

THE AMERICAN TERRAIN



PHOTOGRAPHS

BY

ROGER ARRANDALE WILLIAMS



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Superstition Mountains, Arizona
Delicate Arch, Utah
Adirondacks, New York

Denali Preserve, Alaska
Devastation Trail, Hawaii
Monument Valley, Utah

Cover: Mono Lake, California

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"For a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."

F. Scott Fitzgerald



INTRODUCTION

The land as source and sustenance has been axiomatic since humankind first walked the earth. As such, it has functioned as a wellspring for both spiritual and temporal needs, and remains a fundamental of our existence despite the fact that contemporary society has significantly distanced itself from its basic roots.

Landscape as a genre of its own has come to assume a legitimate and respected place in the annals of picture making, although relatively speaking this is a recent development in the long continuum of visual expression. Photography, having now marked its sesquicentennial, has brought its own image-making properties to the land and the physiognomy of the American landscape, with its wide variation of countenance, has proven a rich source of subject matter. In the process of viewing and, for the photographer, making such images, an awareness of nature's own timeless and inexorable agenda emerges in contrast to human imperatives regarding the natural environment.

Historically, our sense of ourselves as a people and a country has derived to a great degree from the land and its availability on such a vast scale. The motif of manifest destiny continues to define the American character in an important way, even if it is now largely a remnant of the nineteenth century territorial expansion movement.¹



It is only now, in the latter part of the twentieth century, that we are coming to realize the infinite is finite, with the continual growth in industry and resource development, and the ever-increasing pressures of population on the land.² While the philosophical ideal of the American wilderness remains alive, the reality of such untouched and "untamed" landscape is fast fading.

As a result, it is to the land set aside in trust, which our predecessors had the foresight to secure (beginning with Yellowstone in 1872), and which photographers helped to facilitate with their early images of topographical splendors, that we most often turn to enjoy the pleasures of our diverse American landscape. Thus, while this is not a publication about our system of parks and preserves, in and of themselves, these nonetheless remain as primary places in which to experience the natural landscape. In one sense, then, these photographs form a collective statement about that which should be most cherished and protected from the incursions of man and technology.

The landscape, and in particular the western landscape, should not be considered without also considering the Native Americans who held first claim to this continent. Where our approach to the land has been one of possession and proprietary self-interest, theirs has culturally been one of temporary tenancy and custodianship. The earth traditionally has been viewed as an entity in its own right to be respected and revered as one of the all-powerful elements. It is impossible not to sense something of this ancient truth while viewing the results of the physical forces that created an object as incomparable as Delicate Arch, for instance, which stands as a singularly impressive icon to geologic time.



The western territory of frontier legend and mythic proportion is, of course, only one part of the American landscape. Other areas of the country offer their own regional landscapes as unparalleled as this signature area in their respective terrain. The photographer has intended this survey as a broader, more inclusive look at the abundant variety of land encompassed within our national boundaries. By way of example, who among us can deny the ageless dominion of the Adirondacks of New York State, or the majesty of the Alaskan territory, or even the seemingly unbounded wetlands of the southern Florida Everglades as not also worthy of contemplation.

In discussing these images of the land, it should also be noted that the photographs offer a wide-field, panoramic approach to the image, which has had various uses in the history of photography. Though only occasionally applied to the uninhabited landscape as central subject, the expansiveness of the American landscape, especially as it initially greets the European eye, seems to invite this grander view. It is a more demanding format, however, in that not every scene lends itself automatically to this elongated proscenium frame, for reasons ranging from the presence of people and their marks on the land to the given land forms themselves. This has made for a more measured production on the photographer's part. Nevertheless, there are instances when open spaces and sweeping vistas are striking features of our indigenous landscape. In these complementary circumstances, there is an inherent felicity with which the panorama captures and conveys the essence of such places.

Kristine Arrandale Williams



Denali Preserve, Alaska



Devastation Trail, Hawaii



Monument Valley, Utah

PERSPECTIVE

From photography's formative years, the desire to visually extend the picture beyond its traditional format, which was originally based on the classic proportions of the golden rectangle, has sparked the creative energies of photographic imagemakers and inventors alike. In the heyday of the celebrated daguerreotype process³, practitioners such as William Southgate Porter achieved an expansive photographic vision by juxtaposing and carefully aligning sequenced daguerreotypes to communicate the more spectacular views. Such an approach to revealing a comprehensive view in its wider scope has remained popular even into modern times. Others favored a continuous whole and, through their inventiveness and diligence, would arrive at alternative approaches to the photographic panorama.

*William Southgate Porter
Fairmount Waterworks
Daguerreotype Panorama
in eight plates, 1848.*



*International Museum of Photography,
George Eastman House, Rochester,
New York.*

The first recorded seamless panorama was produced in 1846 by Friedrich von Martens⁴. Residing in Paris at the time, the German engraver designed an ingenious revolving-lens camera that simultaneously incorporated a curved daguerreotype plate to capture the projected image. This basic design concept has been perpetuated in a succession of cameras which owe allegiance to von Martens' engineering feat.

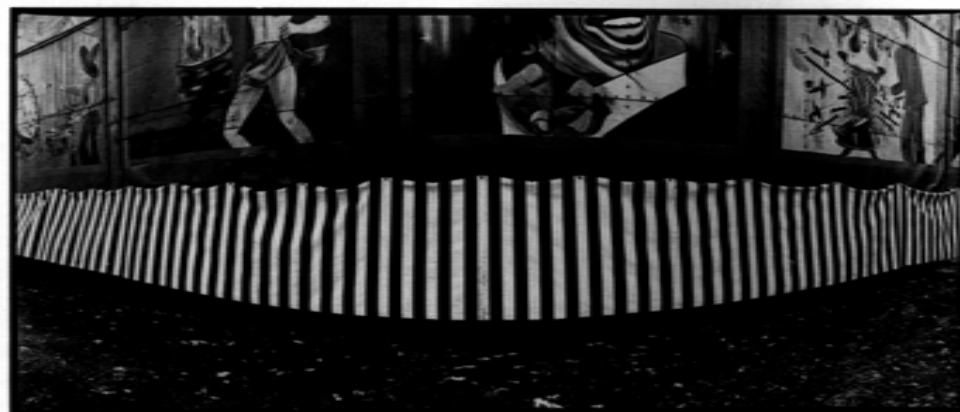
*Friedrich von Martens
Panorama of Paris
Daguerreotype, 1846.*



*International Museum of Photography,
George Eastman House, Rochester,
New York.*

With the advent of flexible film in 1889, camera names such as Cylindrographe, Al Vista, Horizont, Panon and others appeared which put to advantage the features of the original model with new ease. While refinements over the years have made contemporary cylindrical-lens cameras more convenient to use than von Martens' prototype, the appearance of the subject itself has continued to be presented with a distinctive arc. The attempt to correlate a visual perception equivalent to the rotation of the eye, using the broad sweep of a pivoting lens, can create a prominent "bow" effect that bends the photographic space. In the two-dimensional print, this is visually echoed by the optical translation of horizontal lines into sinusoidal curves.

Roger Arrandale Williams
Broadside Circus Trailer.
Silver Gelatin Print, 1980.



Convex curve in striped canopy
attributable to rotation of lens.

A further approach to creating the panoramic picture, one which might be considered more sympathetic with our way of seeing, came through technical advances in lens optics. In 1859 Thomas Sutton⁵, an English photographer, created an extreme wide-field lens by filling the air space between two optically-formed convex glass shells with distilled water. The resultant 120° "fluid lens" preceded today's wide-field lenses and presented the opportunity for stationary-lens panoramic cameras to be manufactured. From the banquet and panoramic view cameras of the early 1900's to contemporary counterparts, such as the Linhof Technorama, the Fujica Panorama and Art Panoram, elongated linear photographs have been possible which offer the illusion of an undistorted, uniform "plane." It has been my preference to work with a Burke & James Panoram of this design for its compatibility with and correlation to the expansive and exhilarating vistas of the American landscape.

Roger Arrandale Williams

NOTES

¹The legacy of manifest destiny extended its influence into this century with the eventual statehood of the territories of Alaska and Hawaii. There are also the U.S. Virgin Islands, which the United States purchased from Denmark in 1917. A part of the Lesser Antilles chain, known previously as the Danish West Indies, these islands lie east of Puerto Rico between the Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean. The U.S. Virgin Islands are administered by the Department of the Interior and have a national park of their own located on the island of St. John.

²A graphic example of these imposed pressures is evident at Mono Lake, California. The "tufa" towers, as the unusual and photogenic pillars of accumulated mineral deposits are called, are in future jeopardy from the falling lake level, since they are only able to form underwater. In the formation process, calcium-rich freshwater springs ascending into alkaline lake water precipitate out as limestone accretions. The diversion of streams that formerly flowed into Mono Lake, in order to meet a major metropolitan area's demand for fresh water, is a contributing factor to this environmental situation. In tandem with this, the degree of water salinity has been measurably increasing and effecting the entire lake's ecosystem.

³The daguerreotype process was an unusually delicate one resulting from the collaboration of Nicephore Niepce (1765-1833) with Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre (1787-1851) in France. While the process became accessible to ambitious amateurs and professionals alike, in 1839, it did take a certain amount of skill and dexterity to successfully arrive at an image. Silver-coated copper plates were exposed to vapors of iodine in order to create a light-sensitive plate. After subsequent exposure in a camera, development of the latent image was promoted by fuming the plate with mercury vapors. Bathing the plate in hyposulphite of soda and a final rinse completed the process. Generally, the mirror-like image was comparatively small by today's standards.

The daguerreotype process was primarily used to make portraits around $2\frac{3}{4}$ " \times $3\frac{1}{4}$ " in size, rarely exceeding $6\frac{1}{2}$ " \times $8\frac{1}{2}$ " in size. The finished image was then elegantly encased to present it, as well as to protect it against abrasion. Available in many countries, the daguerreotype process was most practiced in the United States, remaining popular up until 1860. Hand tinting of the plate, at an additional charge, gave a more life-like quality to the image, making the daguerreotype even more desirable to an already clamoring public.

⁴Friedrich von Martens (1809-1875) built a pivoting-lens camera in 1844 which projected a 150° arced image onto a curved plate. The movement of the lens was regulated by a hand crank which turned a gear attached to the lens mount. Leather bellows allowed for uninhibited lens rotation, while a small slit behind the lens exposed a vertical band of the light-sensitive plate in a similar fashion to a contemporary focal plane shutter. The resulting image was a daguerreotype 5 " \times $12\frac{1}{2}$ ", a relatively large photographic image for this period.

⁵Thomas Sutton (1819-1875) patented his 120° fluid wide-angle lens on September 28, 1859. Research by Jack Naylor, collector and noted authority on photographica, indicates that Sutton's lens "became the heart of a most unusual camera made by Frederick Cox, a London cabinet maker. Cox, who made the first thirty or so cameras, subsequently severed relations with Sutton, who, in 1861, sold his camera patent to Thomas Ross of London. The latter then took over the manufacture and sale of the Sutton Lens and Camera. The Sutton/Ross Cameras were made of polished mahogany by skilled artisans. The camera had a smooth operating rack-and-pinion focusing mechanism and the shutter was a simple hinged wooden flap, which covered the box housing the lens. No advertising for the Sutton Camera can be found after 1862, and it is so rare today that it seems likely very few were made during the years the camera was offered for sale."



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