



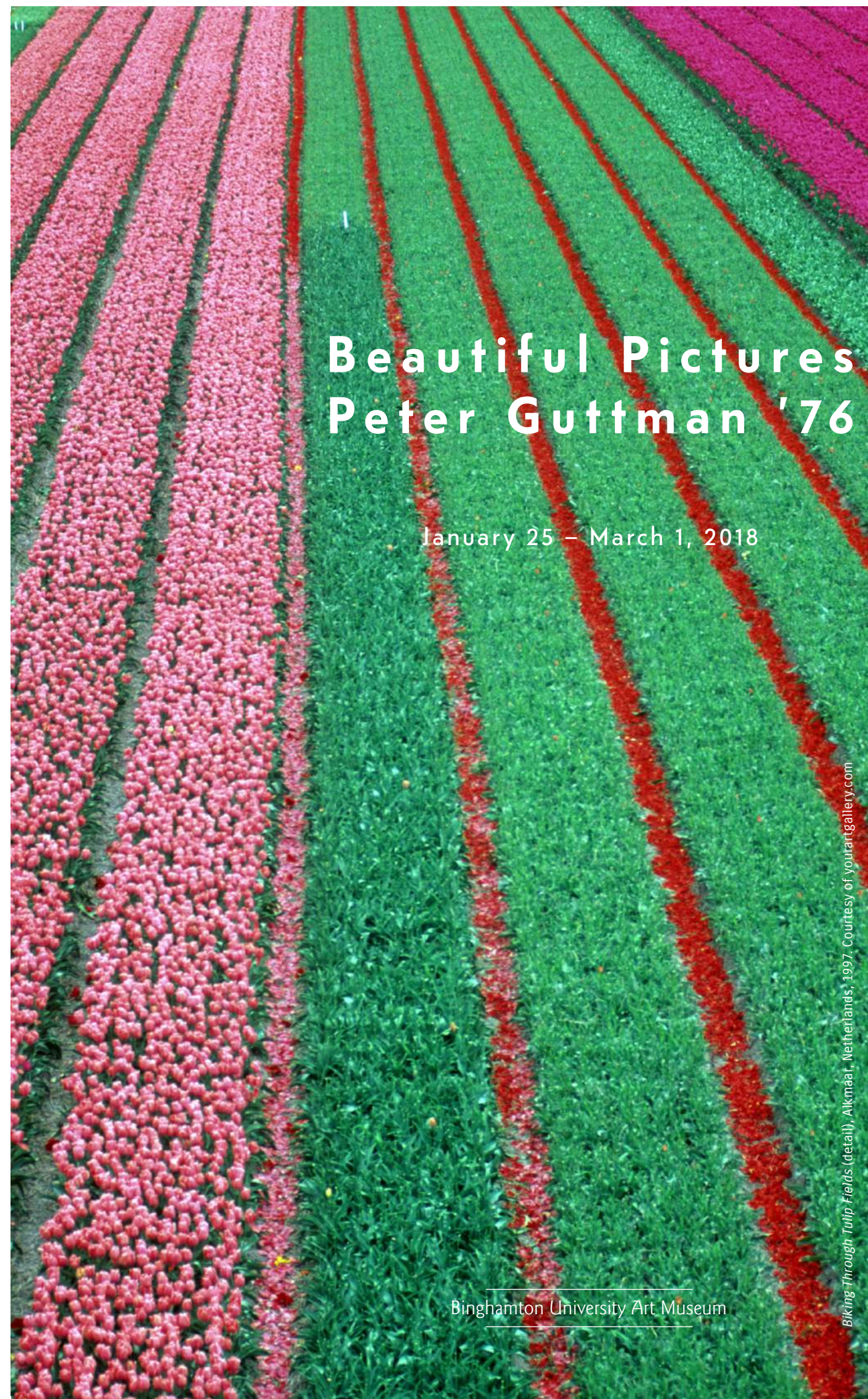
Tiny black lines on a US map detail Guttman's domestic travels, exhibiting a commitment to explore roads less traveled.

Peter Guttman '76 is known internationally for his work as a photographer, lecturer and travel journalist who has authored 8 books and ventured to 7 continents and over 230 countries. His many accolades include the Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Exploration and Storytelling, the Lowell Thomas Travel Journalist of the Year Award (three times), a Lifetime Achievement Award from the New York Travel Writers Society and a George Eastman Power of the Image Award. Guttman has also been recognized with solo exhibitions at Sotheby's and the United Nations. In 2012, his bestselling travel app, *Beautiful Planet HD*, was named by NBC News as one of "eight outstanding educational apps" and is projected here in the main gallery for visitors to explore.

Despite his world travels and fascinating projects, we at Binghamton University may know him best as the curator of the most unconventional dorm room in the history of campus life. Containing neon beer signs, a working traffic light, kinetic contraptions and so on, his room became a must-see site for fellow students and visiting parents. Guttman also made his years at Binghamton distinctive by continually finding alternative routes to campus from his home in Queens. And so began an approach to life that combined wanderlust, photography, amassing objects and a desire to share his collections and adventures with others. Please visit the lower galleries to see the focus exhibition, *Peter Guttman: Collection as a Self Portrait*, that explores how Guttman's collections wed his world travels with a sense of self. For additional work by Guttman follow him on Instagram @peterguttman.

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Binghamton University Art Museum  
Binghamton University  
Binghamton, NY 13902  
Binghamton.edu/art-museum  
All photographs © Peter Guttman



*Total Solar Eclipse and Snowman*, Ray, North Dakota, 1979. Courtesy of Gallery 32 Fine Arts, NYC



*Hiker in a Remote Slot Canyon*, Paria, Arizona, 2002. Courtesy of Gallery 32 Fine Arts, NYC



# Beautiful Pictures

*Nature (is) beautiful if at the same time it look(s) like art; and art can only be called beautiful if we are aware that it is art and yet it looks to us like nature.*

*Immanuel Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, 1790*

Peter Guttman's photographs are beautiful pictures of natural beauty. But where is the beauty? Is it in the picture? Or is it in the nature? What, and where, exactly, is beauty?

Guttman's photographs invite us to reflect on the relationship between nature and beauty—one of the central issues in the history of aesthetics. In this context, the ideas of the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant can help us to see what is significant about the beauty of Guttman's pictures. Kant is credited with carving out a distinct space for beauty; beauty is neither what we can know nor what we desire. For Kant, when we say an object is beautiful, we are not saying that we know something about it, nor are we saying that it is something we want. In fact, we are not saying anything about the object at all, but are instead saying something about ourselves and how we relate to other human beings. We are saying that we take a special kind of pleasure in the object, which occurs when we have no stake in knowing or possessing it. Because we have no particular personal stake in the object, this feeling of pleasure is something that can be shared. Here, Kant can help us to understand what it is that makes a traveler such as Guttman feel the need to share the pleasure of what he has seen through his pictures. For Kant, the pleasure of beauty includes the feeling that we are sharing this pleasure with others even if they are not actually present. We can therefore see Guttman's pictures as expressions of his own pleasure in the beauty of nature—a pleasure that includes the feeling that others who are far away will also be looking at what he sees. (One could even say, with a bit of whimsy, that Guttman is like the snowman who foregrounds the total eclipse of the sun and opens its arms to the viewer.)

According to Kant, the pleasure of beauty is a special kind of pleasure. It is not the feeling that something is merely agreeable, like the taste of chocolate, nor is it the pleasure of getting what we want. Both of these kinds of pleasure involve an interest in having the object. Instead, it is the pleasure in merely reflecting on the object and trying to figure out why it is the way that it is. Kant calls this reflective stance "disinterestedness." When, however, we are not disinterested but rather have an interest in the thing as something to know or to have, then it cannot be an object of beauty for us. A geologist, for example, can only find a rock formation beautiful if she takes a stance toward it that is different from what her scientific interest requires. Guttman's sandstone cliffs along Lake Powell are therefore beautiful because they confront us, not as rocks to be studied, but as gigantic masses from a distant age that claim our attention and make us reflect on the order and origin of nature. What we see when we judge something to be beautiful is therefore not what it is, but rather its design. For Kant, beautiful designs are those that are "free," which therefore do not easily fall under a fixed category that would enable us to say what it is. He writes, "I do not need (a concept) in order to find beauty in something. Flowers, free designs, lines aimlessly intertwined in each other under the name of foliage, signify nothing, do not depend on any determinate concept, and yet please."

We can now see why Kant said that nature is only beautiful if it looks like art and art is only beautiful if it looks like nature. For nature to be beautiful, it must appear as if it has some design and as if there is something it is meant to be even if we cannot say exactly what this is. And for art to be beautiful, its design must appear natural. It must appear as if the artwork is itself the source of what it is meant to be and not as if it had been made by someone according to some preconceived formula. It must be free. Now let us return to our original question. Where is the beauty in Guttman's pictures? It depends on the stance we take. We can find the beauty to be in the work of art if we pay attention to how Guttman's framing of nature itself displays a design. For example, the horizontal strata in the photograph of a slot canyon look like parallel etched lines. But one might be more inclined to say that the beauty is in the nature that Guttman pictures and that Guttman's pictures are beautiful works of art

because they show the beautiful art of nature. The photograph of hulking masses of ice, which seem to take the form of large arctic animals, is beautiful because we reflect on these natural forms and take pleasure in this reflection. In looking at the nature in Guttman's photographs we give our imagination free reign to consider what they are meant to be and allow ourselves to be taken into the work as we configure it in different ways. The beauty of Guttman's pictures is therefore in how they reveal the various designs of nature.

Yet, as Kant himself noted, it is difficult to take a disinterested stance when we can readily recognize an object. When we know what something is our mind is not free—we are compelled to relate to it as an object of knowledge or desire rather than as an object of beauty. We say "I see a boat," or, "I like that dress," rather than "it is beautiful." What, then, are we to make of the more familiar objects that appear in Guttman's photographs? Is it possible to take a disinterested stance towards them? And what of the people? If our stance towards the people is interested, then what kind of interest would this be? An interest in knowledge? Or desire? Moreover, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even nature itself is something in which we take an interest. Today, we cannot look at nature the same way as did Kant. We must have an interest in it—not to know it or to possess it—but to ensure that it not be destroyed.

In fact, it seems that this is what Guttman's beautiful photographs are meant to do. Rather than asking us to take a disinterested stance, the beauty of his pictures means to inspire a shared interest, in the continued existence of the natural world and its inhabitants.

Melissa Zinkin, Associate Professor of Philosophy



*Glacier Express, Schmiten, Switzerland, 1994. Courtesy of Duggal Visual Solutions, NYC*



*Wigwam Motel Holbrook, Arizona, United States of America, 1999. Courtesy of Duggal Visual Solutions, NYC*



*Covered Wagons Creak Across the Dakota Prairie, Flasher, North Dakota, 2004. Courtesy of Gallery 32 Fine Arts, NYC*