

66 on 66: A Photographer's Journey

Terrence Moore

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The creation of the Interstate Highway System under the administration of President Dwight Eisenhower opened a faster, more convenient passage across America, but, with its four-lane “freeways,” it also marked the death of its rural and small town communities.

Master photographer Terrence Moore's documenting of Route 66, established in 1926 as one of the original roads connecting the East and West coasts, began in the 1970s. In these photographs, he recorded the “seismic change” that took place in the customs and culture of rural America as the old towns were bypassed and isolated, and a new culture that fed on speed and convenience grew. Large corporations like Walmart, set along the new highways, devoured the commerce of mom-and-pop stores along the old routes, and once thriving small communities became ghost towns.

Moore's photos are a memorial and a meditation on a particular time and place in American history as conveyed by the now iconic Route 66. Captured in paint and neon, signs along this “Mother Road” tell the story of American migration from the upper Midwest and Appalachia from the 1930s to the present day. When Moore's documentation project began, there was little interest in the subject and little respect paid to photography as an art form, and he was surprised to find that no one seemed to care, or even to notice, what was happening as the hungry road system drained the life from small towns and villages. Fascinated by Route 66, a lover of the desert, and a “connoisseur of extraordinary, killing heat,” Moore persisted in photographing the vestiges of “the way the West had been, with its curmudgeonly survivors and the ancient homesteaders of the 19th century.”

Moore's four-decades-in-the-making collection of photos of Route 66 is a beautiful and fitting tribute to the highway and to a vanished way of life.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January/February 2019)

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