



# Walter De Maria: Thoughts from the Lightning Field

*Kenneth Baker*

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*The Lightning Field* (1977), by the American sculptor Walter De Maria, is recognized internationally as one of the late-twentieth century's most profound works of American art. The piece is located in a remote and rugged area of southwestern New Mexico's high desert and is composed of 400 stainless steel poles installed in a grid measuring one mile (east-west) by one kilometer (north-south). The poles average some twenty feet in height and are installed so that the tops form a level plane, which, according to De Maria, could theoretically "support an imaginary sheet of glass."

Art critic Kenneth Baker began his encounter with *The Lightning Field* in 1978, shortly after its completion, when he was commissioned by Dia Art Foundation (which owns and maintains the work) to write a study of it. The resulting essay--the shorter of two Baker essays that comprise the text of this book--is descriptive and reflective and acclaims *The Lightning Field* as "the closest thing to a masterpiece to come out of minimalism." Together these writings offer a uniquely personal and probing assessment of this major work of art. Dia Art Foundation curator Lynne Cooke has contributed the introduction, which places *The Lightning Field* in its art historical context. Beautifully illustrated with fifteen color photographs and ten black-and-white images, the book also includes a statement by the artist.

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