The North-Holland Landscape

As an experiment, the Province of North Holland awarded photo assignments for the first time two years ago. There is now a structural assignment policy, in which four photographers were recently put to work. The experiment involved, among others, Theo Bos who opted for the North Holland landscape.

“My series consists of two parts,” says Theo Bos. “Those of open landscapes and the artefacts within them. I knew the province moderately to very poorly. So going around became a voyage of discovery, which I extended from Amsterdam to the north. In the end, even places I had earlier passed , and visually denied, turned out to have photogenic potential.

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I did not want to react to the exceptional in the landscape, but to concentrate on its everydayness. In my application for the assignment I even called it a 'landscape of nothing'. In my youth, we lived near the woods and so originally I had little affinity with this land, that is so open, flat and empty. It is so indeterminate, so unfinished. And then all those strange buildings with lots of corrugated sheet and plastic materials!

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The photo assignment comes to you in writing. When I wrote my proposal I already had some images in my mind but that, of course, was only theory. Later I had to adapt my starting point to what I saw and how I saw it.

When searching for the indefinite, you essentially don't know what you're looking for. I just knew: There shouldn't be any striking things in the photo.

At first I had the feeling that the landscape was there to put a beautiful sky above it. In itself it meant nothing. That’s what you see in the works of the old masters: Two-thirds of their canvases are devoted to the sky. I later threw out all those ‘fabulous Dutch skies'. They hardly play a role anymore. Now it's only about the earth, the water.”

The assignment involved delivering twenty photos, which Theo Bos made on 4x5 inch color film. It sounded a bit negative in his application: ‘insignificant landscape', but he has come to love this landscape, which came across very convincingly in our conversation.

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