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Out There Wednesday, September 26, 2012 | By Paul Moakley | 3 Comments

Looking at the Land From the Comfort of Home

Andy Adams works almost exclusively in the virtual world of contemporary photography. Whether you visit his photography website [FlakPhoto.com](#), follow him on Twitter or take part in his daily Facebook discussions, you'll find Adams diligently working as a young cultural anthropologist. Reaching far into the online photo ether, Adams always tries to present us with something new that he hopes you'll be equally thrilled by.

Since 2006 FlakPhoto has grown to become a defining resource for anyone interested in the latest trends in photography online. Institutions like the RISD Museum of Art have recently taken notice of his work, calling upon Adams to curate an installation and accompanying online exhibition to complement its most recent massive show *America in View: Landscape Photography 1865 to Now*.

In the fall of 2010, Adams curated a similar project for FotoWeek in Washington, D.C. called *100 Portraits*, which was a broad survey of contemporary portraiture. Beyond the physical installation Adams, of course, put the project in its entirety on the Internet. LightBox recently spoke to Adams about his projects:

“[100 Portraits] was the beginning of my realization that you could bring the ideas of online publishing and art exhibition together to produce a public digital exhibition for everyone in the world that has access to the Internet.

The focus of the RISD exhibition curated by Jan Howard is an historical survey of American Landscape photography from 1865 till now. The parameters for ‘Looking at the Land’ were also very broad and the website component is an exploration of current photography in the documentary style with interviews that analyze and understand the evolving landscape photo tradition.

The constraints were fairly simple — I wanted this to reflect contemporary styles and current practice, and photographers exploring new directions. In the interest of serendipitous discovery, and hoping I would see something new, I put out a public call online seeking images ‘depicting the American Landscape since 2000.’

While curating the 100 Portraits project, which I coproduced with Larissa Leclair of the Indie Photobook Library, she impressed upon me the idea that this web site that I’ve been publishing every day was becoming a kind of archive and collection unto itself. In a way, the Web has become this giant collection of contemporary photography—portfolio websites, photo blogs, Tumblrs. That’s really interesting.

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What I've witnessed in the last few years is this real anxiety about the abundance of images in the world, on the Internet. That's one way to see things. I prefer to view the situation as one with infinitely more opportunities to discover new, interesting work. Of course, the hazard of what I did here is that you have to look through more than 5,000 pictures to make sense of it all.

I'm interested in learning why people photograph landscape so I asked each of the 88 photographers the same questions: 'What compels you to photograph the land? What does that mean?'

One of the things that I'm trying to do is to foreground the perspective of the image-maker. This may be another way to add meaning to that huge abundance of pictures.

I also asked each photographer: 'Why did you photograph this place?'

With landscape photography it's easy to tell a pro-environmentalism narrative that shows the destruction of the land or how human alterations have forever destroyed that land. That's all true, of course. But I don't have an agenda with this project; I'm more interested in understanding why contemporary image-makers make landscape photographs to learn how that tradition is evolving in the 21st century.

If there is a dominant theme in the show it probably is the absurd juxtaposition of nature and culture, recognition that this is the way things are now, that we co-exist with nature. Rather than preach at the spectator, many of these images describe that disconnect with irony and humor.

One of the things that I think might be indicative of this generation is that you have all these photographers that grew up in suburban sprawl, so that whole concept of home and place is different. Maybe we're not even lamenting development and the loss of wilderness anymore because we've come of age without it? I see a lot of these photographers coming to terms with those ideas and the place where nature and culture are colliding. That's why some of these pictures seem humorous or ironic. They are less an indictment and more of an acknowledgment.

It was important for me to show the American landscape and real places. America looks very different than it did 100 years ago. It's also important to remember that these images are not objective facts — they're subjective interpretations, personal perspectives about how the world looks today.

This is very much a research project that I'm making public. The ideas that I'm trying to understand and the things that we are interested in have existed before this exhibition and they will exist after. I've attempted to tap into the new public sphere that exists in the global online photo community, to learn collectively what these things mean and to hopefully contribute to the history of things, so one day people can look back and learn from it. That's the bigger picture goal."

Andy Adams is the founder of [FlakPhoto.com](#) and curator of Looking at the Land — 21st Century American Views, a collaboration with the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design. The exhibition is on view until Jan. 13 and you can visit the online version [here](#).