

Joe Deal: New Work, September 4, 2009-January 3, 2010

The Great Plains of North America exists for me both as a physical landscape and as an idea, or internal landscape. — Joe Deal

This exhibition marks the premiere of a new body of work by Joe Deal (RISD Provost 1999–2005, RISD Photography Professor 2005–2009). Photographed between 2005 and 2007, *West and West: Reimagining the Great Plains* was inspired by the landscape Deal saw as a child while driving west from his home in Topeka, Kansas, to visit relatives in Great Bend, in the middle of the state. Deal presents the anticipated sameness of the Western landscape in a consistent format: each scene is bifurcated by the horizon line. His use of the square-format negative allows for an image that can imply infinity, especially as seen in aggregate in the gallery. On close examination, however, the landscape, or Deal's depiction of it, presents an endlessly fascinating and changing expanse as grasslands and sky unfold in equal share.

This new work might seem to represent a shift from Deal's earlier photographs, which often describe explicitly the impact of development on the American landscape, particularly in the West. Yet they should be seen as a continuation. The grasslands of the Great Plains were once the largest uninterrupted ecosystem in North America, and that is still how they are mythologized in our view of the American West. The transformation of the Great Plains began with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which opened the new territories to settlement and replaced vast, open spaces with an immense grid of squares. To Deal, the square frames of these photographs echo the squares of that grid, metaphorically representing those changes. Deal pictures the Great Plains mostly as he remembers this place from his childhood and as we might see it in our minds—without the roads, fences, and power lines. "While not denying reality," Deal notes, "I wanted to try to look beneath the grid and to re-image something that now can exist only as an idea." Deal compares framing the landscape through the camera to a kind of reenactment, "a way of knowing what it must have been like to lay a straight line down over a vast plain."

The photographs exhibited here are among a group of fifty images seen in an accompanying book that captures the full drama of the Great Plains, spanning the area between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, and from the Canadian provinces to the Mexican border.

All works are carbon-pigmented inkjet prints in the collection of the artist, courtesy Robert Mann Gallery, unless otherwise noted.

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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Joe Deal, American, 1947-2010, (RISD Provost 1999-2005; RISD Faculty 2005-2009)

Missouri Plateau, 2006

Carbon pigment print

Gift of Joseph A. Chazan, MD 2011.71.1



Joe Deal, American, 1947-2010, (RISD Provost 1999-2005; RISD Faculty 2005-2009)

High Plains, 2006

Carbon pigment print

Gift of Joseph A. Chazan, MD 2011.71.2



Joe Deal, American, 1947-2010, (RISD Provost 1999-2005; RISD Faculty 2005-2009)

Chalk Formations, High Plains, 2006

Carbon pigment print

Gift of Joseph A. Chazan, MD 2011.71.3



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Joe Deal, American, 1947-2010, (RISD Provost 1999-2005; RISD Faculty 2005-2009)

Flint Hills, 2006

Carbon pigment print

Gift of Joseph A. Chazan, MD 2011.71.4



Joe Deal, American, 1947-2010, (RISD Provost 1999-2005; RISD Faculty 2005-2009)

High Plains, 2006

Ink

TL71.2009.14

Joe Deal, American, 1947-2010, (RISD Provost 1999-2005; RISD Faculty 2005-2009)

Burn. Flint Hills, 2006

Ink

TL71.2009.15

Joe Deal, American, 1947-2010, (RISD Provost 1999-2005; RISD Faculty 2005-2009)

Snow. High Plains, 2007

Ink

TL71.2009.16

Joe Deal, American, 1947-2010, (RISD Provost 1999-2005; RISD Faculty 2005-2009)

Twin buttes. Colorado Piedmont, 2006

Ink

TL71.2009.17