

Main Street: Towns, Villages, and Hamlets of the Great Plains

by Danny Singer
Essay by Grant Arnold



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The Great Plains is one of Earth's greatest ecosystems. Comprised of short- and tall-grass prairie, it extends from the Canadian Arctic south to Texas and from the Rocky Mountains in the dry west to the north-south corridor of I-35, I-29, and Canadian Highway 6 in the humid east. Although some of North America's great cities are located on the Great Plains—Canada's Calgary, Regina, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, for example, and Denver and Dallas in the United States—the region is best known for its isolated small towns, villages, and hamlets whose livelihood, historically, is based on converting the native prairie into ranch land and agriculture.

Working in the tradition of documentary photography and using contemporary photographic techniques, Danny Singer here records, as no other Canadian or American photographer previously has, the main streets of those tiny settlements that define the Great Plains. In grand panoramas, we sense what it is like to live in these prairie towns that offer their residents the essential services for living—a bank, food store, co-op, gas station, post office, school, church, watering hole, public park, you name it. But when we look above and down the streets of a Danny Singer photograph, we see what lies beyond: the infinite space and big sky that not only establish the character of the Great Plains landscape, but also overwhelm all but the hardiest of citizens.

Danny Singer's *Main Street* offers an original and lasting view of the heart and soul of the North American Great Plains: its small towns, villages, and hamlets at the turn of the twenty-first century. Here we rediscover that, far from the maddening noise and traffic, hectic life and polluted air of the city, rural life in the hinterland still matters. A concluding essay by the renowned art critic and curator, Grant Arnold, establishes Danny Singer's place among the continent's great visual-artists of all time.

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"Danny Singer's epic photographic project focuses on the main streets that form the commercial and cultural center of the small towns, villages, and hamlets of the North American Great Plains. The specific resonance of Singer's photographs lies in the way he situates the subject matter as a site marked by a continual tension between place and space, map and itinerary. To those who know and love the Great Plains, Singer's photographs offer a brilliant visual parallel to one of the most influential representations of the history and culture of the Great Plains: Wallace Stegner's autobiography, *Wolf Willow* (1955). Like Stegner, Singer engages us with a sense of place that continues to reinforce historical moments and a mythological sensibility in our perception of land and life on the Great Plains."

—Grant Arnold, Audain Curator of British Columbia Art at the Vancouver Art Gallery

