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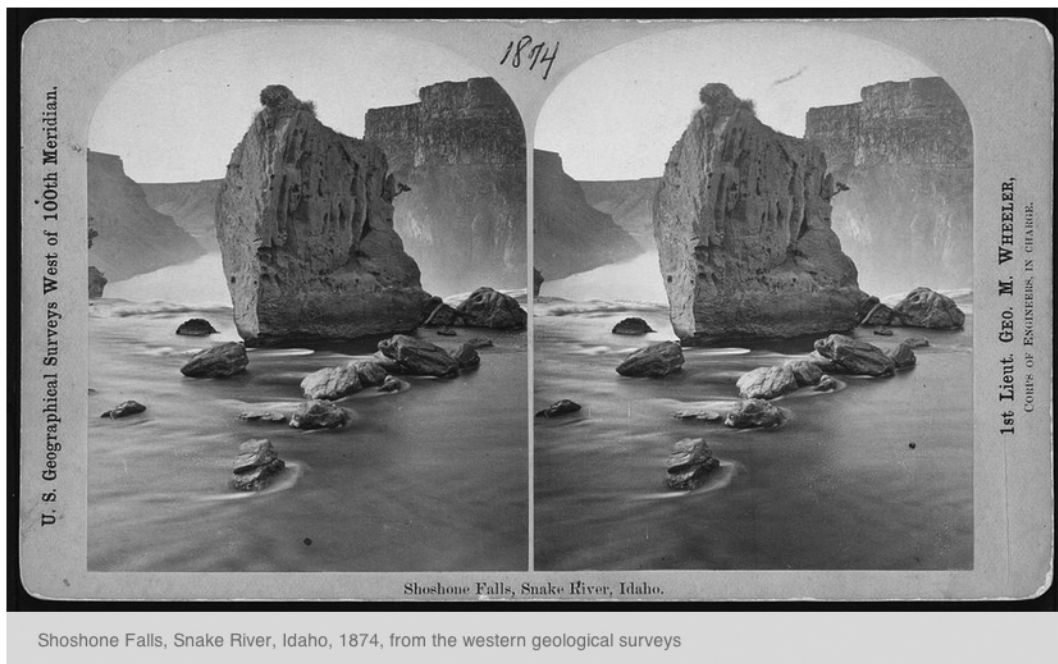
daily picture show

What's The Landscape Of Modern Landscape Photography?

by CLAIRE O'NEILL

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It used to be that landscape photography was about capturing the sublime, immortalizing the pristine — or at least about surveying uncharted territory. Think Timothy O'Sullivan's work out West. Arguably, if there was a person in the photo (unless strategically placed like a Caspar David Friedrich painting), it wasn't *really* a landscape.



Timothy O'Sullivan/Courtesy of Library of Congress

These days, though, it's not easy to find a landscape that has been truly untouched by humans. And photography, naturally, has evolved to reflect that.

In other words: We have become so closely entangled with the land that we almost can't remove ourselves from the frame, at least not honestly. It would be *possible* to keep that ugly telephone pole just out of the frame; but instead, what you often see in contemporary photography is that telephone pole front and center.

the picture show

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Grand Canyon National Park, Ariz., circa
1941

Ansel Adams/U.S. National Archives

Andy Adams of online magazine *Flak Photo* was recently tasked by the the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design to examine modern landscape photography. His Web exhibit *Looking At The Land* explores people's relationship with the landscape, *without* attempting to remove them from the frame. And in the spirit of his mission, you can explore the photos — and read about what inspired the photographers — right from the comfort of your couch.

"Internet culture and digital media play key roles in my photo work so it was a natural decision to present this show publicly online," he writes. (Though, for those in Washington, *Looking At The Land* also has a temporary physical installation for *FotoWeek*.)

I wondered if there were identifiable trends emerging in landscape photography today, so I called photo curator and historian Alison Nordstrom to chat about it.

She's a good person to ask, because a few years ago, she helped mount a rerun of the 1975 exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape* at the George Eastman House in Rochester. In the '70s, it was considered by some to be a ground-breaking display. It signaled a departure from Ansel Adams, and introduced a post-modern view of the environment that we still see today: A clinical view of suburban sprawl, cracked pavement and dilapidated buildings.

"We make landscapes now that consider the built landscape as *integrated* into the natural landscape," explains Nordstrom.

"The whole point of landscape," she says, was traditionally to show "that dichotomy between man and nature." But that has changed: "We don't even know what nature is anymore," she says.

In the Web exhibit, Andy Adams encourages you to ask questions: "Why do people photograph places? What compels artists to make images of the land? Are their intentions similar or different than previous generations?"

So where do you fit into the landscape? Join the discussion; share the project; leave your comments!