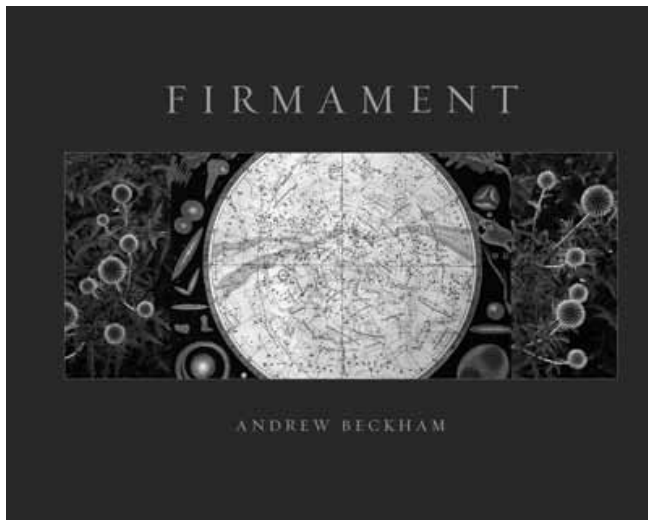


## **Firmament: A Meditation on Place in Three Parts**

by Andrew Beckham  
with an introduction by Blake L. Milteer



The transient nature of our place in the world has long been an abiding artistic concern of Andrew Beckham. Whether he stands firmly on the ground or star-gazes into the heavens, Beckham, through the frame of his camera, tries to answer questions that have accompanied human life over the millennia: How do we know where and when we fit in the scheme of Life? How do we find a meaningful place for ourselves within Nature? Is one place more or less important than another for contemplating the eternal questions of "Who am I?" and "What am I doing here?"

In constructing "visual poems" that include single images as well as visual montages of sequenced photographs, Beckham tries to reconcile these questions by focusing on the synchronicity between the mundane and the infinite. By presenting these images as a new kind of "visual storytelling," Beckham juxtaposes the varying scales of photographic inquiry, from the private spaces near our homes to the expanding and unknowable universe.

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Firmament is a meditation on place unlike any other. In Portfolio I, Beckham discovers a unique stretch of land, one square-mile in Bear Creek Canyon near his home, where a curious sense of visual order is achieved amongst the chaos of impenetrable bramble and thick woods. For the artist, this is ground incarnate. In Portfolio II, Beckham explores a landscape so wide and vast that space can hardly be contained within the frame of his camera. Here, in the 20,000 square miles known as the Sand Hills, Beckham discovers a place where land and sky meet and often merge within a virtual sea of rolling prairie grassland. In Portfolio III, Beckham turns to the "incalculable distance" between the heavens and Earth, between grounded experience and infinite space. Here, Beckham's artistry is revealed in a visual assemblage of his own photographic work merged with the cosmologies of centuries-old star charts.

In viewing Andrew Beckham's work, we see depth and beauty, serenity and enlightenment, and we gain a certain reassurance that there is something greater than ourselves when we contemplate the universe with a sense of reverence and even awe. We also come to realize that we have a sacred duty to understand and respect our individual place within the world, so that we may take better care of that which we have come to know, no matter how small or large the scale.

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"Andrew Beckham continues a vital reconnaissance, searching for places where the truth seems secure and, like life itself, is resonant with an inexplicable poignancy. He also confronts a kind of paradoxical truth: that great beauty can dwell in the darkness and in the apparent chaos of emerging forms. Recalling the words of Robert Adams, in the redemptive nature of light, Beckham finds grace and the rekindling of an affection for living."

—Terry Toedtemeier, Curator of Photography, Portland Art Museum, 1985–2008

"Andrew Beckham is a lot of things, but I consider him a 'visual poet,' using language both written and visual to construct nuanced work that is compelling, fragile, and poignant. He is the Joseph Cornell of the photo world, combining photographic memory with objects imbued with ideas and meaning."

—Aline Smithson, *Lenscratch*



"Andrew Beckham delivers us to the realm of the marvelous."

—Barry Lopez

