

Lisa Grossman

River Work Statement, 2014

You cannot see the great sweeping bends of the Kansas River from the ground. For years it was only an intriguing blur to me as I drove over one of the bridges that span it. When I moved to Lawrence, Kansas, from Kansas City in 1996, I began exploring the river's edges – levee and riparian trails and the few riverside painting sites that afforded a long view.

In 2002, after catching an unforgettable glimpse of the Kaw (as the Kansas River is known locally) on a flight back to Kansas City, I began flying the 171-mile length of the river valley with a local pilot so I could document it with photography and video. A little elevation revealed the Kaw's stunning beauty, its wide arcs stretching across the horizon. I flew at dusk and dawn to capture the astonishing contrasts of the darkening land with the river's reflected light.

For over twenty years my prairie work, primarily plein air, has been a sustained meditation on open spaces. I yearn for the horizon and lean sunward, with keen attentiveness to shifts in light, color, and weather. The prairie river paintings, studio works using my aerial footage, continue those investigations with an emphasis on flux and flow. I seek to convey the ceaseless sweep and thrust of carving river currents through sand, the turnings of day and season, and even the movement of the plane circling and crossing over, tracing the meanderings of the river. Searing glimpses grip me and flashes of light fuel my visual investigations.

I appreciate the endless metaphors and symbolism associated with rivers, but this river challenges me to engage deeply with place in a visceral and personal way. Experiencing it from shoreline, sandbar, the air, and kayak, the Kaw's windings continually lure me into a process of discovery.