

Stephan Sagmiller

LAWNS

May 17th - June 22nd 2025

ARTIST STATEMENT

STANDARD
SPACE

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LAWNS: California
17 May - 22 June 2025

Hiking the arid Santa Monica Mountains, I stepped into a field of Giant Wild Rye so tall that it became its own landscape. As the sun dipped, it ignited into a symphony of emerald, ochre, and sienna—each blade glowing with the clarity of an image seen through a light box. In that moment I was transported to my childhood in the Pacific Northwest. I recalled the strong connection I had to the land and how effortless that felt. This began my fascination with the American lawn.

Lawns and wild grasses are well tended, but often overlooked. Grass is not merely a background for skies and mountains, but an expressive subject in its own right. I use a large format camera to capture the immense detail of each scene. After several years of photography, the collection grew, and my process evolved into a kind of specimen gathering, where the poetics of form and space became as important, if not more so, than objective description. I search for locations using satellite imagery and field guides. I hike widely and return often, for light, wind, or season. I'm looking for what's known as a "*holotype*" an iconic specimen from which new species are defined.

A strange abstraction is at work. A realism through abstraction, and vice versa. The clarity of the photographs gives a heightened sense and satisfies a desire to connect with the world. We see the world in Lawns. A world of idealism and perfection, of chemistry, of insects, of drought, and fire. Of Laws and morals, too. Natural history is human history. We are invited to complete the analysis, to compare, and experiment with what's seen. The "specimen" becomes monument.

~ The grasses in this collection are made exclusively on expeditions to California and fit into several categories: Wild grasses, artificial turf, genetically modified experiments, imported and domestic industrial lawns, and other hybrids. Each work in the exhibition is titled with the common and scientific names of each species and the location in which it was found.

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