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## REVIEWS

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**Ancient Walls: Indian Ruins of the Southwest.** By Chuck Place and Susan Lamb. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1992. 112 pages. \$34.95 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

*Ancient Walls*, composed of photographs by Chuck Place and text by Susan Lamb, captures in print an essential characteristic of the American Southwest, in respect to both the land and its ancient peoples. The authors' finely crafted images and passionate descriptions convey the fundamental paradox of life in the deserts and mountains of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado: Enormously powerful forces of fire, water, air, and earth are relentless and inescapable, yet the life that endures seems impossibly fragile. The tenuousness of life's grip on such a harsh landscape is deceptive, however. The smallest insect, the gnarled juniper, the elegant mule deer are all, in their own way, as durable as the land they inhabit. Likewise, life on this land seems austere, even cruel, but to the patient observer it is subtle, complex, and of infinite variety and beauty.

Perhaps the greatest puzzle for us in the modern world is that there were once people who lived in complete harmony with nature, people who withstood its extreme discomforts and dangers with the simplest of means, people who saw life as a partnership with all the beings of the Earth rather than as a contest that humankind must win. The Anasazi, Mogollon, Sinagua, and Hohokam were stubborn civilizations that had no illusions about what was necessary to survive. Life was hard and short. Even

small mistakes could be fatal. Survival depended on an intimate knowledge of every dimension of the physical and spiritual worlds; the two were, in fact, inseparable. *Ancient Walls* records that time in the perfect stillness of penetrating sunlight.

Chuck Place's photographs capture the contradictory character of the land and its ancient people—the delicate balance of strength and weakness that governs life. Through Place's lens, the masonry houses of Canyon de Chelly and Mesa Verde are nearly seamless extensions of the monoliths that shelter them. The houses convey a sense of a tenuous existence, literally on the edge of a precipice and subject to the vicissitudes of weather and predators. Yet they also seem as obstinate as the cliffs that tower over them and as permanent as the peaceful canyons below. Place reveals the underlying character of the architecture at a variety of scales, from that of the vast surrounding landscape down to details of meticulously cut sandstone blocks. His choice of early morning light raked across the finely sculpted volumes of Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde is a good example. The golden light enhances the graceful proportions and delicate textures of building volumes, but it also reveals the enormous mass of the walls and the cool, dark spaces they shelter.

Sunlight in the Southwest seems to be a life form in its own right. In Place's photographs, the sun dances on cactus spines, it imbues stone walls with such heat they glow, and it brings petroglyphs to life like giant marionettes. The dominant color of the book is red; the red of hot sandstone, petrified wood, and dry grass. An occasional glimpse of deep blue sky or the green of a verdant canyon refreshes the reader's eye. The book thus helps us imagine the delight of a desert-blasted traveler in discovering the cool, deep pool beneath Inscription Rock.

Page after page reveals astonishingly beautiful landscapes, details of fine masonry, and elegant artifacts. It is a land inhabited by small, tough animals and the spirits of people long gone; their shades dance on the cliff faces within constellations of shamanist symbols. For example, Place includes a straightforward photograph of the Great Gallery from Canyonlands National Park in Utah. The towering, abstracted anthropomorphs etched in the rock were used also by Godfrey Reggio at the beginning and end of his disturbing film, *Koyaanisqatsi*. Reggio's title is derived from a Hopi term for "life out of balance," a suggestion that is perhaps applicable to this book as well. For the tone of the book is somber. The disappearance of the people who once hunted, farmed, danced,

and sang on these mesas is a mystery; either the world that sustained them withdrew its beneficent hand, or they lost the will and imagination required to survive. In addition, the book questions our modern hubris. In particular, at the conclusion of the book, Susan Lamb reminds us that not only have we vandalized and looted the world of our ancestors, but we blithely continue to destroy the land and poison the sky for a quick profit.

The sensuality of the book's images, its warm colors and generous forms, are seductive; but below the surface lies a deep melancholy. The effect of the lush photography and evocative narrative is to spin these distant images into a personal reverie. The authors gently challenge us to question our place in the world and to wonder how future people will imagine us by musing upon what we have left behind. With all of our technological wizardry, will we receive as much respect from our descendants as we now have for people who lived on cliff ledges and did not even know of the wheel?

*Ancient Walls* thus has two lives. Pick it off the bookstore shelf, thumb through it, and you will be struck by the high quality of the photographs and the elegant format in which they are presented. It is, however, much more than merely another slick coffee table decoration. Although most people will buy this book for its color-saturated, calendar-style photography, if they take the time to read the sensitively crafted text, they will discover another book. The images will then be transformed; what seemed merely pretty will become ironic. Beauty and tragedy become fused, and the reader may catch a glimpse of the sublime in the ruins of ancient people.

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**Campaigning with King: Charles King, Chronicler of the Old Army.** By Don Russell, edited and with an introduction by Paul L. Hedren. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991. 187 pages. \$25.00 cloth.

Charles King (1844–1933), an 1866 graduate of West Point, carried on a lifelong love affair with the army. His career brushed with the end of the Civil War and stretched from the Indian wars through World War I, including service as a general officer in the Spanish-