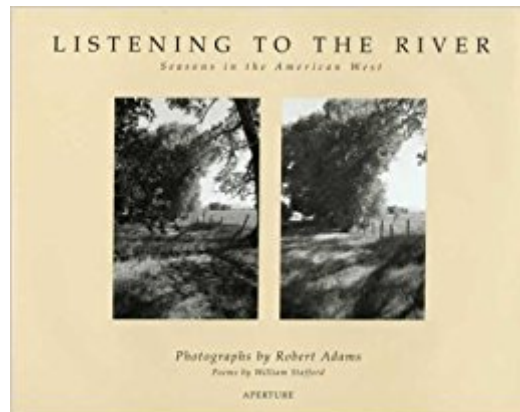




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Listening To The River: Seasons In The American West



Synopsis

Listening to the River is a celebration of anonymous places where we can still find nature's beauty. Robert Adams first visited these particular locations as a boy, when the West seemed unchanging. Now in his fifties, he returns to them with the affection of a longtime acquaintance. The book records hushed walks when irrelevancies are forgotten, when sunlight makes the fields, hills, and roads new. Adams has chosen twelve poems by William Stafford to accompany the pictures. Both photographer and poet observe a practice of quiet in the out-of-doors, and both discover there a promise. This is an optimistic book, though not a sentimental one: a number of the photographs record views of the suburban West. "Any tree in the path of development appears to have an uncertain future," Adams observes. Listening to the River affirms, however, that trees and other elements of nature are ultimately protected. "Part of what their beauty means," says the photographer, "is that they are safe." In 1989 Adams spoke at the Philadelphia Museum of Art about his enjoyment of the landscape, citing as an example his experiences at rural crossroads on the plains: "Sometimes there doesn't seem to be anything there at all-- just two roads, four fields, and sky. Small things, however, can become important-- a lark or a mailbox or sunflowers. And if I wait I may see the architecture-- the roads and the fields and the sky. Were you and I to drive the prairie together, and the day turned out to be a good one, we might not say much. We might get out of the truck at a crossroads, stretch, walk a little ways, and then walk back. Maybe the lark would sing. Maybe we would stand for a while, all views to the horizon, all roads interesting. We might find there a balance of form and openness, even of community and freedom. It would be the world as we had hoped, and we would recognize it together."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Listening to the River is one of the most enveloping photographic books I have encountered...It is aural as well as visual: we hear silence at first, the resonance of the plains, birdsong perhaps, then the rustle of leaves, the slap and rattle of water, wind through grass, branches being pushed back as we make our way through the landscape. It is altogether a sensual book, helped in this respect and others, by William Stafford's fine poems, which contribute to a mix of image and text that moves along smoothly."--Peter Brown, Houston Center for Photography

"Robert Adams is perhaps America's most thoughtful and eloquent living photographer-writer. [Listening to the River] contains Adams's recent black-and-white photographs of fields and farms and the sides of roads, pictures that seem utterly unprepossessing at first glance but that, like the previously published poems by William Stafford accompanying them, reward close attention."--The New York Times Book Review

"There is nothing arcane or recondite about his photographs. There is more affection in them than irony, more wonder than pronouncement, and in that sense they are not academic. An ordinary man or woman can look into many of his images and feel at home. His landscapes are familiar, unpretentious. We know these things that he is showing us, though we likely have never seen some of them so vividly....Robert Adams speaks to us as human beings, to our dreams for grace and dignity, and I would say holiness in the world."--Barry Lopez, author of Arctic Dreams, on Robert Adams's pictures

Robert Adams has lived most of his life in Colorado. His photographs of the developed West have been widely published and exhibited. William Stafford (1914-1993) was raised in Kansas but spent much of his life in Oregon, where he worked as a college teacher. His many books of poetry-- among them *Stories That Could Be True*, *A Glass Face in the Rain*, and *Smoke's Way*-- earned him the admiration and affection of a wide, general audience, and of his colleagues. Many readers agree with the poet Louis Simpson that if the United States is "to have a sense of itself, it will be through work like Stafford's."

Not what I expected. Wanted more Wm Stafford poetry. Pictures were poor quality.

Sublime, poetic, thought provoking... The list goes on.

This book is one of the best Robert Adams books--the photographs are landscapes, but verticals, arranged in short sequences--taken a few seconds or a few feet apart--and the poems, by William Stafford, perfectly balance the book. I bought this book when it was first published in 1994, and I treasure it--I've bought several copies over the years to give as gifts--once when I gave a copy to a friend, he looked at it for several minutes without speaking--then looked up in amazement--"there are colors in these pictures", he said--but the printing is a neutral duotone... The book is out of print, but should be in the collection of any serious student of photographs of the American west.

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