FOTOGRAFIE DI
JESSICA LANGE
still image

EXHIBITION TEXTS

Landscape

Spanning more than three decades, from the early 1990s to the present, this selection of fourteen photogravures brings together landscapes photographed by Jessica Lange in Kentucky, California, Louisiana, Minnesota and Scotland. The photogravure process is a specialized printing technique that combines photography and engraving. In this process, an image is transferred onto an engraved copper plate, allowing for the production of photographic prints with a high level of detail and rich tonal gradation. Through the remarkable depth of photogravure, these works acquire an almost timeless quality, where place becomes less a geographical reality than the projection of an inner landscape. Their muted tonalities, velvety textures and extraordinary material presence suspend the viewer in a state of contemplation, beyond narrative and beyond time.

These images recall Alfred Stieglitz's celebrated Equivalents, in which clouds became visual translations of psychological and emotional states rather than representations of nature itself. A similar correspondence can be found in Georgia O'Keeffe's synesthetic relationship between colour, form and sensation. Lange extends this lineage by allowing landscape to become the expression of a mental condition rather than the description of a physical site.

Minimal in composition yet profoundly evocative, these photographs resemble intimate visual meditations or miniature paintings. They tell no story beyond the silent intensity of an emotional state. Wandering through remote territories where human presence has almost entirely vanished, Lange approaches what might be described as a place of origin—a primordial landscape where time seems suspended and memory settles into matter itself. In these quiet, almost metaphysical images, the external world dissolves into an interior experience, inviting the viewer to inhabit a space where perception, memory and emotion become inseparable

Gestures

This series explores the subtle vocabulary of gesture—the almost imperceptible movements through which emotion, memory and narrative quietly emerge. Jessica Lange isolates hands, postures, fleeting expressions that function as visual clues, suggesting stories that remain deliberately unfinished. These photographs do not describe an event; instead, they capture the threshold where meaning begins to take shape, leaving the viewer to complete the narrative.

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Such an approach is deeply rooted in Lange's original profession as an actress. Every gesture, however discreet, carries significance. A lowered gaze, a hand resting on a shoulder, the inclination of a body or the tension of a face becomes a language in itself, capable of communicating states of mind without words. Like the repertoire of physical expression developed by actors, these gestures convey hesitation, intimacy, vulnerability or expectation, allowing the invisible to become perceptible.

Far from anecdotal, these images form an inventory of human expression in its most essential form. Each gesture remains open to multiple interpretations, resisting any definitive reading. It is precisely this ambiguity that gives the series its emotional power. Between theatre and photography, Jessica Lange transforms the body into a site of suggestion, where every movement, however ordinary, becomes the beginning of a story and the reflection of an inner life.

Dérive

In March of 2020 when New York City went into lockdown due to Covid, like many others who could, I left the city. I didn't return until October, seven months later. Everything had changed. It was a different city. It felt abandoned. Blocks of storefronts were boarded up. All "non-essential" businesses had closed by executive order. The usual crowds of people moving down the streets had disappeared. I read somewhere that a city's meaning is to make loneliness bearable. There was no masquerading the loneliness now. I mentioned to my son that I had no idea what I was going to do during the long winter months ahead. He asked me if I was familiar with the French philosopher Guy Debord and his theory of the Dérive. He suggested that I make it my practice over the following months. And that was how it started. Almost every day I would leave my apartment and start walking, letting myself "be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters found there." I started carrying my camera with me so I would have a visual diary of my wanderings. I walked places in the city I'd never seen before. And I was moving slowly for a change. I was taking the time to really look, often stopping to speak with people living out there on the street. For the following six months I practiced Dérive. These photographs are a record of that time.
- Jessica Lange

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Highway 61

All memory resolves itself in gaze...
- Richard Hugo

It is a storied stretch of road that cuts through the middle of the country – originating at the Canadian border in the boreal forests on the shores of Lake Superior and ending at Broad and Tulane in the sweet, somnolent air of New Orleans.
I have a long history with Highway 61. I was born in a small town along that road in Northern Minnesota, as were my parents and sisters. Most of my family – grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins – were born, raised, married, and died in towns on that same stretch. Before the interstate was built, Highway 61 was the main route north and south. During my childhood, we drove it to visit relatives, go to the country fair, to Memorial Day and Fourth of July parades, to the Harvest Festival, shopping in Duluth, and, on very special occasions, to the big cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. If you lived here, you'd be home by now, read a billboard just outside the Twin Cities. Reading that as a child, I always thought, "But if I lived here, I would have a different family, a different life. I wouldn't even be myself. I would be someone else." And I'd be lost in the next chapter of my endless daydreams.
In 1965 I bought my first album, Highway 61 Revisited, by a fellow Minnesotan. Dylan's Highway was different from mine, but he put it out there. He made it seem important. And I felt like I was in on the secret.
At 18 when I left home, I boarded a Greyhound Bus at the Tulip Shop in Cloquet, and headed south out of town on Highway 61, on my way to Europe and beyond, the start of a new life. I have been driving this road again recently, back and forth from my home in New Orleans to my cabin in northern Minnesota; sometimes just passing through places along the way and sometimes staying awhile. It is a conduit between my past and my present.
Highway 61 is almost 1,600 miles long and passes through eight states. When it rolls along the Mississippi it is called the Great River Road. When it heads south out of Memphis through the ancient floodplains of the Delta it becomes known as the Blues Highway – home to some of the great blue singers of the last century, many of whom recorded songs about 61.

Lord, it wrecked my heart
to think about Highway 61
I felt so blue, Lord, while I was out on that lonely highway...
- Roosevelt Sykes

I felt that loneliness as a child and I feel it even more acutely now. Long stretches of 61 are empty, forlorn, as if in mourning for what has gone missing – the hometowns, the neighborhoods, family farms, factories, and mills. Even the strip malls have failed. Stores all boarded up, weeds growing through

the asphalt of countless vacant parking lots. Some of the people left, creating a ghostly beauty in their leave-taking. Some remain, perhaps yearning for that more vibrant past but reluctant to abandon the place called home. If, as Roland Barthes says, “every photograph is a certificate of presence”, then these photographs are a chronicle of what I witnessed along and near Highway 61. It has been a long drive, wrapped in my story.

- Jessica Lange

Freak show

The sixteen photogravures created by Jessica Lange on the set of Freak Show, the fourth season of American Horror Story (2014), extend her photographic practice into a realm where fiction becomes a plastic medium. Printed as photogravures and meticulously hand-painted, these unique works evoke the tradition of illuminated manuscripts: colour does not merely embellish the image but pushes beyond its boundaries, transforming its emotional and visual resonance. Photogravure itself contributes to this transformation, expanding the possibilities of photography into a richly tactile and painterly language. Inspired by the world of nineteenth-century freak shows—travelling spectacles that presented individuals perceived as extraordinary or physically different—this series explores monstrosity not as an aberration but as a reflection of our own fears and prejudices. It belongs to a photographic lineage shaped by Diane Arbus and later by Mary Ellen Mark, a close friend and profound influence on Jessica Lange, both of whom devoted their work to those living at the margins of American society. Behind the grotesque and the uncanny emerges the hidden face of the American Dream, where exclusion, vulnerability and the unsettling beauty of otherness expose the darker foundations of the American imagination.

World

Jessica Lange’s photographs speak in silence. They do not require excess, explanation, or ornament. Their language is reduced to essentials: point, line, plane, light. Each image seems held in suspension, composed with the quiet precision of a fleeting equation.

From Russia to Finland, from Minnesota to Italy and New York, place becomes less a geographical marker than a state of perception. Lange does not seek spectacle; she follows the discreet movement of life, its fragile appearances, its ordinary revelations. Her photographs often seem touched by a northern light—

soft, enveloping, almost painterly—recalling the stillness of interiors, the pale luminosity of Vermeer, or the silent gravity of Scandinavian painting.
A young girl looking upward, a chapel washed in muted light, Blacks and whites converse with restraint; figures emerge gently, never forced. The world is not seized, but allowed to appear.
In this work, poetry is not hunted. It arrives quietly, in the interval between waiting and seeing. Jessica Lange records life where it reveals itself most simply: here, there, everywhere, in the calm intensity of the everyday.

Presence of the past

Jessica Lange's photographs of the American landscape reveal a country seen from its margins, where abandoned buildings, deserted streets and fading places become silent witnesses to a world slowly disappearing. These are not simply images of decline but meditations on absence, memory and the fragile traces of lives once lived. The grain of the photograph, its muted tonalities and velvety textures, seem themselves to embody exhaustion, as though the materiality of the image were echoing the slow erosion of the places it records.
Far removed from the triumphant mythology of the American Dream, Lange constructs the portrait of a nation hollowed out from within, haunted by the spectres of its own history. Behind the dazzling façade of consumer culture and spectacle lies a quieter America, marked by economic hardship, social isolation and the lingering aftermath of forgotten promises. Her photographs reveal what remains after the lights have dimmed: spaces suspended between presence and disappearance, where silence becomes the principal narrator.
This vision belongs to a long documentary tradition that reaches back to the photographers of the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression, whose images exposed the social and economic fractures of the American South and Midwest. Yet Lange transforms this documentary heritage into something more lyrical and introspective. Rather than documenting facts, she photographs emotional landscapes, where every abandoned house, weathered wall or empty road becomes the metaphor of a country confronting its own vulnerability and the quiet melancholy of an identity slowly fading from within.

The 5 nameless days, Chiapas

Carnival is celebrated throughout the state of Chiapas, Mexico, and is perhaps its most important annual festival. Lasting thirteen days, it marks the five "lost" or nameless days of the ancient Mayan calendar—a liminal period during which the natural order of the world is believed to be suspended.

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According to tradition, these are days of uncertainty and transformation, when the boundary between the human and the spirit worlds dissolves, allowing unseen forces to move freely among the living. The usual rules of society are temporarily overturned, and everyday identities give way to ritual, symbolism, and masquerade.
Before the austerity of Lent begins, communities celebrate with extraordinary exuberance. Men and women don elaborate costumes and carved masks, transforming themselves into monkeys, wolves, jaguars, and other mythical or symbolic creatures. Many men dress as women, embracing the spirit of inversion that lies at the heart of the festival, where hierarchy, gender, and convention are playfully challenged.
The photographs in this series were made in the Tzotzil Maya communities of Tenejapa and San Juan Chamula, where Carnival remains one of the most powerful expressions of indigenous spirituality and cultural identity. Blending pre-Hispanic cosmology with Catholic traditions introduced during the colonial era, the festival reveals a living heritage in which ritual, myth, and communal celebration continue to shape everyday life.

Mexico

Mexico has long held a special place in Jessica Lange's imagination. For decades, she has returned to the country again and again, drawn by its atmosphere, its people, and the mysterious interplay between ritual and everyday life. It is a place of constant rediscovery.
Her photographs unfold like a cinematic sequence. Never a distant observer, Lange inhabits the world she photographs, moving quietly through its streets with empathy and restraint. She preserves the solitude that permeates her work, attentive to fleeting encounters, fractured reflections, anonymous faces, and moments suspended between presence and disappearance.
Many of these images emerge at twilight, when certainty dissolves and the ordinary becomes theatrical. Lovers gather before Santo Domingo, dancers whirl through the Zócalo, circuses awaken, and the city vibrates with music, movement, and expectation.
As night falls, bodies merge, separate, and drift through the frame like an improvised choreography. Lange does not simply photograph what is visible; she reveals what lies just beyond it. With velvety blacks, luminous whites, and an acute sensitivity to atmosphere, Mexico becomes an intimate diary of impressions—a meditation on memory, wandering, and the enduring fascination that has continually drawn her back to this extraordinary country.

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