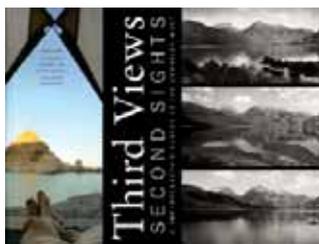




Rebecca making coq au vin near the site of Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, the Great Salt Lake, UT © Mark Klett, 2000.



Third Time's a Charm

Nell Farrell takes a trip back in time with Mark Klett and his band of merry image-makers

TIME IS PERHAPS THE MOST essential feature of photography. The decisive moment, the freezing of a scene in order that we may study it; strange juxtapositions or facial expressions not seen with eyes alone. Mark Klett's rephotographic projects, while certainly consisting of photographs that record specific moments, refer primarily to "the time in between," where history reverberates among multiple temporal, physical, and conceptual vantages of a single site.

Third Views, Second Sights: A Rephotographic Survey of the American West is not just a set of photographs, nor is it just a photography book. It is a long-term project, a lifestyle, even. Collaborative in nature and stretching over years, it began with the idea of rephotographing majestic views of the American West made by Timothy O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins, William Henry Jackson and others from the late 1800s. A group of photographers including Mark Klett visited these sites in the late 1970s, making exact rephotographs. For *Third Views*, he put together a new team that has revisited and fully documented these same landscapes.

The fascination afforded by discovering the fate of the locations is supported by Klett's long experience with the science

involved in his work: the requisite understanding of the chemistry and mechanics behind the original photographs, knowledge of the natural world, and the methodology required to rephotograph in a meaningful manner. Locating the site of the original photograph and determining the exact angle at which to place the camera is an involved process. Sometimes the vantage point no longer exists. Time of day and time of year, crucial to match the qualities of the original photograph, are also taken into account. Writing about the Second View series, William Fox declared the project "an astonishing feat of mathematical accuracy, cultural geography, history and art."

These are the concerns of the maker. As a viewer, one cannot stop turning the pages, inspecting every detail of the three photographs: each little farmhouse made a ghost in present and past, each road whose curves shift over immobile mountains.

In addition to the three views of each site—19th century photograph, second view, and the most recent—are the field notes and backward glance-images that give the impression of a footloose adventure. The accompanying DVD allows one to electronically cruise from one campground to the next, along dusty Western roads, past low-slung buildings, lost dogs and sunsets. One becomes familiar with Michael, Toshi, Byron and Kyle, some of them Klett's former students, each contributing his own extraordinarily creative and often humorous artistic personality. The resulting ride is a road trip that many of us have either experienced in real time or dreamed of in cinematic idyll. This diary of six guys roaming the West in their pick-ups is a loosely yet elegantly woven adventure, from which emerges a sophisticated vision of the modern West. These artists are explorers of our contemporary world. Gathering artifacts along the way and applying their sensibilities and cultural knowledge, they seek and reveal the layers of interaction that exist in the land. The shooting ranges, ghost towns and mines built and removed are evidenced not only in the wide-angle view, but in the detritus left and the stories told.

The first photograph in *Third Views* shows the Great Salt Lake merging into a pastel sunset, the air saturated with pink and blue, clouds floating in the mirror of water. At center, a figure stands at a camp table, making dinner. Plastic coolers, old tires and folding chairs litter the beach. At first it may look silly, but Klett and his cohorts stick with it until you feel comfortable with their refusal to meet expectations of iconically beautiful views; and then you step into the image, because like it or not, those plastic coolers are familiar and create a cultural bridge between the great and small. Is it not a deeper awe when one can feel it as one's own?



Third Views, Second Sights: A Rephotographic Survey of the American West. 256 pp., 138 duotone and 14 color illustrations, 11½ x 8¾. Cat# MX039H \$60.00 Published by the Museum of New Mexico Press.