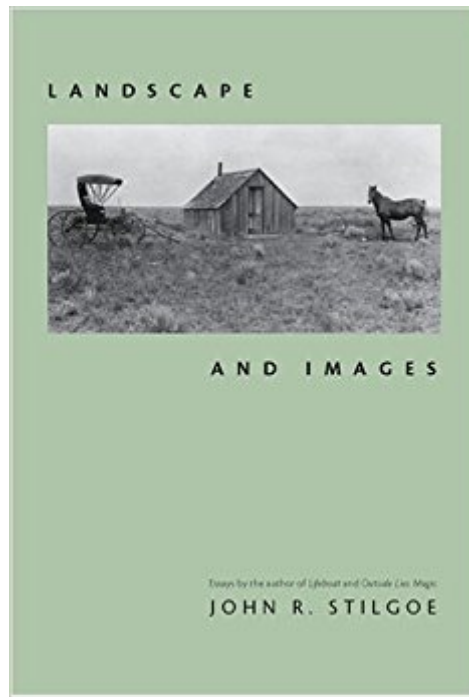


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Landscape And Images



Synopsis

John Stilgoe is just looking around. This is more difficult than it sounds, particularly in our mediated age, when advances in both theory and technology too often seek to replace the visual evidence before our own eyes rather than complement it. We are surrounded by landscapes charged with our past, and yet from our earliest schooldays we are instructed not to stare out the window. Someone who stops to look isn't only a rarity; he or she is suspect. *Landscape and Images* records a lifetime spent observing America's constructed landscapes. Stilgoe's essays follow the eclectic trains of thought that have resulted from his observation, from the postcard preference for sunsets over sunrises to the concept of "teen geography" to the unwillingness of Americans to walk up and down stairs. In Stilgoe's hands, the subject of Jack O'Lanterns becomes an occasion to explore centuries-old concepts of boundaries and trespassing, and to examine why this originally pagan symbol has persisted into our own age. Even something as mundane as putting the cat out before going to bed is traced back to fears of unwatched animals and an untended frontier fireplace. Stilgoe ponders the forgotten connections between politics and painted landscapes and asks why a country whose vast majority lives less than a hundred miles from a coast nonetheless looks to the rural Midwest for the classic image of itself. At times breathtaking in their erudition, the essays collected here are as meticulously researched as they are elegantly written. Stilgoe's observations speak to specialists—whether they be artists, historians, or environmental designers—as well as to the common reader. Our landscapes constitute a fascinating history of accident and intent. The proof, says Stilgoe, is all around us.

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