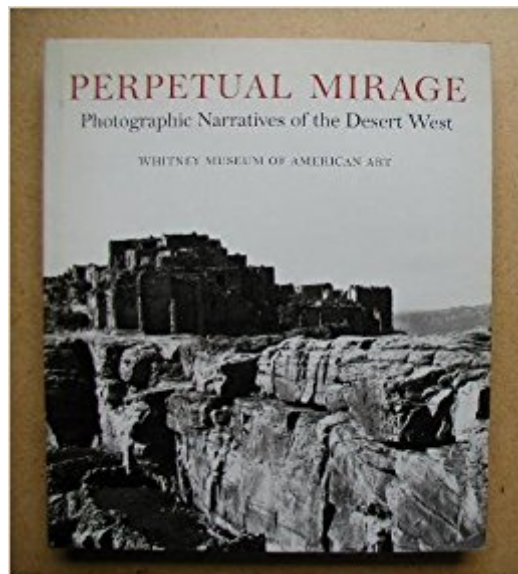




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Perpetual Mirage: Photographic Narratives Of The Desert West



Synopsis

Many impressions of the American West as a place of romance and scenic beauty, filled with towering mountains, majestic canyons and unusual wildlife, have been shaped by photographs, many of which were first seen in photographic books. This legacy includes the magnificent survey albums of the mid-19th century, turn-of-the-century ethnographic reports (notably the North American Indian Project of Edward S. Curtis), illustrated travel guides such as those by Edward Weston, books by Ansel Adams and Eliot Porter that marshalled the environmental movement, and photo-textual documents made by Dorothea Lange. This volume, the catalogue for an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, from June 1996, is an illustrated history of the desert West and also a study of one of the most distinctive American publishing traditions - the photographic book. By including material from 20 books spanning 150 years, as well as maps, letters and vintage photographs, the work traces the shifting perceptions of the American West. Essays by 22 historians, novelists, journalists and environmentalists examine the mythic and actual history of the American desert from a wide range of perspectives. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

This catalog to an exhibition of photographs of the desert areas of the American West held at the Whitney Museum this past summer should satisfy our continuing fascination with the region while at the same time analyzing the evolution of its unique meanings. Castleberry, the Whitney's librarian and curator of special collections, has written a well-researched and perceptive introduction that

examines photographic books as unique historical tools that "make excellent barometers for gauging the interests-or fantasies-of the historical consumer." The lead essay, by Martha Sandweiss (American studies, Amherst Coll.), provides an overview of the evolution of the photographic book as a narrative medium from the latter part of the 19th century to the present. The 20 short essays that follow, written by a group of notable historians, curators, and novelists, delve more deeply into specific titles and projects in the genre. Highlights include Robert Coles's interpretation of Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor's *An American Exodus* (1939) as a "milestone" in social documentary, and Robert Sobieszek's insightful comments on the bulldozed landscapes of Lewis Baltz's *Nevada* (1978). Castleberry has chosen an excellent approach and format for exploring the mythic nature of the arid West. An impeccably produced work that would make a fine addition to most collections. Kathy J. Anderson, Indiana Univ., Bloomington Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

So good a book I ordered it twice already, unwittingly. If you can get a copy of *CROSSING THE FRONTIER* by Phillips, et. al, the two go together like shutter and shutter cable. Big books, both are, and the writing doesn't get in the way of the photographs.

This is the catalog of a 1996 exhibition at the Whitney: "Photographic Narratives of the Desert West." The catalog has well-reproduced photos from the mid-19th century up to the turn of the 20th, mostly from the "Great Surveys" by Clarence King, Lt. Wheeler and John Wesley Powell, with works by such pioneer landscape photographers as William Henry Jackson, John Hillers, and Timothy O'Sullivan. There are a few samples of the works of early 20th century photographers like Edward Weston, Dorothea Lange and Ansel Adams, and (to my eye) less-distinguished work by more recent photographers like Robert Adams and Mark Klett. Fortunately, the core of the book is about the pioneers. The accompanying essays are worth reading (though of variable quality), and there's a useful section of biographical sketches of the featured photographers. Definitely worth a look if you're interested in this era of photography. It's a handsome and well-produced book, certainly well-worth the \$6-10 asking price for a used copy. As is usual with OOP books, has (at the moment) three separate pages listing used copies of this book. This page has the most copies available as of this writing. Happy viewing, Peter D. Tillman

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