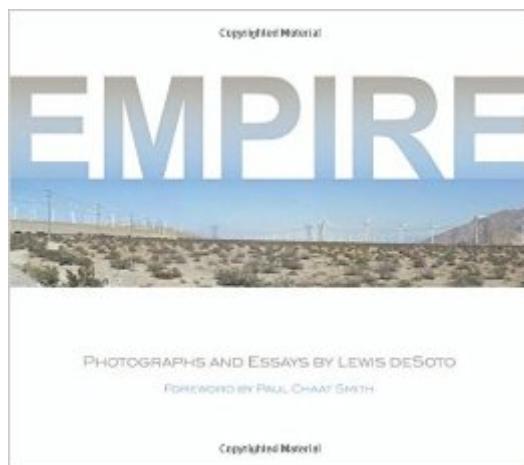


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Empire: Photographs And Essays By Lewis DeSoto



Synopsis

In this book of photographs and essays, noted visual artist Lewis deSoto explores his birthplace and ancestral Cahuilla homeland, the œmarvelous and abject•landscape of Southern California's Inland Empire. Sixty intimate photos capture the paradoxes of the region's deserts, lushly manicured lawns, freeways, and inland sea. Punctuating these single-frame images are panoramas of landscapes that capture infinitudes of detail. DeSoto's captions unpack these panoramic shots, revealing their geologic, social, and cultural significance. But beyond captions, Empire marks deSoto's emergence as a nonfiction writer. Eight essays meditate on a youth spent in regions including San Bernardino, mountainous Highway 18, Rancho Cucamonga, Riverside, and Palm Springs. DeSoto's elegant prose marks these places as locales of rich history, industrialization, sharp social strata, as well as sites of deep personal transformation. Taken as a whole, this is the work of an established artist and the dawn of a new literary voice: one that both assembles, piece by piece, a picture of a specific place, and deconstructs the complexities of home.

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Customer Reviews

œEmpire by Lewis deSoto, an established visual artist of Cahuilla heritage, is a collection of eight essays and sixty photographs that masterfully weaves his personal and ancestral history with the social, cultural, geological, political, and architectural story of the Inland Empire of Southern California. The photographs are both single frame and extended panoramas that document a range of subjects from vernacular architecture to large scale topographical overviews. All the images are

packed with detail and subtle, but rich, evocative content. The panoramas, some of which are printed in dramatic foldouts, give a tactile tangibility to the space and flow of the Inland Empire landscape. The essays and extended captions are meaningful and expressive reads with some heartbreakingly poetic and eloquent passages. The elegance of his prose comes not only from its sophistication and refinement but equally from his honesty and directness. His carefully disciplined aesthetic distance in both the writing and photographs appears initially dispassionate which makes the currents of emotion, pain and loss more powerful and effective. While "Empire" can function as a document of a region and the story of a specific individual it is also a chronicle of the unfolding creation of self and the search for home that has a profound wide ranging appeal.

I know Lewis DeSoto as a brilliant artist of great originality, but I didn't know he was such a good writer. With Empire he has integrated his great eye as a photographer with an insightful and personal text. Here is my favorite excerpt: "Now I cruise into the valleys below San Gorgonio Pass and see the hint of Los Angeles in the western glow of muggy ocean air. I remember how chaos reinvents everything.....Chaos parches the orange groves. Fast-food architecture clusters like cancer at the junctions of freeways. Walmart parking lots are dotted with homeless people living in their cars. Stucco houses are patched with iron grates on doors and windows to keep out poachers. The palm trees, Washingtonia filifera, here in the beginning, still watch it all."

This book is a double pleasure. The photographs by artist Lewis deSoto are stunning. His essays are deeply personal and moving. The landscapes of the Inland Empire were once the site of orchards and vineyards. They are now marred by decades of environmental degradation which is clearly visible in a lot of the awe inspiring photographs. For the young artist, who is member of the local Cuhuilla tribe, there was ill health and isolation, but there was also the exuberance of youthful freedom and escape that a drivers license and a cool car provided. The camera became a companion on long car rides then, and art a way of leaving his youth behind. As he revisits the changed landscapes of his youth it becomes clear that the Empire stayed with him and deeply informed his work. Both the photographs and the essays made me want to see and read a lot more!

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