45 percent of the world’s CO2 and, along with China, are the top consumers of electricity and other resources. Eventually, Lux will comprise photographs of the 43 brightest cities in these areas, but the project is less about the individual locations than their effective interchangeability and the global ramifications of consumption. Reflecting this, each of the images is titled simply Metropolis, accompanied by notation of the city’s latitude and longitude.

Seely’s photographs explore the realities faced when dealing with the infrastructure of these urban environments and their excessive energy consumption, but she consciously takes an indirect approach to the subject. "I am interested in the dialectic between the surface documentation of the photograph and the complex reality that lies beneath the surface," she states, "how beauty can suggest the simple and ideal while both subtly reflecting and obscuring a darker more complicated truth."

Born in 1976 in Berkeley, CA, Seely received her BA from Carleton College (1998), a Post-Baccalaureate from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2001), and her MFA in photography from the Rhode Island School of Art and Design, Providence (2003). She is currently a lecturer at the California College of Arts in Oakland, California.