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Discovering the Vernacular Landscape

John Brinckerhoff Jackson

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John B. Jackson, was a writer, publisher, instructor, and sketch artist in landscape design who was influential in broadening the perspective on the "vernacular" landscape. Jackson was the publisher and editor of 'Landscape' Magazine from 1951 to 1968.

At first, Jackson argued, quite literally, for a lofty - an airborne - view of the world, reveling in the below-from-above perspective of aerial photographs. But Jackson's work, which dominated the first five issues of the magazine, was grounded in what he would later call the vernacular: an interest in the commonplace or everyday landscape, and Jackson expressed an innate confidence in the ability of people of small means to make significant changes, by no means all bad, in their surroundings. In an opening essay The Need of Being Versed in Country Things Jackson states that "It is from the air that the true relationship between the natural and the human landscape is first clearly revealed. The peaks and canyons lose much of their impressiveness when seen from above. What catches our eye and arouses our interest is not the sandy washes and the naked rocks, but the evidences of man." His writings allowed him to raise questions and present controversial statements especially in reference to humans and their role in shaping the landscape. Jackson's works have been published in seven other books along with A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time which won the 1995 PEN prize for essays.

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