

Danny Singer: Small Beneath the Sky

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Danny Singer *Kincaid Summer Sky* 2010, Courtesy the artist and Gallery Jones

In their stillness and extreme detail, [Danny Singer](#)'s photographs of the main streets of small towns across the Canadian and American prairies have an uncanny way of looking at once real and unreal, like meticulously crafted stage sets where the action has yet to begin. This sense of artifice results from Singer's practice of taking pictures of the whole street from end to end, moving his camera every two or three feet as he shoots, then digitally constructing the image into a unified whole so that the buildings are shown in a flat, horizontal plane. The photographs invite us to stand back and see the street in its entirety, something we could never do from one fixed vantage point in real life. Our eyes are able to meander down the street, taking in details of architecture, streetscape and signage, noticing the kind of businesses and public buildings that are part of small-town routine and commerce. The occasional signs of life—a bike rider, street sweeper, parked cars and trucks, a man standing in the

window of a restaurant and a black Labrador—are frozen in their captured state, actors engaged in the rituals of daily life.

The format of the images, long and narrow like film strips, enables us to enter them and walk along the streets, past the hotels, libraries, credit unions, community halls, flower shops, restaurants, insurance and tax preparation offices and service stations that exist, in some combination or other, in every village. And while there is a wistfulness to these photographs in their evidence of boarded-up buildings, peeling paint and “For Sale” signs, they are as much about the resiliency and survival of these agricultural communities as they are about a disappearing way of life. Time on the one hand seems to stand still, but on the other it marches along incessantly and inevitably.

In his most recent exhibition at Gallery Jones, Singer also showed new photographs in which the ratio between height and width is less extreme, where the sky looms large and main streets are tiny, the buildings toy-like. In these images, the sky dwarfs the built environment, sometimes foreboding, as in the black-and-white photograph *Foremost*, sometimes a total whiteout, as in the winter scenes of *Bladworth* and *Ceylon*, sometimes so wispy and buoyant, as in *Kincaid Summer Sky*, that you can almost feel warm breezes tickling your face. In these visual poems redolent with the smell of hay and resonant with the rumble of thunder, we see the power and awesomeness of nature, as well the self-sufficiency needed to live a prairie life. And although Singer digitally manufactures the skies from shots taken at different times and places, they nevertheless embody the vast, changeable prairie sky, which is characterized eloquently in Saskatchewan-born poet Lorna Crozier’s memoir *Small Beneath the Sky*: “Calm or restless, the sky follows your every step. It touches you with loneliness.”