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## Review of *The Inhabited Prairie* Photographs by Terry Evans

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*The Inhabited Prairie.* Photographs by Terry Evans. Essay by Donald Worster. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998. Photographs, notes. xvii + 73 pp. \$29.95.

The land provides constant fascination to artists: from seashore to mountain, desert, and prairie the land inspires. It is also raw material for the photographer's arranging eye. In this third book of photographs, Terry Evans offers fifty black-and-white images of central Kansas taken from the air and at ground level, images showing us that the land can be anything from the bosom of nature to the throne of majesty, sacred space, fearsome predator, or garbage dump.

The images reveal an inhabited prairie. There are farms, highways, industrial and military installations. They tease us with details, structures, patterns, lines, and curves. We are invited to travel with Evans by foot and by air over a used and subdued landscape. We celebrate with her the subtle, powerful, and apparently limitless view of *Ponds and sky, western Saline County, May 8, 1991*, and morn the destruction in *Smoky Hill Weapons Range targets: simulated planes, April 11, 1993*. But ultimately something is lacking.

Only rarely is the magic, the power of photography to transform the land or any object visible to us. The painterly *Terraced plowing and grass waterway, Saline County, April 18, 1991* is an impasto expression of shape and value worthy of any expressionist action painter. The mystical *Tower for Saline County: Kansas Water District #2, April 18, 1991* shows a prairie icon, the water tower, in imperial white against a darkening landscape, while the shadows of the tower and the hill it is situated on stretch across the image, dominating the land. Here is an extraordinary expression of the importance of water on the prairie. Another dozen images of this caliber would carry the book.

Some of the images exhibit a pleasantly quirky sensibility. *Cattle feedlot, Saline County, April 24, 1993* is a remarkable view of the paths cattle make in the confines of a feedlot. On a different scale, it could be the streets of an upscale housing development. *Rose Hill Cemetery, Saline County, February 19, 1991* shows a square cemetery late in the day, ringed by trees pierced by a single road which forms an interior ring on a convoluted field. The first impression it conveys is of a square sheet cake, nicely decorated, placed on a wrinkled tablecloth. A wonderful image. Oh, that there were more!

Ultimately, most of the book's photographs do not satisfy as these few do. Many are dark, low contrast, awkwardly composed, or derivative. Few aspire to the soaring magnificence of a William A. Garnett or Marilyn Bridges aerial photo. The ground level images do nothing to support the aerial ones. Evans's notes describe layers of human occupation, though they are not depicted in the images—which must be as frustrating for her as it is for us.

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