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We Dream in Terrain
Dan Frawley
March 6th – 28th, 2015

Dan Frawley has been slowly working towards his exhibition, *We Dream in Terrain* for several years. His method was simple: search for locations with geographic similarities (a clear horizon and a hill crest), lock a 4x5 camera to a tripod, select a starting point, and, walking forward, take a photograph every five meters. As the frames progress they reveal nothing new about the landscape that lies in front of the lens. However, because the camera is placed without concern for the uneven ground on which it sits, each frame references the land's unique topography through the skewing of the image's horizon.

For this installation, Frawley has wrapped eleven 42" x 54" black and white Giclee prints around the North, East, and South walls of the Project Space. The immersive prints create a panoramic view reminiscent of the images beamed back to earth by NASA's rover, *Curiosity*, which was sent to Mars to document the topographical terrain of the planet. Frawley's final images are worlds apart in space and technology from those of NASA, but make interesting companions for comparison. Frawley's instincts found a location where he could explore his method in order to understand the land where he placed his camera. This seemingly random method of capture is actually a very definite act. Frawley's camera, like *Curiosity*, is placed by its owner, reducing it to a strict recording instrument. The cameras on both devices remain static until they are instructed to move increasingly forward into the future by the same force that put them there. The initial landing spot of both devices was purposeful, leading to a set of images that investigate a landscape through progressive frames.

Frawley's images are shot in the stark midday sun, which adds to the sense of an arid landscape. The midday sunlight presses the small plants and stones in the foreground onto their own shadows, creating a footprint that references the location of the camera in relation to the sun. This lack of long shadows and shallow depth of field effectively flattens the landscape against the wall. The dryness of location and light, combined with the monochrome nature of black and white photography, creates a frame that compresses perspective—as if reducing the immensity of a landscape between two glass slides ready for microscopic inspection.

In his article, “Reading Photographs Iconographically or Ichnographically” (2005), Lars Kiel Bertelsen compares the image of astronaut Neil Armstrong's boot print captured after his moon landing, his ‘one small step’ remark, and a passage from H.G. Well's novel, *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). He argues that there is a startling similarity between Armstrong's quote, “That's one small leap for man, one giant leap for mankind,” and Well's passage about a similar moon landing ending with, “an extremely big leap.” These two examples use ‘leap’ as a metaphor, which when aligned with the imprint of the photographed boot print, creates an image ready for mass consumption. This connection, in the mind of the viewer, satisfies their need for photographic pleasure by applying a suggested response through their experience with popular culture. The historic meaning of the image is now one of mass culture, rather than just an image of Armstrong's boot print.

We Dream in Terrain, engulfs the viewer in a sea of images that reference *Curiosity's* images. Yet, unlike the rover's images—which were beamed back and presented over a long period of time as the project progressed—Frawley places his images side-by-side, allowing the viewer to mentally walk through his work sideways. The shift in horizon angle gives the feeling that you are gently rumbling forward in the landscape. His images create a window for the viewer, bringing them closer to a world where they physically are not; creating the impression of a nameless alien landscape. That *Curiosity's* images can be recalled while looking at Frawley's work naturally creates an otherworldly feeling of distance, creating a flat abstract map of experience that can be re-charted by the viewer's movements through the gallery.

- Lucas Johnson