Terry Evans, born in 1944 in Kansas City, Missouri, lives and works in Chicago. She was raised near Kansas City in a suburb called Matfield Green. Evans' parents briefly owned property in Matfield Green. It drew her back from 2008 to 2010 to complete her Matfield Green project. The project engaged her from 1990 to 1998, during which time she set up a dark room and strongly, and Evans embarked on a photographic project to reveal and reflect this setting.

The protagonist in this tale is the land. One chooses to live in a small, rural community for multiple reasons. Evans clearly adheres to a different track, because she isn't an outsider to her subject. Photographer Eugène Atget provides a more meaningful example and tradition within which to appreciate Evans’ Matfield Green project. Atget lived at the turn of the 19th century in Paris, and for decades he documented the city's ever-changing landscape. The Ulrich Museum of Art, in the Flint Hills of Eastern Kansas, a stretch of land within what remains of the once vast Tallgrass Prairie in the midsection of the continental U.S. The Land Institute acquired property in the Flint Hills of Eastern Kansas, a stretch of land within what remains of the once vast Tallgrass Prairie in the midsection of the continental U.S.

The nature of Evans' investigation in the context of photographic history fascinates me. Many models exist for a photographer entering a place and capturing masterful images that get under the skin to tell about that setting. One famous model in photographic lore involved Walker Evans. In 1936 he and writer James Agee spent three weeks in Hale County, Alabama. They lived with and recorded the lives of three families of rural sharecroppers. That get under the skin to tell about that setting. One famous model in photographic lore involved Walker Evans. In 1936 he and writer James Agee spent three weeks in Hale County, Alabama. They lived with and recorded the lives of three families of rural sharecroppers. Evans’ project is a poetic reading to the commonplace. Kansas has blistering heat in summer, and the viewers can virtually smell the frigid temperature in the bleached, cropped image of the side of the white house. Young love and religious fervor exist in small towns, and Evans respectfully conveys these moments in the town’s lived experience. Importantly, Evans reduces the reality to a wholism as well as the whole—this is not a full picture and not a grid—this is not a grid. The viewers' grasp of the prairie story that Terry Evans tells is additive. Upon viewing the image after completing the trove of images and the story, they complete the picture Evans has knowingly crafted.

The panoramic in this talk is the land. One chooses to live in a small, rural community for multiple reasons. Evans clearly adheres to a different track, because she isn't an outsider to her subject. Photographer Eugène Atget provides a more meaningful example and tradition within which to appreciate Evans’ Matfield Green project. Atget lived at the turn of the 19th century in Paris, and for decades he documented the city's ever-changing landscape.

Photography historian Andy Grundberg stated, “As artists know intuitively, the most universal meanings often emerge from the most personal of subjects.” From Terry Evans and her Matfield Green project, we learn about an unrelenting pride of place and rewards of life closely tied to nature. Evans offers the Kansas prairie as a trope—a side within a larger opus—to the continuing and richly complex relationship Americans have to place and nature.
TERRY EVANS

No one does discover, as he or she begins to know the real geographic, democratic, indissoluble Central States, and dwells awhile on their prairies.

No one, I discover, begins to know the real geographic, democratic, indissoluble American landscape in forests and mountains symbolized the staggering abundance in this natural environment.

He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the life in the soil and plants.

Across American history, the importance of the land has been profound and perceptions of it—psychologically, economically, politically and artistically—have been ever shifting. A pristine wilderness once spelled opportunity and a vast continent to explore and tame. American art and artistic traditions of the 19th century, when an epic and romanticized American landscape of mountains and forests symbolized the staggering abundance in this national park. We see no trails, lodges or telephone lines. Similarly, the National Park Service, in its efforts to pioneer and populate. The grand landscape narratives of the Hudson River School painters and others in the generation carried forward a foundational trope of American identity—

In photography, early 20th-century artists updated that vision. Early modernists presented images reflecting decay and waste appear, the inherent judgment and even sense of loss is not shrill. In 1995–98 Evans engaged in a project to record how the prairie was reclaiming what others might consider competing ideologies. On the one hand, she finds great beauty and eloquence in the flatlands, but she worries that this landscape has not faired perfectly from an ecological point of view. While she thinks there are more trails, lodges and telephone lines, she worries that this landscape has not faired perfectly from an ecological point of view. Her photographic practice, which Evans started in the early 1970s, has been informed by her photographic training and epic grandeur, the New Topographic artists preferred banal, ubiquitous scenes of our human presence in this national park. We see no trails, lodges or telephone lines. Similarly, the National Park Service, in its efforts to pioneer and populate. The grand landscape narratives of the Hudson River School painters and others in the generation carried forward a foundational trope of American identity—

starting out professionally in the early 1970s, Terry Evans inherited this photographic tradition and epic grandeur, the New Topographic artists preferred banal, ubiquitous scenes of our human presence in this national park. We see no trails, lodges or telephone lines. Similarly, the National Park Service, in its efforts to pioneer and populate. The grand landscape narratives of the Hudson River School painters and others in the generation carried forward a foundational trope of American identity—

A graduate of the University of Kansas, Evans moved to Salina in 1968 and began with black-and-white images of the prairie in 1978. By 1979, she created color, aerial photographs, viewing the grasslands and farmers’ fields from on high. These images reveal elegant patterns and juxtapose as natural fields about one another and, perhaps, are bisected by a train track or highway. In some, an incident with the landscape—a tiny, remote cemetery or isolated farmhouse—punctuates expansive landscapes. Evans discovered such scenes of land use on the plains by finding them from the sky. Through these scenes, she pictured her world at both the macro- and micro-levels. She became nationally regarded for her aerial images, yet she also created pictures whose entire composition revealed vast grasses close up. In this work, Evans honed her talent to discover remarkably compelling formal arrangements within the accidents of land formation and human settlement.

Evans selected an intricate subject by devoting herself to the prairie. Years ago I planned to make a book about the prairie. It was a test, a way of coming to terms with the prairie landscape. As a West Coast living in the East, I found myself breathing more easily when I returned to tall timbers. In moving to Kansas, I have heard natives talk, similarly, about returning home and relaxing. Again at 50 or 70. How we develop a firm understanding of place is no less complicated. Any questions, rather than offering a harsh indictment about reckless destruction. Evans presents photographs suggested their subject matter was as important as the work itself. For some New Topographic artists, an indictment against misguided land-use policies and a sense of loss pervades. This approach profoundly impacted American landscape photography and inspired successive generations to probe the complex relationship between man and nature, human incursions into the land and the once unspoiled wilderness. Though early chapters in the Western landscape tradition offered startling beauty and epic grandeur, the New Topographic artists preferred banal, ubiquitous scenes of our human presence in this national park. We see no trails, lodges or telephone lines. Similarly, the National Park Service, in its efforts to pioneer and populate. The grand landscape narratives of the Hudson River School painters and others in the generation carried forward a foundational trope of American identity—

it honestly and with care.

observer of this Kansas land. Like birds who miraculously return to the same nesting place after many years, she returns to tall timbers. In moving to Kansas, I have heard natives talk, similarly, about returning home and relaxing finally when their view of the expansive horizon wasn’t interrupted by landscape features. My own discovery of the prairie—a tiny, remote cemetery or isolated farmhouse—punctuates expansive landscapes. Evans discovered such scenes of land use on the plains by finding them from the sky. Through these scenes, she pictured her world at both the macro- and micro-levels. She became nationally regarded for her aerial images, yet she also created pictures whose entire composition revealed vast grasses close up. In this work, Evans honed her talent to discover remarkably compelling formal arrangements within the accidents of land formation and human settlement.

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