

Interstate Landscapes

I'm not sure when I became so enamored with the landscape that exists alongside of the interstate highways in Missouri and Illinois, but I do know that I feel intimately familiar with it and connected to it. I appreciate and respond to the wide-open spaces that are divided by a razor-sharp line, the part of the country that is exactly one-half earth and one-half sky. Unlike the dramatic landscape out west, a moving car may very well be the best vantage point from which to appreciate this restrained terrain—the speed magnifies the monotony, makes mountains out of molehills.

In 1993 I began photographing construction sites along the highway, focusing on the actual land that was being altered and buried beneath the asphalt and concrete. At the same time, I started taking road-trips to Chicago, Illinois from St. Louis, Missouri. I photographed the landscape between these two cities with a point-and-shoot camera from behind the wheel of my car, never bothering to slow down or stop. During this time, I took thousands of 35-millimeter slides that record this stretch of highway—so many, that if all of the images were projected in rapid sequence, they could probably be considered a short film, instead of a series of still photographs.

What initially inspired me to make *Interstate Landscapes* was my fascination with the patches and strips of native grasses that seemed to suddenly appear along the interstate highways. I had watched these grasses grow and change with the seasons for years before I pulled over to the side of the road to step into those blurry scenes. Throughout this time, I also watched the areas beyond the patches of grass become more and more developed. In some places, the landscape that I knew as a child had been radically changed. This work describes the subtle topography of Illinois and Missouri, the nondescript places that I have looked at and been surrounded by my entire life. These are my attempts to capture the stillness—to record the quotidian, sometimes prosaic, other times lyrical and mesmerizing, mid-western landscape.

Dean Kessmann