
Edited by curator Ann M. Wolfe and including contributions by W.J.T. Mitchell, Lucy Lippard, and Geoff Manaugh, Altered Landscape proudly highlights the rich contemporary landscape photography collection at the Nevada Museum of Art. This gorgeous book explores the impact of humans on the landscape, from the subtle to the blatant. From black and white to color, these photographs document all manner of alteration—additions to, removal of, markings on, and transformations of all kind to the earth as a result of mankind’s interference. The more than 150 images represent such artists as Michael Light, Yang Yongliang, Amir Zaki, Amy Stein, Toshio Shibata, among many others. The photographs focus on the mining industry, atmospheric testing, suburban communities, metropolitan areas, water engineering/dams, and other effects of humans on formerly pristine landscapes.

W.J.T. Mitchell reflects on his personal history and his memories of the desert landscape growing up in Carson City, Nevada. He describes historical instances of land use in art, asserting that photographers are not just simply documenting but are making a statement with their photographs; the marks on the desert are “inscriptions that defy erasure.”

Lucy Lippard’s essay shines the spotlight on female landscape photographers, arguing that while women have historically contributed more to eco art, they have been denied the attention that their male counterparts have received. She describes the photographs as recording memory and the movement of history as well as the constantly changing environment.

Geoff Manaugh’s beautifully eloquent essay questions whether an unaltered landscape even exists and points out the redundancy of the term “altered landscape.” He focuses on the artists’ perspectives and ideologies that inform their imagery. In addition, Manaugh posits that perhaps landscape photographers may “create new lenses” to see the earth from a viewpoint that acknowledges its irrevocably transformed surface rather than from the position of the virgin earth, untouched.

Altered Landscape is so much more than a stunning “coffee table” book. The photographs represent a broad survey of contemporary landscape photography while the brief essays are poetry—speaking to the many issues displayed in the work in beautiful, precise language, enhancing the glorious color plates. This book would be an asset to museum libraries as well as academic libraries with photography and art history programs.

Andrea V. Cancellare, Collection Development Librarian, Sul Ross State University, acancellare@sulross.edu