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## Review of *Saskatchewan: The Luminous Landscape* By Courtney Milne

Terry Graff  
*Mendel Art Gallery*

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*Saskatchewan: The Luminous Landscape*. By Courtney Milne. Calgary, AB: Red Deer Press, 2005. 144 pp. Photographs. 29.95.

*Saskatchewan: The Luminous Landscape* is a compelling photographic anthology of the diverse and complex topography of the Canadian prairie province of Saskatchewan. Published to commemorate Saskatchewan's centenary in 2006, this handsome coffee-table book comprises 225 sumptuous full-color photographs by the internationally acclaimed master photographer Courtney Milne. Six chapters of stunningly beautiful imagery, combined with personal commentary, chronicle Milne's intimate relationship to his home place, which extends back to his childhood growing up on the bank of the South Saskatchewan River.

For Milne, landscape photography has served as a sustaining inspiration in a remarkable photographic and writing career that has taken him to seven continents over the past quarter-century. Surprisingly, although five of his books have focused on prairie landscapes, this twelfth publication is the first dedicated solely to Saskatchewan. From Waskesiu Lake to Old Man on His Back Prairie, and Heritage Conservation Area to the Athabasca Sand Dunes, to his own rural acreage outside the town of Grandora, Milne captures the unlimited shifting patterns of light, color, and reflection with both clarity and passion to portray the irrepressible beauty of the province.

Milne is an artist who follows his own instincts and intuitions. For him, the medium of landscape photography serves as a spiritual quest, a channel through which he feels he can better know, and appreciate, our sacred link to the land. He uses the camera's viewfinder not to place a boundary between himself and nature, but as a tool to enable dialogue, an exchange between him and the landscape that allows the particular character of the landscape to speak for itself.

Technical acumen is an important part of Milne's photographic art, to be sure, but what's more important is the artist's ability to see. Whether a sweeping prairie vista or a close-up

subject found on the forest floor, Milne's eye is finely tuned to pattern and design in nature. He knows how to find the key elements in a landscape that will create a photographic image of depth and drama. He writes, "We are never far from the beauty of the land if we accustom our eyes to seeing it in the world just outside our door every day of our lives."

Since the invention of photography, the natural landscape has served as perhaps the most seductive, as well as most popular, of photographic subjects. As such, it is possible that photography, through its conversion of natural environments into simulations and commodities, has contributed as much to humankind's alienation and detachment from nature as it has connected us to its elemental cycles. Cultural production is inextricably entwined with the institutionalization and dismemberment of nature.

In the midst of a global ecological crisis, Milne's art takes on added poignancy and may be read as a form of environmental activism. The artist states, "We must preserve our wild and sacred places, where timeless rhythms of nature go untouched by humans."

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