



# Human Nature







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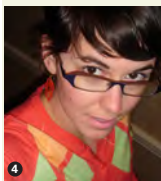
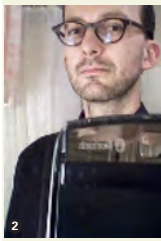
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5. **Rachel Hooper** is the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Curatorial Fellow at Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston. She recently organized the Center for Land Use Interpretation's exhibition *Texas Oil: Landscape of an Industry* and co-edited the book *On the Banks of Bayou City: The Center for Land Use Interpretation in Houston*.

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7. **Linda Walsh**'s recently published book with writer Pamela Walker entitled *Growing Good Things to Eat in Texas, Profiles of Organic Farmers and Ranchers Across the State* was published by Texas A&M Press this year.

8. **Madeline Yale** is HCP's Adjunct Curator and member of the organization's Advisory Council. Recently HCP's Executive Director (2006-9), Madeline now resides in London and Dubai where she is working on research projects on photography.

Cover image:  
Robert Voit (Stuttgart, Germany) *Industrial Drive, Flagstaff, Arizona, USA*, 2006 (detail).  
C-Print, size variable.  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Walter Stroms (Munich),  
Paul Amador Gallery (New York)



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# In this Issue

"Human Nature," the theme of this issue of *spot* and of a recent exhibition at the Houston Center for Photography, is an interesting term, full of potential muddle as to its meaning. As you will see, the work portrayed is largely about nature, but only in rare instances is it not also about humans, and their nature.

Many of us hold ourselves to be outside of nature, even above nature. Still others maintain a vague view that we should be eliminated from nature, in order for it to flourish. But the truth is that the structure of the universe tells us it's all one thing – nature extending forever, and containing (among other things) us.

We are ferocious with our Earth. We ravenously dig and cut and haul and burn and slowly turn the planet's resources into all the things we want. We produce waste emissions that poison the soil and water and air and now begin to radically affect the climate everywhere.

Enormous harm to our children and their children is coming fast, and it's not clear that we'll be willing to turn our attention to solutions at a time when we have become so accustomed to having plenty and wanting more.

We humans are so caught up in thinking about the present that we have a hard time thinking about the future. It's well established that we require crisis – not imminent crisis but actual crisis – to shift into a defensive mode and cope with events. Right after the hurricane hits, we start looking for water and food and ice and power.

Here in the Houston area, we're just pulling out of a stupefying, record-setting drought, and large parts of Texas are going through it still. Scientists are telling us to get used to it. The Secretary of Energy, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Chu, warns that all agriculture in California could be undermined by global warming by the end of this century. And James Lovelock, the scientist who created the Gaia theory, says it's likely that the human race will be reduced to one billion people by then, largely because so many of us will not be able to find food. He is suggesting that several billion people will starve to death.

This is probably still avoidable, of course. And to ignore the present reality of climate degradation or, worse, to understand what's on our horizon and decide to turn our heads, or even to believe that feel-good but stopgap measures such as recycling cans and the like is enough to fix it, is to court disaster.

So human nature, which is highly creative and generally desirous of good will and good fortune for all, seems inclined to enjoy life as it is even if that indulgent stance tempts species collapse and diminishes the chances of continued human evolution.

Fortunately, that creativity has been hard at work studying these changes while proposing a vast system of strategies that might mitigate disaster. As it happens, the solutions seem likely to lead to a higher quality of life for humans – a relatively new goal. It might prove useful for us to try to understand the difference between "standard of living" and "quality of life." As the urban thinker Andrés Duany says, "everyone in America has a higher standard of living than any one in a Tuscan hill town, but everybody in that Tuscan hill town has a higher quality of life than any one in America." A little over the top, perhaps, but an insight worth considering.

The photographs in this issue of *spot* are, obviously, windows into the nature of humans, and into the natural and built environment in which we go about our business. Surely our shared visual intelligence and understanding is nurtured because so many people are so good at using photography to study and express the world. The question is whether these people, these images, and these ideas, along with others will help us come to grips with the looming catastrophe, and the hope is that they will point out the ways to avoid it and all of the genuine horror that it would bring.

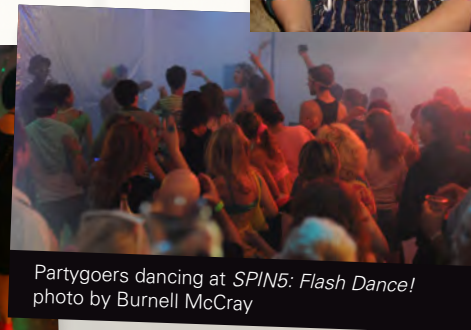
David Crossley



[illegible]

► In other personnel news, this spring we said our goodbyes to Evening/Weekend Gallery Manager Paul Elhoff, who after nearly five years at HCP returned to New York. We extend a large welcome to Evening Gallery Manager Maria Ciepiel and Weekend Gallery Manager Susan Baxley.

active member of the performing and visual arts community in Houston and was HCP's Executive



*SPIN5: Flash Dance!*, Friday August 28, 8pm - 11pm  
photo by Maria Ciepiel

nearly \$3,000 for the newly formed foundation in Leigh's honor, a fund that will soon provide scholarships to individuals who conduct internships in the arts. For more information and to make a contribution, please contact Sandy Moberg at 713.529.4755 x17.

A black and white photograph capturing a massive, curling ocean wave, likely a tsunami, as it approaches a shoreline. The wave's crest is high and turbulent, with white foam visible. The water surface is dark and textured with ripples. The sky is a uniform, light gray, suggesting an overcast day. The photograph is presented with a white border. At the bottom of the image, there is a black rectangular area containing white text.

Sally Gall *Tanah Lot*, 1992

► As part of our educational strategic plan, we created the Resident Education Instructor position and hired Kristy Peet to assist Education Coordinator, Rachel Hewlett, with growing the educational curriculum. Kristy has an MFA in Photography from Savannah College of Art and Design and has been teaching at HCP since 2006. Please visit our website ([www.hcponline.org](http://www.hcponline.org)) for new educational offerings including

► There are many benefits to being a member of HCP, including reciprocity at participating *Connections Program* institutions and 25% discounts on all classes and workshops. Members are invited to post events on the “Members Bulletin Board” section of our web site, including announcements about exhibitions, fellowships, and publications; please send details to [info@hconline.org](mailto:info@hconline.org). Also on our web site is a new section on the homepage

Best regards,

Madeline Yale



Opening Reception for HCP's Fellowship Exhibition in June 2009, photo by Natan Dvir



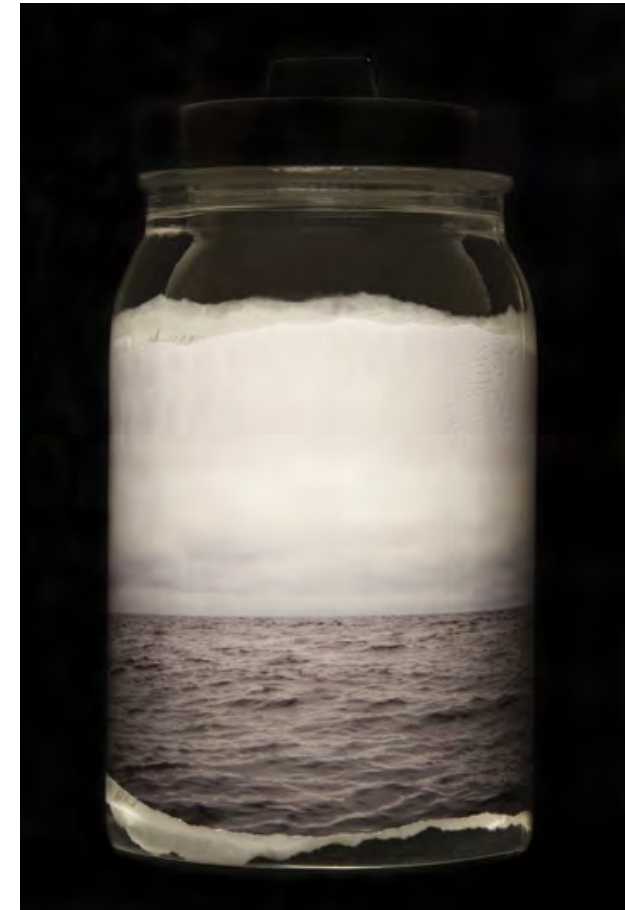
HCP Staff (from left to right) - Sandy Moberg, Rachel Hewlett, Jason Dibley, Madeline Yale, Susan Baxley, Bevin Bering, Maria Ciepiel  
photo by Frazier King



Kristy Peet teaching Intro to Photoshop in HCP 's Digital Darkroom, photo by Rachel Hewlett



# HUMAN NATURE



by **Madeline Yale** When I was in my mid-twenties, I lived on an organic farm in Tuscany. Taking a hiatus from my photographic interests and delaying graduate school, I spent two years living amidst olive groves, vineyards, honey bees, chestnuts, wheat fields, and animals. The farm was operated by a U.S.-based foundation whose mission was to promote cultural and environmental sustainability. I led an internship program for foreigners; youths would spend three months with us learning Italian, studying Sieneese traditions, and farming.

The interns' rotational duties included making lunch for the whole group, using food grown onsite and meat from our animals. I will never forget the day in January when a new intern came back from the vegetable garden dismayed because she couldn't find tomatoes for her salad. A bright, well-educated American from D.C., Nina assumed, like many of us, that the vegetable was harvested year round – if they are available in the supermarket in January, why aren't they available on the farm? It struck me more than ever before that what we were practicing was critical – beyond the simple understanding of which crops grow seasonally, it is important to appreciate where our sustenance comes from and how stewardship of natural resources is fundamental to the survival of our species.

It has been several years since I left farm life in Tuscany. However, the topics of sustainability and stewardship seem more relevant than ever before in contemporary life. Not surprisingly, a current trend in fine art and documentary photography explores our

association to the natural world. *Human Nature*, an exhibition this past spring at HCP, touched upon the subject from a variety of contemporary perspectives.

Such a topic is nothing new to the medium; in its early beginnings, photography revealed our complex relationship with the environment. From Anna Atkins' cyanotype glossary of plant specimens to Timothy O'Sullivan's landscapes depicting undocumented territory claimed for the North American Transcontinental Railroad, photography has served a purpose in merging art with science to illustrate nature and our command of it. In the '30s and early '40s, the Resettlement Administration (later named the Farm Security Administration or FSA) headed by Roy Stryker, used photography as a weapon for legislative change. Under Stryker's direction, photographers including Ben Shahn, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Marion Post Wolcott, and Arthur Rothstein, created thousands of images propagated during the Roosevelt administration to champion the plight of the

farmer and document the impacts of farm mechanization, drought, and the Great Depression. Likewise, Ansel Adams' majestic scenes of the northwestern wilderness promoted the Sierra Club's mission to preserve and protect the natural world. Another form of landscape photography is Land Art, which evolved in the late 1960s as a branch of Conceptual Art. Land Art forerunners including Gerry Schum and Richard Long staked their claim on Earth by manipulating the land and photographed the evidence.<sup>1</sup> Photographic projects that compare changes in the landscape over time include the Rephotographic Survey Project, where in 1977, Mark Klett and others returned to sites photographed by O'Sullivan and his contemporaries William Henry Jackson and Carleton Watkins to create images from the same vantage point.<sup>2</sup> Fast forward to today where numerous exhibitions like International Center for Photography's *Ecotopia* in 2007 (reviewed by David Crossley in the Fall 2007 issue of *spot*) reveal a world in environmental flux, where varying stewardship practices clash.

The *Human Nature* exhibition at HCP approached the subject of stewardship and our relationship with other species from varying perspectives. The counterculture movement of "rewilding" as explored by photographer **Lucas Foglia** served as the initial cornerstone for the exhibition concept. In the southeastern United States, individuals raised in mainstream urban and suburban environments seek a more harmonious relationship with nature. These individuals reside in intentional communities that live off the grid and from the land. Some adopt Mennonite dress, others construct clothing from hunted animals. All share similar environmental concerns and aim to live more self-sufficiently. Foglia, who was raised on a farm in New York, observes and photographs his subjects from a protective perspective, depicting individuals who strive to live in harmony with their surroundings.

opposite left:  
Lucas Foglia (Dix Hill, NY)  
*Acorn with Possum Stew, Wildroots Homestead, North Carolina*, 2006  
from the series *Re-Wilding*  
Digital C-Print, 19.5 x 26 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

opposite right:  
Pablo Lopez Luz (Mexico City, Mexico)  
*Libramiento Mexico, Cuernavaca*, 2007  
Archival Inkjet print, 40 x 40 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Sasha Wolf Gallery (New York, NY)

left:  
Travis Roozée (Pontiac, MI/Brooklyn, NY)  
*Colored Moss, Centralia, PA*, 2003  
Digital C-Print, 12 x 18 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

right:  
Mary Daniel Hobson (Muir Beach, CA)  
*Sanctuary #1*, 2007  
Archival pigment print, Edition 4/25, 16.5 x 11 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



On the flipside, Greater Mexico City, one of the largest cities in the world, serves as a complex metaphor for the human desire to live for both success and excess. The region has a unique and tumultuous history of urban planning. Situated in a closed volcanic basin more than 7,000 feet above sea level, the area once included seven lakes. By the 1500s, the Aztecs had built an advanced, sustainable city with a waterway channel system, square plots, and waste management systems. Four main avenues from the city's mainland center directed traffic and trade with outlying areas. Following the Spanish siege in 1521, new settlers drained the lakes and filled them with dirt mined from nearby areas. Today, water continues to be pumped out of the city's shallow aquifer, and parts of the city have sunk by depths greater than twenty feet. Repeating earlier history, the city's population explosion in the 20th century led to disputes in land management. Since 1950, the population has grown from 1.5 million to more than 22 million. Political, economic, and environmental controversies have hindered efforts to form and implement a cohesive long-term plan for the region's urban development.<sup>3</sup>

Mexico City-based photographer **Pablo Lopez Luz** captures the complexities of sprawl from aerial and vista perspectives. An image of a road leading south to Cuernacava depicts green zones where vegetables, fruit, flowers, and livestock are cultivated to support the demands of the city's increasing population. Undulating hills of middle to low-income housing built since the 1950s demonstrate the city's tremendous overpopulation and housing crises. Further east, the photographer reveals areas where clear cutting has created room for development in a region where lake beds and green areas have made way for dumpsites and mines.

Fire is admittedly a captivating subject for photographers, whether it be the subject of disaster or controlled land management. Two photographers in *Human Nature* approach the subject from opposing perspectives. For the past eighteen years, Kansas-born photographer **Larry Schwarm** has photographed the dramatic tall grass prairie fires that sweep across the Flint Hills of his state each spring. In an effort to maintain the original ecosystem, the mesmerizing fires represented in Schwarm's images are set by

humans. Historically, these fires occurred naturally in the North American prairie, an area that once contained over 150 million acres from Canada to Texas. Today, less than one percent of the original tallgrass prairie exists as a result of suburban development and changing land management practices. Without the burns, the prairie grasses would grow up to eight feet tall, converting much of the land to scrub forest. Destruction leads to rebirth; the fires regulate the growth of deep rooted perennial grasses, warm the soil that allows cattle to graze earlier in the season, and keep invasive weed species and new trees at bay.<sup>4</sup>

Despite human efforts to control the landscape, the perseverance of nature is evident in the work of **Travis Roozee** who photographed Centralia, Pennsylvania, an active anthracite coal mining town from the mid 1800s until 1962 when an underground coal fire erupted at the local dump. Continuing to burn today, oxygenating itself via undiscovered vent pathways, it is believed that the fire underlies several hundred acres and has enough energy to continue burning for over 1,000 years. The colorful moss and lichen growing year-round in Roozee's images give evidence of a general warming of the ground. In the mid 1980s, after a boy fell into a 150-foot sinkhole and after the land was deemed unstable, the government intervened with new efforts to extinguish the fire. Because of impeding costs, the government forced the dwindling population to relocate by purchasing and demolishing the majority of Centralia's buildings. Many citizens who refused to leave erected external support structures to bolster their homes' stability. Roozee also photographed a section of Route 61, the town's main thoroughfare, which in 1993 was permanently closed due to coal fissures.<sup>5</sup>

Also on the topic of energy – and the commodification of it – is the work of two artists whose photographic visions and subjects vary in scope and presentation. Finding beauty in the elegant geometry of modern wind turbine blades, **Jay Tyrrell** photographs these structures, measuring between 60-140 feet, as they rest on the ground before installation or hover atop 200-300-foot steel towers. His panoramic abstract forms in black and white were shot in Palm Springs, Altamont Pass in the Bay Area of San Francisco, the Sacramento River Delta, and areas of New Mexico. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. has had the fastest growing wind power capacity in the world since 2006, and Texas contains the most wind power turbines in the country. While many wind analysts state that wind power is the most environmentally friendly energy resource second to solar, wind farms pose a risk to migratory birds. The Texas coast is an important migratory corridor for bird migration, and a 2009 report from the U.S. Department of the Interior cites that a decline in bird populations that migrate through the corridor are a result of wind turbines, among other factors.

An exhibition in Houston that broaches the subject of energy would not be complete without discussing the local oil and gas industry. One of the busiest ports in the United States, the Port of Houston



top:  
Larry Schwarm (Wichita, KS)  
*Breathless, Southern Edwards County, Kansas, 2008*  
from the series *On Fire*  
Digital C-Print, 29 x 29 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

above  
Larry Schwarm (Wichita, KS)  
*Distant Fires in Chase County, Kansas, 2006*  
from the series *On Fire*  
Digital C-Print, 29 x 29 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

Paula McCartney (Minneapolis, MN), *Bird Watching: Northern Cardinal*, 2007, from the series *Bird Watching*  
Archival Inkjet print, 18.5 x 18.5 inches. Courtesy of the artist and KlompChing Gallery (New York, NY).





sees approximately 25-30 ship arrivals each day, of which two thirds contain oil, gas, and petrochemicals, with the remainder carrying containers, steel, and cement. Houston Ship Channel pilot **Louis Vest** photographs and creates stop motion animation video from the bridges of ships he navigates through the channel. Photographing his journey past refineries, terminals, and storage facilities utilized by Dynegy Incorporated, Crown Energy Company, Kinder Morgan, Stolt-Nielsen, and Lyondell Chemical Company, to name a few, Vest captures the pulse of energy and resources contained and emitted. At night, the flares on these refineries take on an eerie, otherworldly appearance in Vest’s video work.<sup>6</sup>

While Vest’s images depict Houston local scenes that are relatively inaccessible to the general public, artists and social activists **Benjamin Drummond** and **Sara Joy Steele** take their viewers to other parts of the world to tell the story of global change through the activities of people. Thanks to support from the Blue Earth Alliance and other sources, they have photographed volunteer glacier monitors in Iceland, fishermen of the North Atlantic, and the tinder people of North America, among other subjects. Featured in *Human Nature* were the Sámi reindeer herders in Norway as they confront and adapt to the complex issues surrounding global warming. The reindeer habitats and migration routes are increasingly diminished as secondary homes, oil mining, and wind farms progressively dominate the landscape. Supported by the government, the Sámi herd the reindeer using snowmobiles and transport them on ships from summer to winter environments. Despite such movements, there is a significant reduction in lichen moss due to birch tree encroachment, making survival more difficult for the reindeer and other species that depend on lichen moss for sustenance. Drummond photographs these groups, and Steele provides a narrative to accompany the images. The resultant storyboards are elegant and tactile.

Another artist who intertwines writing with photographs is Californian **Mary Daniel Hobson**. Interested in the conflation of art and science, Hobson immerses photographs of the natural world in mineral oil to create specimen-like objects. The contained photographs represent her nearby environs and incorporate inscriptions and maps on verso that reference the artist’s dreams and memories of nature, serving as “messages in a bottle.” Hobson’s work describes the paradoxical relationship between humanity’s desire to harness and control the environment via scientific means and nature’s ability to hold mysteries greater than what can be contained.

Jay Tyrrell (Walnut Creek, CA)  
*Martian Supreme Commander*, 2007  
from the series *Wind Army*  
Archival Inkjet print, 18 x 38 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



Frustrated by her inability to capture the perfect image of songbirds in situ, **Paula McCartney** creates her own idealized version of the species in nature. Populating her environs with craft store replicas, McCartney presents her fictitious documents in taxonomic form, modeling the presentation after John James Audubon’s *Birds of America* and Victorian botany journals.

Similar to McCartney’s index, yet using found objects, Dusseldorf school-trained **Robert Voit** created his own pictorial inventory of mobile phone masts that simulate nature, appearing as deciduous trees, conifers, pines, palms, and cacti. Employing photography as a means of gathering information, Voit’s “typology” – a phrase coined by Bernd and Hilla Becher – is a sequenced arrangement of like-objects arranged in grid formation. The topic points to the proliferation of communication technology, serving as a reminder of our increased desire to stay connected. Mobile phone technology was born in 1946, and as advances in electronics were made, cellular technology became available to the general public. Today, an estimated 60% of the world’s population has access to mobile technology, and there are an estimated 4.1 billion mobile phone subscribers worldwide.<sup>7</sup> What is fascinating about the project is that despite the desire for these objects to resemble the natural forms they emulate, the mobile phone masts are anomalistic forms of vegetation.

Today, I am several thousand miles away from the life I had in Italy, writing from my new home in Dubai, an area of heightened geographic development. I’m sitting in a house built upon reclaimed land – over 100 million cubic yards of sand was dredged from the sea to create the Palm Jumeirah. This young island in the shape of a palm tree is a miraculous environment, conceived of and constructed using some of the most advanced technology in the world today. While a contemporary triumph, the Palm has problems; water circulation, water contamination, endangerment of marine ecosystems, and land instability. Yet, it is a successful tribute to human adaptability. Looking out the window, there is lots to see. An 80-foot tall cell phone tower resembling a palm tree is in the foreground (I invited Robert Voit to photograph it!). The hazy desert horizon is dotted with shiny new skyscrapers, and cranes sleepily perch atop dozens of others under arrested construction.<sup>8</sup>



top:  
Robert Voit (Stuttgart, Germany)  
*Lago di Garda, Italy*, 2006  
from the series *New Trees*  
Archival Inkjet print, sizes variable  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Walter Stroma (Munich),  
Paul Amador Gallery (New York, NY)


bottom:  
Robert Voit (Stuttgart, Germany)  
*Las Vegas, California, United States of America*, 2006  
from the series *New Trees*  
Archival Inkjet print, sizes variable  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Walter Stroma (Munich),  
Paul Amador Gallery (New York, NY)

top:  
Robert Voit (Stuttgart, Germany)  
*Hundon, Suffolk, England*, 2006  
from the series *New Trees*  
Archival Inkjet print, 19.5 x 15.5 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Walter Stroma (Munich),  
Paul Amador Gallery (New York, NY)

bottom:  
Robert Voit (Stuttgart, Germany)  
*Scottsdale, Arizona, United States of America*, 2006  
from the series *New Trees*  
Archival Inkjet print, sizes variable  
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Walter Stroma (Munich),  
Paul Amador Gallery (New York, NY)



Dubai is a new city with a new soul, mostly built within the last 10 years. Comprised of more than 85% expatriates, local society is in a brand new stage of development; ethnicities have yet to settle into patterns of interrelation. The affluence here is palpable, it is a place where excessive wealth is readily measured by the rapid speed of progress. Yet as the global economy falters, the region – its wealth, its population, its growth – is destabilized. This precarious mechanical organism is perhaps an example of what Hannah Arendt phrased as “progress and catastrophe are the opposite faces of the same coin.”<sup>9</sup>

The Ruler of Dubai’s poetic fantasy to transform the virgin landscape into an artificial, yet somehow perceived “perfectly natural” man-made playground is disconcerting. On the other hand, I am choosing to live in Dubai and am therefore sustaining the region’s development. The humanly-driven machine here is changing nature, yet this situation is not site-specific, nor is it time specific. And all over the world photography is bearing witness to this; revealing our good intentions, our conscience, and our decidedly human follies. 

1. Fogle, Douglas. *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography 1960-1982* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003), p. 26.
2. Of note: Abelardo Morell ([www.abelardomorell.net](http://www.abelardomorell.net)) is conducting a re-photographic project in Texas with his camera obscura tent beginning in January, 2010.
3. History of Mexico City based on information provided in interviews conducted in February and March, 2009 between the curator and Fernando Sepulveda, Architect and Urban Planner, Head of the Metropolitan Development Commission in Mexico City, 1967-1982.
4. Schwarm, Larry. *On Fire: Photographs by Larry Schwarm, introduction by Robert Adams* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
5. Quigley, Joan. *The Day the Earth Caved in: An American Mining Tragedy* (Baltimore: Random House, 2007).
6. For more of Vest’s work, please visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/oneeighteen/>. Shortly after *Human Nature* opened, Vest launched a new video made while navigating Houston’s ship channel that attracted over 32,000 viewers in the first 24 hours.
7. Telecommunications statistics available via the International Telecommunication Union and Cellular News <http://www.cellular-news.com/archive/Statistics.php>, March 15, 2009.
8. For more information on the Palm Jumeirah, visit [designbuild-network.com](http://www.designbuild-network.com/projects/palm-jumeirah): <http://www.designbuild-network.com/projects/palm-jumeirah>.
9. Hannah Arendt (1968), quoted in Virilio, Paul. *Unknown Quantity* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 40.

FEATURE

# THE LAST POLAR BEAR

Humans and the nature of the universe painted with light

by David Crossley

That polar bear photograph evokes a story of global climate change for millions of human minds. We are staring into nature and understanding patterns that give rise to sadness and frustration. The concept of The Last Polar Bear has moved many people to struggle against the total loss of that species of Earth citizen.

The picture is iconic in the sense that it stands for something much larger. (It is unusually iconic in that it is a photograph we think we’ve seen whether we have seen it or not.) It is a visual symbol that has acquired conventional significance, from which vast stories arise.

It is also a direct look at something in a place that we are highly unlikely to see in person. That is a primary service of photographs – to give humans a kind of magical access to otherwise unseeable things in the universe.

As many humans pull away from nature, the intellectual and even emotional experience of it comes increasingly from photographs (and video or film).

We have seen the way that life is created, how it evolves and grows, how it moves and eats; we know a lot about the web of life thanks to photography.


We have learned to love landscapes and objects we have never visited, and we’ve seen into places and periods when the darker sides of our natures have led to horrific loss and violence.

Through photographs, we have seen fantastic distances into space and time and even into the heart of matter (where we see there is yet more space).

Through photographs we have looked backward in time, almost all the way to the Big Bang. We have seen glorious lightbursts of matter, as well as gases that dispersed and vanished thousands of years ago.

Perhaps human nature is explained most thoroughly through photographs. The wars, the droughts and floods, the hurricanes and tsunamis, the inequity and suffering, the assassinations. We know much about these even while being separated from them by space or time.

The photograph, in all its forms, provides experience of those things about which we have no experience, about those things which may no longer exist – even about things that may never have existed at all.

We have seen reality, and other, by painting with light. The photographs on the next pages are among those that have transformed our understanding of our universe. 



top:  
Lou Vest (Houston, TX)  
*Petrochemscape 01/06/09, 2009*  
LightJet print, 16 x 24 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

left:  
Benjamin Drummond and Sara Joy Steele  
(Seattle, WA)  
*Facing Climate Change – Sámi Reindeer Herdsmen, 2006*  
from the series *Facing Climate Change*  
Archival Inkjet print, 23 x 30 inches  
Courtesy of the artists



Arne Nævera (Norway), *Polar Bear, 2005*  
© Arne Nævera / Shell Wildlife Photographer of the Year





David Malin, *The Horsehead Nebula*. Malin was the first photographer to provide us with the details and color of the remarkable structures in very deep space. All these gaseous objects are within the vicinity of 1,350 light years distant. © 1980-2002, Anglo-Australian Observatory/Royal Obs. Edinburgh. Photo from UK Schmidt plates by David Malin.



NASA, *Pillars of Creation* (1995). The Hubble Space Telescope's most famous photograph shows the Eagle Nebula. Hubble sees backward in time, and astronomers think a supernova knocked the pillars down about 6,000 years ago. What we see now is evidence of the blast just before it reached the pillars. The pillars will appear intact to observers on Earth for another 1,000 years or so.



NASA, *Hubble Ultra Deep Field* (2003-2004). This photograph is our deepest view into the visible universe. What we see here are galaxies emerging from the dark ages shortly after the big bang, as the first stars reheated the cold, dark universe. NASA talks of "oddball galaxies littering the field." A few appear to be interacting here. The order and structure of the universe is just beginning to emerge.



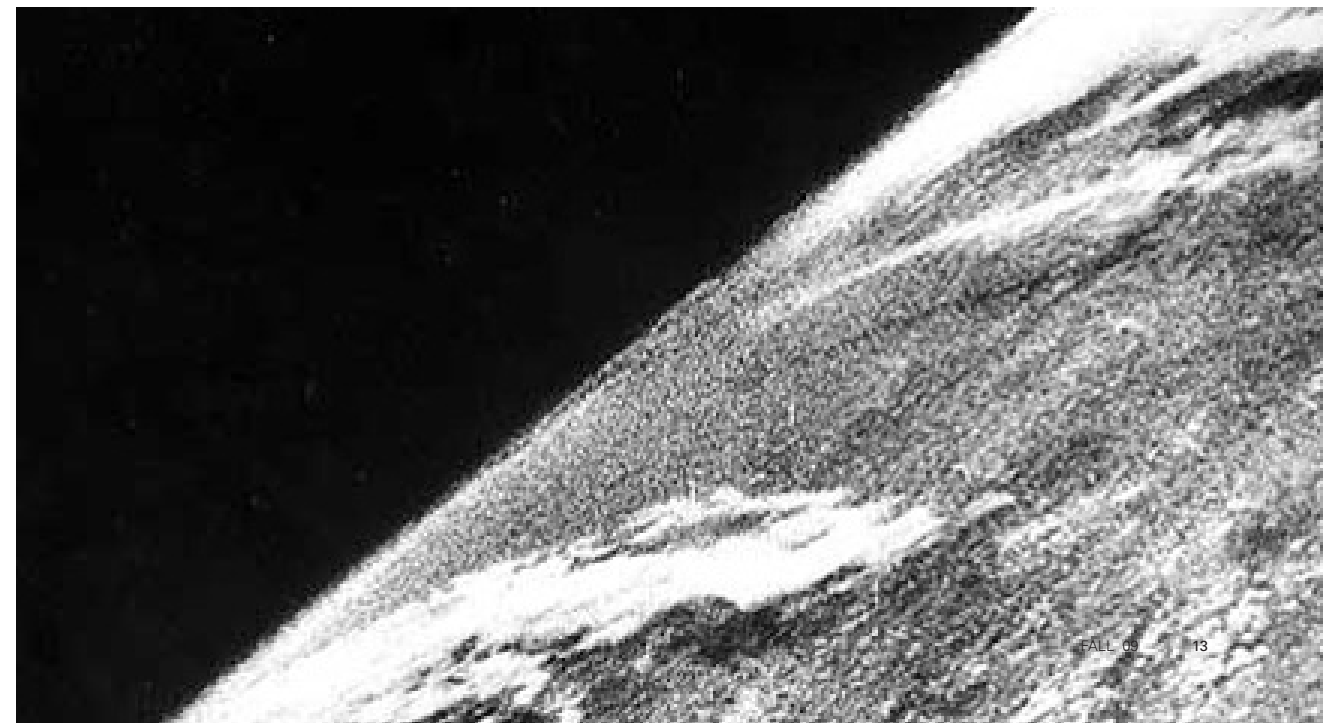
William Anders, *Earthrise* (1968). Perhaps the most famous photograph ever taken, it was shot with a Hasselblad aboard the Apollo 8 mission on December 24, 1968. As Apollo 8 emerged from the far side of the moon on its fourth orbit, crew commander Frank Borman rolled the spacecraft to position its antennas. Looking to the lunar horizon he said "Oh my God, look at that picture over there! Here's the Earth coming up!" He shot the image in black and white. Within two minutes, Anders had the color version.

Although the photograph is usually mounted with the moon below the earth, the picture shown below is the way Anders framed it. His image is almost always seen from Borman's point of view.

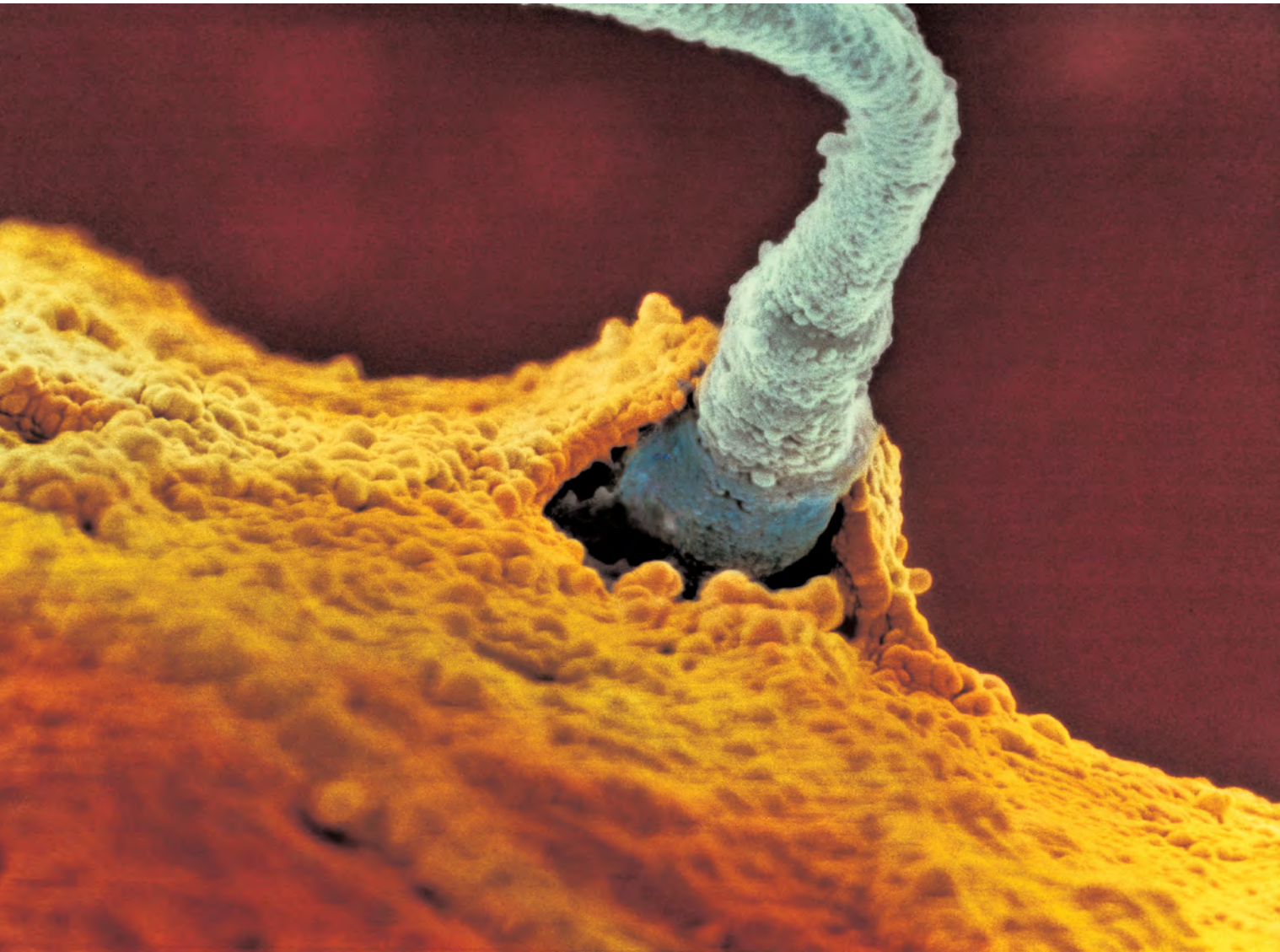


left: Jupiter's Great Red Spot, taken by the Voyager 2 spacecraft. The vast flow of information about Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune (and many of their moons) that came from Voyager shaped science textbooks and laid the foundation for the modern space program. Thousands of photographs were taken from vantage points humans had never experienced before. Those brilliant images of Jupiter and Saturn fired the public's imagination and fueled enthusiasm for future space exploration.

below: The first photograph of Earth from space, 1946. The photo was taken from a V-2 rocket 65 miles high as the missile climbed straight up. It then fell back to earth, slamming into the ground. The camera was broken, but the film, in a steel cassette, was unharmed. White Sands Missile Range/Applied Physics Laboratory.







Lennart Nilsson, *The Winning Sperm*, © Lennart Nilsson, Bonnier Fakta AB



above:  
Lennart Nilsson, *Life* Magazine cover image, "The Drama of Life" 1965  
© Lennart Nilsson, Bonnier Fakta AB

Lennart Nilsson was a photojournalist before he turned to new photographic techniques to look inside the human body. In 1965, *Life* magazine presented some of his pictures of the beginning of human life, both on the cover and on 16 pages inside the magazine. Over the years, he has broken a lot of ground using scientific instruments to photograph blood vessels and other very small objects, including the first images of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus and the SARS virus. Nilsson says he became interested in making the invisible visible.

But it was his photographs of fetuses and the act of fertilization that won him worldwide fame. Those photographs not only showed us so much about the beginning of life that we could not otherwise see, but they inflamed the culture as well. Almost as soon as the *Life* pictures were published they were appropriated by anti-abortion activists to make their point about what fetuses are.

The Web is rich with arguments about whether Nilsson made his photographs in utero or outside the body. There are long trails of conversation, some difficult to read, about what an "aborted fetus" actually looks like (apparently, not much like a baby) and about the circumstances under which whole, dead fetuses are obtained.

Nilsson says he did both. He acknowledges that he "had to use fetuses from what are called extrauterine pregnancies. But I have also shot living fetuses in the womb using an endoscope. These days, I work with ultrasound and three-dimensional pictures taken through the skin from outside the body."

For more information, an interview with Nilsson is at [www.lennart-nilsson.com/q\\_a.html](http://www.lennart-nilsson.com/q_a.html)



Lennart Nilsson, *A Little World* © Lennart Nilsson, Bonnier Fakta AB



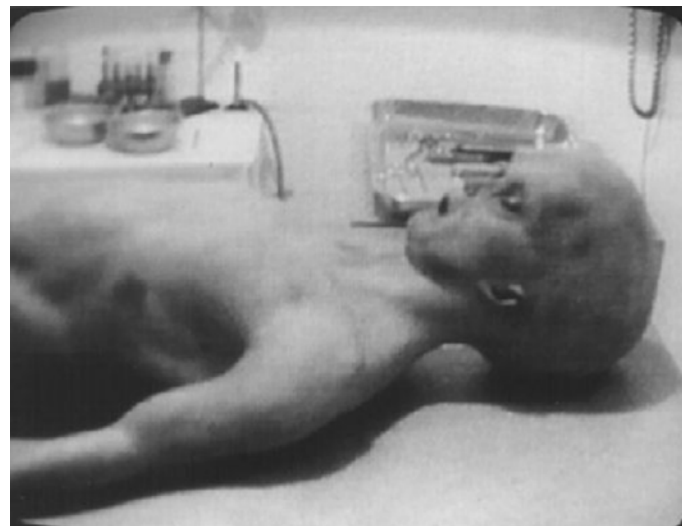


Matthew Brady, *Federal Dead on the Field of Battle of First Day, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania* (1863). Brady was one of the world's first war photographers, and his pictures showed Americans the grim realities of the battlefield for the first time. Brady's team had to contend with many technical issues. Developing a single glass plate negative required a horse-drawn wagon filled with equipment and chemicals.



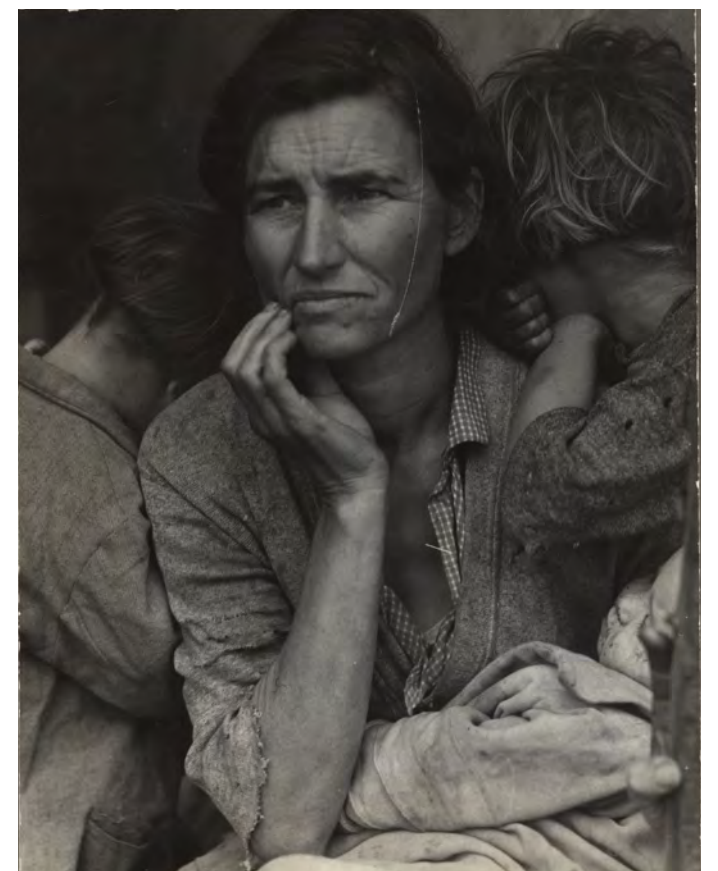
top:  
Edward S. Curtis, *Red Hawk at an Oasis in the Badlands* (1905). Red Hawk of the Oglala Sioux waters his horse in South Dakota. Red Hawk fought with Crazy Horse against Custer at Little Big Horn. He lived to attend the 50th Anniversary of the Battle in 1926, and he lived to see the west transformed by development. These images gave us what we needed to make Roy Rogers movies, connected us to magic feathers and helped supply us with the myths and realities of the American West.

Abraham Zapruder, *JFK Assassination, Frame 313* (1963). The only film footage of President John F. Kennedy's assassination appears to show the president's head exploding. But is it real? There are many stories that deal with this frame, including one that says this whole Zapruder film is a doctored version of the original. Who knows?



Space alien on an operating table in Roswell, New Mexico. Photographer unknown. All facts and figures unknown. But all of us do have this image of a space alien etched on our brains.

right:  
Dorothea Lange *Human Erosion in California/Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (1936). "I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother . . . She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. . . . that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed." Within twenty-four hours of making this series of photographs, Lange presented them to an editor at the San Francisco News, who alerted the federal government to the migrants' plight. The newspaper printed two of Lange's images reporting also that the government was rushing in 20,000 pounds of food, to rescue the workers.





# Photographing Ike


by Maria Ciepiel



Since making landfall just east of Galveston, Texas on September 13, 2008, Ike has become the third costliest hurricane ever in the United States. Communities along the Bolivar Peninsula, a 27-mile-long barrier island northwest of Galveston, were among the hardest hit, having suffered the 10-15 foot storm surge. Upon returning home, long-term residents of the town of Gilchrist, for example, were shocked to discover that the streets where many had lived for 50 years or more had disappeared. Entire towns had been wiped-out, leaving people fearful that their way of life would never be recovered. Such devastating conditions necessitate finding meaningful ways to make sense of our misfortune. Photography has the potential to do just that. While each of these three Texas-based photographers have vast differences in style and purpose, all have used the camera as a way to examine and hopefully come to terms with the more difficult aspects of our natural world.

Images from Houston photographer Gary Trinklein convey a strong sense of place, human determination and irony. In *Stardust*, an American flag draped across the remnants of what used to be an entryway, serves as a marker in what we can anticipate will be a rebuilding. Flags offer the same kind of symbolism in *Everything we had*, which depicts a typical middle class home, its front yard full of piles of debris that were once the family's possessions.

Houston-based photographer Jeffrey Deemie admits to being "initially very tentative photographing the aftermath due to the tragedy associated with this storm." Ultimately, his experience in artistic landscape photography offers a unique perspective, one that seems to come from nature itself. Without a human presence, nature appears to have grown silent and reflective as if contemplating all it has endured.

By choosing to work in black and white for her images of pre- and post- hurricane clouds, Marilyn Davenport, also from Houston, successfully illustrates nature's mercurial temperament. From shifting winds and rapidly changing light, the wide range of tonal values brings forth a variety of textures and patterns which emphasize the intrinsic yet troubling beauty that can be found in severe weather. 

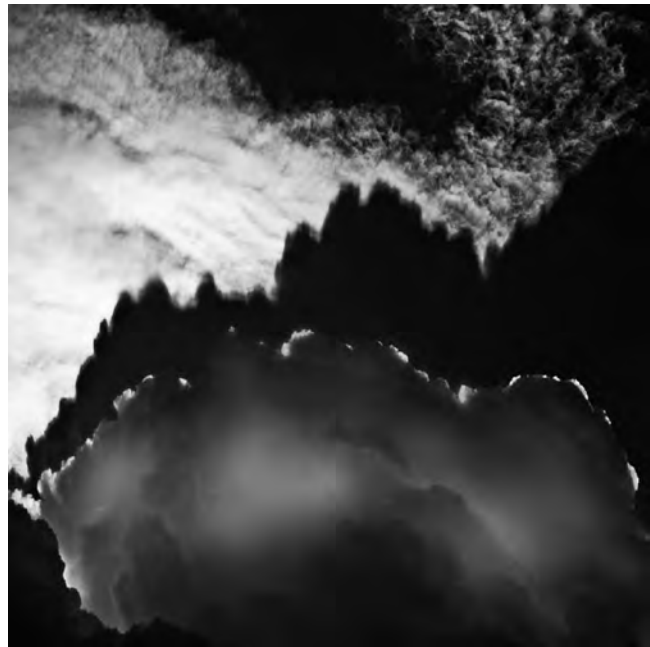
opposite:  
Jeffrey Deemie (Houston, TX)  
*Bolivar Fieldhouse*, 2008  
Archival Inkjet Print  
13 x 28 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

above:  
Gary Trinklein (Houston, TX)  
*Stardust*, 2008  
Archival Inkjet Print  
13 x 18 inches  
Courtesy of the artist





above:  
Jeffrey Deemie (Houston, TX)  
*Murdochs Pier after Ike*, 2008  
Archival Inkjet Print  
13 x 28 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



above right:  
Marilyn Davenport (Houston, TX)  
*Ike: Shadow Cloud One*, 2008  
Giclee, archival pigment ink on archival matte paper  
16 x 20 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

right:  
Marilyn Davenport (Houston, TX)  
*Ike: Shadow Cloud Two*, 2008  
Giclee, archival pigment ink on archival matte paper  
16 x 20 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



right:  
Gary Trinklein (Houston, TX)  
*Everything we had*, 2008  
Archival Inkjet Print  
13 x 18 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

below:  
Jeffrey Deemie (Houston, TX)  
*Ike debris and boats along Galveston*, 2008  
Archival Inkjet Print  
13 x 28 inches  
Courtesy of the artist





# Jason Reed BROWNFIELDS

Our personal and collective understanding of the natural world is seldom about the land by itself, but more often about the complex, tenuous relationship that we (humans) hold with nature. There is a flux of dominance that occurs between the natural world and human nature, a continuous fight that we initiate in our attempts to maintain superiority. But as our societal attention shifts, as it commonly does, we neglect, abandon, and eventually forget. We leave behind ruins that stand quietly as poignant memorials of the natural world moving on with little thought to our presence.

In this series, *Brownfields*, I am photographing spaces and places that hold a deep residual sense of the human past within the abandoned, natural present. Yet these specific brownfield sites exist not just as picturesque markers of the natural reclaiming the human over time. Because of their status as being hazardedly polluted and unfit for redevelopment, they also exist as markers of American social failure. The sites live as open and contaminated wounds on the land, built up through a cumulative process of both ignorant and apathetic utility.

This series works to uncover the overlooked, allowing the left behind objects to become active, powerful mediators of our relationship to the land and the natural world. The photographs are a means of engaging in wonder at the decisions that have been made in the past, leading us to question our present and future. Essentially, the *Brownfields* photographs function as a penetrating response to these places and moments that result from the intricate, and often problematic duality, present between human and nature.

— Jason Reed



Jason Reed (San Marcos, TX)  
*Pillar, Union Pacific Railyard, Bloomington, Illinois, 2005.*  
The Union Pacific Railyard in Bloomington, IL is still in use for major freight lines running across the country and into the central hub of nearby Chicago. However, the east side of the railyard holds an industrial past over 150 years old hidden in the natural overgrowth, as remnants of large manufacturing buildings and piles of industrial and railyard waste are spread across this multi-acre tract. It is assumed, based on its long history of locomotive and railcar manufacturing and its central role in regional shipping, that it has a complicated environmental status.



top:  
Jason Reed (San Marcos, TX)  
*Manufacturing Building, Former Prairieland Steel Company, Havana, Illinois, 2005.*  
This is the main manufacturing building at the site of the former Prairieland Steel Company in the small town of Havana, IL. The company manufactured steel wire and fabricated metal before shutting down in 2000 when demolition of the site began. Upon initial demolition major surface, soil, and groundwater was found to contain lead, arsenic, thallium, and VOCs, all of which are major health concerns. Currently no contaminants have seeped into the town's water, but tests are ongoing and the site is restricted to the public for major health concerns. Cleanup has been stated as ongoing for nearly 8 years.

right:  
Jason Reed (San Marcos, TX)  
*Overtaken Telephone Pole, Former Carondelet Coke Plant, St. Louis, Missouri, 2005.* The Carondelet Coke Plant is a 40-acre parcel of land that sits on the bank of the Mississippi River in south St. Louis. It functioned as a coal gasification/coke production plant for more than 80 years before being abandoned and eventually taken over by the city in 1989. It has sat idle since its abandonment and little information has been disclosed to the public about its contaminants although evidence shows that coke plants are some of the most carcinogenic types of industrial sites.





# Human Nature: Collaborations VI

by Rachel Hewlett with Linda Walsh

Eighteen students from nine Houston area high schools with prominent photography programs participated in *Collaborations VI*, a unique Houston Center for Photography educational outreach program that brings students together to collectively plan and execute an exhibition at HCP. Participants met biweekly with Education Coordinator Rachel Hewlett and community collaborator/local photographer Linda Walsh (see *spotlight*) to discuss exhibition planning, critique photographic work, participate in field trips, and listen to lectures from different community organizations.

*Collaborations VI* was tasked this year to create a theme that complements HCP's exhibition *Human Nature*: to tell a story about an important issue pertaining to today's environment. The subject of food quickly became a topic of interest. A seemingly easy topic, the particulars of our complex food chain are often overlooked. How much attention do you pay to the food in your life – what you eat, what you throw away, what is in it? Do you know where your food comes from? These were the questions the students were challenged to answer using photography.

We decided to deconstruct food and follow it from beginning to end. This involved farming, distribution, consumption, waste – from both business and cultural standpoints – and one's personal relationship with food. One topic discussed with David Crossley from Houston Tomorrow and Laurel Smith from Urban Harvest was the local versus organic debate. Which is better? How are they different? Both of these movements, which often overlap (eat local organic) fuel the ideas of sustainability and pose questions as we look at current situations.

In the interest of examining local sustainability practices, *Collaborations VI* explored farmers' markets featuring products from local farmers, growers, community gardens, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs). Houston alone has over six farmers' markets and numerous CSAs for vegetables and meat. Both farms we visited, Home Sweet Farm and Blue Heron Farm, are active participants in these markets and programs. Chuck Wemple from Houston-Galveston Area Council spoke about expanding the farmers' markets and their accessibility through grant programs for start-up agriculture businesses and the creation of an infrastructure program for the markets.

Houstonians are lucky to live in a climate where we could survive without importing much food. The city and surrounds have a year-round growing season, balanced rainfall, and large amounts of fertile land. Galveston Bay has a highly productive ecosystem with bountiful fish, shrimp, and oysters.


But what do you do if you live in the desert or have a five-month-long winter? Today's world of instant gratification has spoiled us, making it possible to get any fruit or vegetable year round. In the past, food out of season was only available through chemically treated, frozen, canned, or salted methods of preservation. Many stores including Wal-Mart are increasing their local inventory (Wal-Mart states that 20% of its food is local). But in most cases, you are shopping for a strawberry or banana that has been harvested halfway across the globe.

This leads to a discussion about food miles. How far has that strawberry gone to get to your hand? How much gas was spent transporting the strawberry from a farm in South America to the United States? The cost of oil impacts food prices, resulting in a smaller gap between the once



overpriced organic food and conventional food. How much time has gone by since the produce was picked until you are able to eat it? Many shipped foods are picked before they are ripe so they "travel well," are harder during shipping and are less likely to bruise.

Home Sweet Farm prides itself on picking the food no more than one day before market or distribution, providing the consumer with nutritious, tasty, fresh-picked, and in-season vegetables. During their goats' milking season, Blue Heron Farm sells fresh cheeses at the Bayou City Farmers Market.

As the program progressed, the students' work developed on a personal note through their examination of food's life cycle. Illustrating self-reflection, students came in with images taken from their own lives; food their parents cooked, places they had eaten and stores near their homes. Some have investigated the appearance and beauty of food through textures, shapes, and packaging while others explored sociological, political, and environmental aspects of farming and distribution. 

For more information about the organizations and farms that participated in *Collaborations VI* please see the side bar.



clockwise from opposite top left:

Olivia de Salve, HSPVA, *Apple*, 2008

Alex Goss, the Kinkaid School, *Still Life*, 2009

Maggie Nemetz, Episcopal High School, *Mujeres*, (triptych) 2008

Yamile Reyes, Chinquapin School, *Pink Pores*, 2009

Jody Ju, HSVPA, *Restaurant Bowls*, 2009

## Collaborations Participating Organizations

### Houston Tomorrow

Houston Tomorrow, formerly the Gulf Coast Institute, is a nonprofit organization founded in 1998 to explore urban issues and to participate in the discussion of growth in the Houston Gulf Coast Region. Its mission is to improve the quality of life in the Houston region.  
[www.houstontomorrow.org](http://www.houstontomorrow.org)

### Houston and Galveston Area Council

The Houston-Galveston Area Council is the region-wide voluntary association of local governments in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning region of Texas. Its service area is 12,500 square miles and contains more than 5.7 million people. H-GAC's mission is to serve as the instrument of local government cooperation, promoting the region's orderly development and the safety and welfare of its citizens. Key H-GAC governmental services include transportation planning, cooperative purchasing, homeland security, air and water quality planning, forecasting, and mapping. H-GAC also serves the region through workforce development, criminal justice, 9-1-1, trauma care planning, small business finance, and other programs contributing to the region's quality of life and economic competitiveness.  
[www.h-gac.com](http://www.h-gac.com)

### Blue Heron Farm

Blue Heron Farm is a small, family-owned goat dairy dedicated to producing high quality, healthful foods in a sustainable manner. Located on 10.5 acres in Field Store Community, Texas, BHF specializes in fresh goat cheeses that are available at Houston area farmer's markets and occasionally at select Houston area restaurants.  
[www.blueherontexas.com](http://www.blueherontexas.com)

### Home Sweet Farm

Home Sweet Farm (HSF) is a small family farm located off the Bluebonnet Trail in Washington County "the birth place of Texas." The Stufflebeams work full-time as a family on a 22 acre farm with a 110 acre lease. HSF is Certified Naturally Grown, and uses only natural techniques (no synthetic chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides) in growing over 100 varieties of vegetable and herbs. In addition to a monthly market at the farm on the third Saturday of the month, HSF supports itself through providing weekly supplies of produce to members of their CSA (Community Supported Agriculture).  
[www.homesweetfarm.com](http://www.homesweetfarm.com)

### Urban Harvest

Urban Harvest is a nonprofit organization that uses fruit, vegetable, and habitat gardens to improve the quality of life in the greater Houston area. These gardens serve to educate, strengthen community spirit, create therapeutic environments, and provide food and income. "We teach organic gardening techniques, help neighborhoods build successful community gardens, create outdoor classrooms at schools that teach core curricula, nutrition, and respect for the environment, provide fresh, locally grown food, and encourage responsible land use. Our work benefits all of us by improving food, diet, and health. It also builds engaging schools, neighborhood communities, and valuable local businesses that together sustain and improve our environment."  
[www.urbanharvest.org](http://www.urbanharvest.org)





## INTERVIEW

# JOSHUA LUTZ *Meadowlands* In conversation with Jörg M. Colberg

Joshua Lutz just had *Meadowlands* published, after spending ten years on the project. His book (and recent show) had me curious about the background of the project, and I approached Joshua to talk about it.

**Jörg Colberg:** You spent ten years on your project *Meadowlands*, which was recently published as a book and subject of a very successful exhibition at ClampArt, a body of work centered on what many people would probably think of as maybe one of the most unappealing pieces of land in the United States: A large piece of land, a lot of it swamp, that separates New Jersey from New York City. It's also the first bit of the U.S. that I ever got to see after my plane had landed at Newark Airport ten years ago. I remember thinking how ugly the area was, while the view of the New York City skyline just beyond that wasteland was one of the biggest thrills I had ever experienced. Why the Meadowlands?

**Joshua Lutz:** It is interesting to think about that relationship between New York City and the Meadowlands. How one piece of land becomes so built up while the other remains something of an industrial wasteland made up of swamps and landfill. I just finished a biography of Henry Hudson where they talk about the decision to create a settlement in what is now Manhattan and north of Manhattan, rather than just south in New Jersey because that area of the river was just too iced over. Living in Manhattan, the Meadowlands was really about finding these little places hidden within areas where I would not expect them to be.

All images pages 28-30:  
Joshua Lutz, *Untitled*, 2003-2008. From the series *Meadowlands*.  
Images courtesy of the artist and ClampArt, NY.

**JC:** Given that the Meadowlands were initially a way to escape the city, at what stage did you realize you actually had a real photography project? And when you arrived at that point did that change how you approached photography there?

**JL:** When I started photographing the Meadowlands I was really determined to somehow document this place. Somewhere along the way I began to rethink my relationship to the Meadowlands as well as some of the limitations of the document and of photography in general. That switch really changed my approach to what I thought the final product could be. It was liberating to think that I could use this place as a way of expressing myself and not be constricted with the burden of the document and representation. Once I felt that I had enough strong images that were working together and not repeating themselves, I started to think that this just might have legs beyond a box of prints. Generally I shoot for a few months without spending too much time looking at what I've got. I'll then take the next few months looking at the pictures, thinking about them, moving them around and trying to figure out what it was I was doing out there. Each time I take that break where I am thinking about the images and not shooting it changes my approach. I think these breaks have a much larger effect on how I approached photographing there than realizing any potential that the work might have.

**JC:** On your website you talk of the Meadowlands as a place that has to do with solitude and loneliness, and in many of the images the persons portrayed do indeed look a bit lost. Are loneliness and solitude things that you crave, given the craziness of New York City, or is there more to it?

**JL:** It is more about fear of those emotions than it is about craving them. I don't crave loneliness but I do seek solitude. Even though I like spending a lot of time alone I hate feeling lonely, it's a horrible feeling. The city is neither here nor there when it comes to loneliness. It is really what you make of it, the support group you surround yourself with. The city does make me want to escape the intensity of the crowds, sounds, and images. There have been countless days when I would run down to B&H to pick up film, get frustrated with the lines and just head into the Lincoln Tunnel and drive straight to the Meadowlands to escape.

**JC:** Do you think that, with the photos in *Meadowlands*, you also took a portrait of what solitude can mean? When I first saw the images I thought there was a bit of a slightly melancholic air to them – something that made the photography more interesting for me.

**JL:** In many ways I think that it can be a portrait of what solitude can mean although I never wanted it to be too melancholy. I really don't associate the two together.

**JC:** After ten years, the project was done. What made you decide it was done? Or maybe it would be more natural to ask why did it take a total of ten years – that's a long period of time.







**JL:** Frederick Sommer talked about how if he took one good image a year it was a successful year. It would be great to leave it at that, but really it is more about how my relationship to the Meadowlands grew. As I mentioned I became less interested in the Meadowlands as a documentary project and more interested in what we were discussing earlier – be it how this place can serve as a metaphor for issues such as loneliness and solitude or anything else for that matter. It's one of the reasons why I don't caption or title the images. I like the idea that people can bring whatever baggage they carry to these images and not be bogged down by the actual specifics. How did I know it was done? I think I just felt there was nothing more I wanted to say about it. At least for now.

**JC:** And what's next? How do you go about thinking about (or maybe already working on) a new project? A ten-year project seems like such a huge thing, doesn't that make taking on something new like another huge investment?

**JL:** I have been working on another project simultaneously with the Meadowlands. I am not really ready to talk about it, only because I am still trying to figure out exactly what it is I am doing. I am heading to Amsterdam to photograph the borders for a month. It's a commission but perhaps it will turn into something interesting. I have been looking at a lot of old maps of the city and trying to understand how it works and has evolved over the years. It will be exhibited in May at the Amsterdam City Archive Museum. 



CLUI, Offshore rig yards at Sabine Pass, 2008.

# THE WONDERS OF PETROLEUM GEOGRAPHY

MATTHEW COOLIDGE  
IN CONVERSATION  
WITH RACHEL HOOPER

**Rachel Hooper:** The Center for Land Use Interpretation's (CLUI) strangely beautiful exhibitions are designed primarily to get us thinking about the American landscape, and your organization takes its educational mission very seriously. You have chosen the oil industry in Texas as the subject of your study over the past year. What do you hope visitors will walk away with after seeing your exhibition? What sort of effect do you anticipate it will have?

**Matthew Coolidge:** We do not set out for a specific effect, at least not one that is describable. In general, I suppose if people are surprised, amazed, confused, astounded, inspired, overwhelmed, flabbergasted, blown away, intrigued, amused, bewildered, shocked, startled, encouraged, excited, or aroused, then we'll be happy.

**RH:** How do you strike a balance between recording your personal response to the landscape and producing work that can be interpreted in so many ways by your viewers? Does this affect the way you frame your photographs, for example?

**MC:** Working for the Center, following the process of structuring perception that the Center employs, helps me to see better, wider, and to be more open-minded and inclusive. I find that if I have a knee-jerk reaction to something, based on a personal bias, recalling the Center's larger mission helps me examine this impulsive reaction, and I often find that it is simplistic, and even ego-driven. Operating within the structure of an organization helps to "de-personalize" the work that I or others do. As with any institution, there is an organizational methodology with rules, form and language. That's the whole point of an institution: to provide an institutional, as opposed to personal, point of view. The CLUI's





*The Center for Land Use Interpretation is a research organization interested in understanding the nature and extent of human interaction with the Earth's surface. The CLUI embraces a multidisciplinary approach to fulfilling this mission and organizes a series of exhibitions, lectures, residencies, and public tours at regional centers in California, Utah, and New York. In January 2008, the CLUI established a field office on Buffalo Bayou in Houston and began an intense exploration of southeast Texas as artists-in-residence with the University of Houston Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts. The CLUI's research culminated in Texas Oil: Landscape of an Industry, an exhibition on display at Blaffer Gallery, the art museum of the University of Houston from January 17 to March 29, 2009.*

CLUI, A detail of the Texas City complex that includes BP, Valero, and Marathon refineries, 2008.

particular rules and methods are what defines its brand. These conventions include a type of documentary photography and a type of presentation of image and text. In order to make images that are useful for this format, there are general guidelines that we use. There is an ideal "CLUI Archive Image," and that image is clear and focused on the subject. It allows the thing depicted to dominate, and not the mechanics of the image-making, or the cleverness of the photographer, or lack thereof. The image needs to be transparent as possible to be most useful in different cases. That's one reason we use video more and more. With a time-based component, it can be more like seeing, and less about imagery.


**RH:** Where have you travelled in the course of your research for *Texas Oil*? Is there a place that you found particularly compelling?

**MC:** We have been all over the state, from El Paso to Brownsville to Amarillo, to Dallas, and everywhere in-between. From West Texas oil towns like Odessa, Kermit, Andrews, Denver City, and Iraan, to the petrochemical processing centers of the Gulf Coast, like Freeport, Corpus Christi, Port Arthur, and Pasadena. We have scoured the state as much as we can. No way to choose favorites, but some of the great oil-related places include the four-mile-wide refinery complex at Texas City, and ExxonMobil's stealth headquarters building in Irving. The Permian Basin Petroleum Museum in Odessa is one of the most interesting museums in America. The outdoor display of twenty or so different oil pump jacks is sublime. And the Ocean Star Offshore Energy Museum in Galveston is fantastic too. As is the Texas Energy Museum in Beaumont, where they have things like an immersive display where

you are reduced to 4 inches in size to travel through the refining process. And the Spindletop-Gladys City Boomtown Museum has a recreated gusher that operates on demand. Can't beat that!

**RH:** But we've been hearing a lot these days about ending our dependence on oil and finding alternative energy sources. Do you feel at all like you are documenting the end of an era – the twilight of the age of oil?

**MC:** Not the end by any means, but the apogee, perhaps. This may be as big as it gets, but I think the end is a long way off, if ever. I think we will continue to use petrochemicals for a long time, as there is still a lot of oil, and the range of products made from it is pervasive. If we use less in vehicles, which I think most people

agree is a good thing, then there is more oil to use in other things. Who knows what sort of uses and materials are left to dream up with this amazing resource. I don't need to tell you the industry is huge, and very profitable. It will adapt. Like most of us do. 

*Matthew Coolidge is founder and director of the Center for Land Use Interpretation and serves as project director, photographer, and curator for its exhibitions. He lectures widely in the United States and Europe on contemporary landscape matters and is a faculty member in the Curatorial Practice Program at the California College of the Arts, where he teaches the class Nowhere.*



STAN GAZ

# Sites of Impact:

## Meteorite Craters Around the World

Spectacular aerial views of some of the Earth's most memorable craters are featured in Stan Gaz's monograph *Sites of Impact: Meteorite Craters Around the World*, published by Princeton Architectural Press in 2009. With essays by Christian Koeberl and Robert Silberman, the book couples art with science, providing viscerally engaging imagery supported by indexical information and details on meteorite research. Gaz's black and white depictions of these seemingly extraterrestrial concave landforms span several continents. While some images are referential to the forms themselves,

the series includes constructs of blackened skies and up-close abstractions that have a tactile quality akin to the artist's earlier ash series. The narrative points to new and diverging theories on how the shock of meteoritic impact to the Earth's crust and mantle influences both geological and biological evolution.

— Madeline Yale



top:  
Stan Gaz, *Wolfe Creek, Western Australia, 19°11'S, 127°48'E*.  
Courtesy of the artist.

left:  
Stan Gaz, *Meteor Crater, Arizona, United States, 35°02'N, 111°01'W*.  
Courtesy of the artist.



# Focus on

**FOTO  
FEST  
2010  
BIENNIAL**

**FotoFest, a non-profit organization in Houston, transforms the city every two years with a month devoted to photography. The event is multi-faceted: FotoFest curates several thematic shows and exhibits photography at more than 150 participating spaces, including HCP. Hundreds of photographers take part in portfolio reviews and workshops at the Meeting Place. The upcoming FotoFest Biennial launches on March 12, 2010.**

**HCP's Madeline Yale conversed with FotoFest co-founder and Artistic Director Wendy Watriss to learn a bit more about the 2010 event.**

**Madeline Yale:** The theme of *Contemporary U.S. Photography* is an interesting choice, especially in consideration of the previous Biennial theme *China* and the international caliber of artists, reviewers, and photography enthusiasts drawn to the event. Why did you select this theme?

**Wendy Watriss:** Since the 1930s and particularly after World War II, U.S. artists employing photography (or artists from abroad living in the U.S.) have had a global impact in the field. In the context of world history, I would describe the U.S. as a rich and relatively recent hybrid culture that has been shaped by a very particular history and set of political, cultural, and economic circumstances. Not surprisingly, artistic forms of expression in the U.S. have developed particular characteristics, and these characteristics have found a good platform in photography. At a time when there is renewed interest in the politics and culture of the U.S., it seems appropriate to look at one of best known forms of cultural expression in the U.S.

**MY:** You've done something different this Biennial by inviting several curators to curate four central FotoFest shows. Can you tell us how you arrived at that decision and can you give us a sneak preview of what we will see?

**WW:** Most of the Biennials since 1992 have been conceived and curated by FotoFest's founders, myself and Fred Baldwin, in consultation with FotoFest's Art Board. During this time, we have shown individual exhibitions done by outside curators and we have commissioned new works by artists, but 2010 is the first time we have dedicated the central part of the Biennial entirely to outside curators.

The decision to do this is based on two factors. From the beginning, programs were designed to provide a platform for the discovery of important but little known artists. At the same time, we wanted to give more visibility to curators and curatorship. Why? Because curators are so important in determining what art work, and which artists, gain public visibility and recognition.

The invited curators are: Gilbert Vicario, Curator of the Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa and former Assistant Curator of Latin American Art and Latino Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston;

Charlotte Cotton, Creative Director for London Galleries at the National Media Museum in the U.K., and Associate Curator Edward Robertson at Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Natasha Egan, Associate Director and Curator, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College, Chicago; Aaron Schuman, editor and co-founder

of *Seesaw*, an avant-garde online journal of photography, and an independent curator and critic with a strong commitment to U.S. photography. Together, they represent some of the leading voices in contemporary photographic art today and they will bring a cross-cultural perspective to the Biennial.

Curators were asked to choose U.S.-born artists or U.S.-based artists whose careers have taken shape in the mid- to late- 1990s or later and are still producing strong work. The curators' four exhibitions explore the emergence of a vernacular "language" in U.S. photography as it looks at urban and rural U.S. culture and different kinds of relationships between people; the character of regional culture and how it is manifest in the work of younger Southern California artists; and how contemporary photography is intertwined with performance, video, and digital animation.

**MY:** One of my favorite shows during the Biennial is the *Discoveries of the Meeting Place*. Can you tell us how the selections are made and any bodies of work you would like to mention?

**WW:** Perhaps it's one of your favorite shows because it is always serendipitous and unpredictable. We started *Discoveries of the Meeting Place* in 1996 to amplify the opportunities that the Meeting Place portfolio reviews offer participating artists. Each biennial we ask 10 reviewers from the Meeting Place to select one to three artists they have "discovered" at the Meeting Place and find particularly interesting. The 2010 *Discoveries of the Meeting Place* is very diverse. Among the 10 artists, some artists are working with documentary subjects related to war and human rights, and others focus on the aesthetics of objects, their form and function.

**MY:** There are several interesting symposia and workshops during the Biennial. Can you tell us about them?

**WW:** Thank you for asking. I think the Workshops and the Curatorial Forums will be interesting for everyone. The Workshops focus on new online media and how to get the most out of it. The first Workshop, *Beyond Print, How to Get Your Work to the Global Art Market* on March 16, looks at the latest online media tools. The second Workshop, *Multi-media Storytelling – Narrative and Conceptual Art* on March 21, is led by internationally known multi-media expert Brian Storm, Emmy award winner and founder of Media Storm. Both workshops will offer discounted fees to HCP members for \$50.

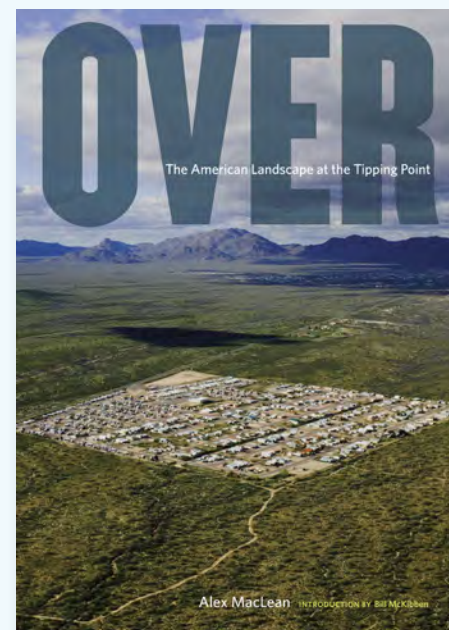
The Curatorial Forums are free and examine curatorial practices and the role of curators in determining what art we see and why. The first, *Curating Contemporary Photography*, will be held March 28. The second, *Curating Contemporary Art in Texas*, on April 8, will look at curatorial practice in Texas, linking photography to other visual art forms.

**MY:** Wendy, I look forward to joining the festivities in March 2010! In the meantime, watch for updated information on [www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org).

## BOOK REVIEW

# Over: The American Landscape at the Tipping Point

by Jacinda Russell



*Over: The American Landscape at the Tipping Point*  
Alex S. MacLean  
Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 2008  
336 pp. \$45  
ISBN-10: 0810971453

For the past three decades Alex S. MacLean has flown his Cessna Skylane 182 over the American landscape, photographing human activity and the environmental concerns that arise. MacLean is interested in the abstract patterns that emerge as "reflections of human desire scattered across the landscape." The overriding themes of the book are diminishing natural resources, overpopulation, the need for greener energy consumption, and the changes that must occur in order to support future generations.

Where will the 400 million people predicted to inhabit the USA in 2040 live? Both MacLean and Bill McKibben, author of the book's introduction, believe that the resolution is to become a more connected society – less McMansions and more semi-detached homes sharing common rooms for dining and recreation; decreased dependency on fossil fuels; living in denser communities with public transportation; more solar panels and wind turbines.


The text is often more engaging than the photographs. Facts like the average

American home doubled in size between 1970 and 2005 or extensive examples on why New York City is the greenest location in the USA are more memorable than many of the images. Throughout the 335 pages of the book, the larger photographs are more appealing than the triptychs crammed on one page. Though emphasizing the element of patterns, they are often redundant.

Nothing about MacLean's photographs breaks new ground in the field. An image of the Prestonwood Baptist church in Plano, Texas records the expanse of empty, beige parking lots directly referencing Ed Ruscha's photographic series *Thirty-four Parking Lots in Los Angeles*. The location of the oil spills interested Ruscha (indicating the most sought after spaces) but where the artistic meets the sociological study is absent in MacLean's image. Turn the page of *Over* and witness a Waltham, Massachusetts parking lot filled with contaminated runoff and one will find the most abstract interpretation of pattern versus politics in the book. I kept hoping to find more images like this but they were few and far between.

Andreas Gursky's digital manipulation of cars parked near a port in Salerno, Italy is reminiscent of MacLean's bird's eye view of white cars in Portland, Oregon, rows of RVs in Sun City, Arizona, or solar electricity generating systems in Daggett, California. MacLean's series also brings to mind Emmet Gowin's *Changing the Earth*

aerial views, Richard Misrach's portrayal of human activity in *Desert Cantos*, and Bill Owen's documentation of *Suburbia*. There are some photographic jewels in the chapter devoted to sea-level rise: shifting sand covering parking lots and picnic shelters (upon quick glance the latter could easily be mistaken for the great pyramids of Giza) in Santa Rosa Island, Florida; trucks snaking their way through mountains of cars and boats inhabiting junkyards in New Orleans, Louisiana and Gulfport, Mississippi post Hurricane Katrina.

At the end of his essay, McKibben hopes that these photographs might "help give us the insight to make the changes we must." And do they? Not without the accompanying facts that drive the point home over and over again. 

Alex S. MacLean, Galveston, TX. Harborwalk is a planned waterfront community built on wetlands on the western coast of Galveston Bay. In the coming century this land will be some of the most vulnerable on the Texas coast to sea-level rise, yet developers continue to construct low-lying homes to cash in on waterfront property values. October 2008 Reviewer's Note, these houses were amazingly not damaged during Hurricane Ike.





# spotlight

For the first installment of *spotlight*, HCP Member and Houston-based photographer, Linda Walsh, presents an image from her recent series on Houston's community gardens.

Linda's photographs are featured in *Growing Good Things to Eat in Texas: Profiles of Organic Farmers and Ranchers across the State*, published by Texas A&M Press (2009).



Linda Walsh (Houston, TX)  
*Sprouted Broccoli*, 2006  
C-Print, 20 x 24 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

My current project is a visual exploration of Houston's community gardens. Since childhood I have been involved in gardening and I have also tended a backyard garden after moving to Houston in the mid seventies. It brings hope and beauty, and it is a refuge.

Several years ago, I was introduced to community gardens in the Houston area through Urban Harvest, a non-profit organization dedicated to building and supporting community gardens. They have developed over 130 gardens in the Houston area. The gardens help educate school children and feed the hungry, and simultaneously, they provide citizens a place to grow their own food and touch the earth. Community gardens cultivate our individual experiences with our own limited gardens to expand them exponentially and beneficially; as a way to grow food for ourselves and others, provide habitat and beauty, and build a crucial sense of community.

These urban gardens also move us toward new ways of being in the world, ways that can help solve some of our country's most vexing issues: the hunger that comes from limited food availability, the food contamination that comes with industrial agriculture and the energy efficiency that comes with local growing.

— Linda Walsh

**INTERNATIONAL DISCOVERIES II**  
FOTOFEST EXHIBITION

November 5–December 19, 2009

Alejandro Cartagena  
Minstrel Kuik Ching Chieh  
Christine Laptuta  
Rizwan Mirza  
Takeshi Shikama

Vee Speers  
Kurt Tong  
MiMi Youn  
Wei Bi

[www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org)

**FOTO  
FEST  
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CONTEMPORARY  
U.S. PHOTOGRAPHY



## FOTOFEST WORKSHOPS

### Beyond Print

Using New Media to Reach the Global Art Market  
Tuesday, March 16, 2010

### MediaStorm

Storytelling with Photographs, Video and Audio  
Sunday, March 21, 2010

[www.fotofest.org/biennial2010/workshops](http://www.fotofest.org/biennial2010/workshops)



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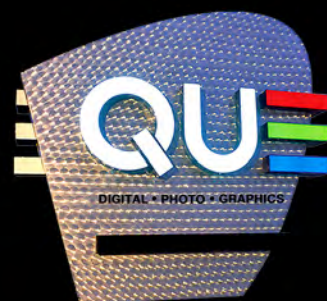


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