

wanderlust

actions,  
traces,  
journeys

1967–2017

In his *Altered Landscapes* series, photographer John Pfahl's constructed lightning bolts strike through the center of his images, connecting foreground to background in compositions of diverse American forests, salt flats, and swamps. We follow this unnatural line as it zigzags over difficult terrain, the only clear sign of human presence in otherwise seemingly undeveloped and unwelcoming land. Pfahl literally marks the territory where he has journeyed, with tape and string outlining his chosen symbol. We cannot ignore that he has been there, unlike those traveling photographers of the nineteenth century, who deliberately created landscapes to appear untouched for their metropolitan audiences clamoring to know and own all that the American continent seemed to offer them.

Pfahl's practice also differs from the work of contemporaries, such as the famous 1969 *Double Negative* by Michael Heizer. In this earthwork, the land became Heizer's passive and pliable canvas as a team of bulldozers digs two fifty-foot trenches into a Nevada canyon. Pfahl's intervention, on the other hand, is temporary and, at times, almost completely hidden among the bramble and brush that surround. Although his designs may not endure onsite, within his photographs, the lightning bolts will always stand in our way and interfere with our sense of depth in a medium that already makes such spatial evaluations difficult. Pfahl reinforces our inability to enter the landscape by turning his lens to the ground to capture compositions in which the sky is either completely cut off or just a sliver in between tree branches and hills. This is not a landscape made available through Pfahl's markings, but a wall of dirt and vegetation that denies our wanderlust any satisfaction.

Natalie Fleming

- John Pfahl.  
 90 top: *White Lightning, Dry Salt Flat near Delles, Utah, 1977.*  
 bottom: *Volcano Lightning, Kilauea Volcano, Hawaii, 1978.*  
 91 *Mountain Lightning, Roan Mountain, North Carolina, 1977.*

Photographs. All from the *Altered Landscapes Lightning Series*. Images courtesy of the artist and Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo.

Splat.

A large moth hits the windshield, its wings stuck and splayed at exactly my eye level and I'm finally forced to pull my wiper switch in towards my chest to release jets of blue washer fluid onto the glass. The wipers swish back and forth slowly, but only manage to make matters worse. Instead of a series of small bodies dotting my vision, I now have an ugly vanilla-colored smudge, bug innards blocking my view of the hazy, humid night and an empty road. And I still have three more hours of driving...

I can't complain too much, because road trips are an American rite of passage. US Highway 1, Pacific Coast Highway, Route 66—the paved veins connecting more than 3.5 million square miles have taken on mythological status in the American imagination. We document our adventures in various ways: photographs, videos, mix tapes, little souvenir spoons you can pick up at rest stops. But the bugs on your windshield are certainly documents too, reminders of where you have been, free keepsakes that you can't easily even wash away.

Greg Stimac chooses to preserve these odd mementos in a series of large photographs highlighting and aestheticizing the bug splatter he accumulates on his own travels. In works such as *Salt Lake City to Cheyenne* or *Untitled, Santa Fe to Billings*, we see no tourist destinations. Instead, his works are almost identical, constellations of tiny bodies broken on glass, distinct like the stars above that rotate as the earth moves. Stimac's work then, puts the human experience in perspective: a thousand lives lost for a road trip at night, a car rushing through the air, as others have done and will do, under an infinite sky.

Natalie Fleming

- Greg Stimac.  
 260 top: *Chicago to Atlanta (Driving Photograph)*, 2009.  
 bottom: *Chicago to Memphis to Little Rock (Driving Photograph)*, 2009.  
 261 top: *Great Falls to Spokane (Driving Photograph)*, 2009.  
 bottom: *Los Angeles to San Francisco to Reno (Driving Photograph)*, 2009.  
 262–263 *Santa Fe to Billings (Driving Photograph)*, 2009.

Archival inkjet prints. Images courtesy of the artist.