

DESERT
NOW



DESERT NOW

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STEVE TURNER

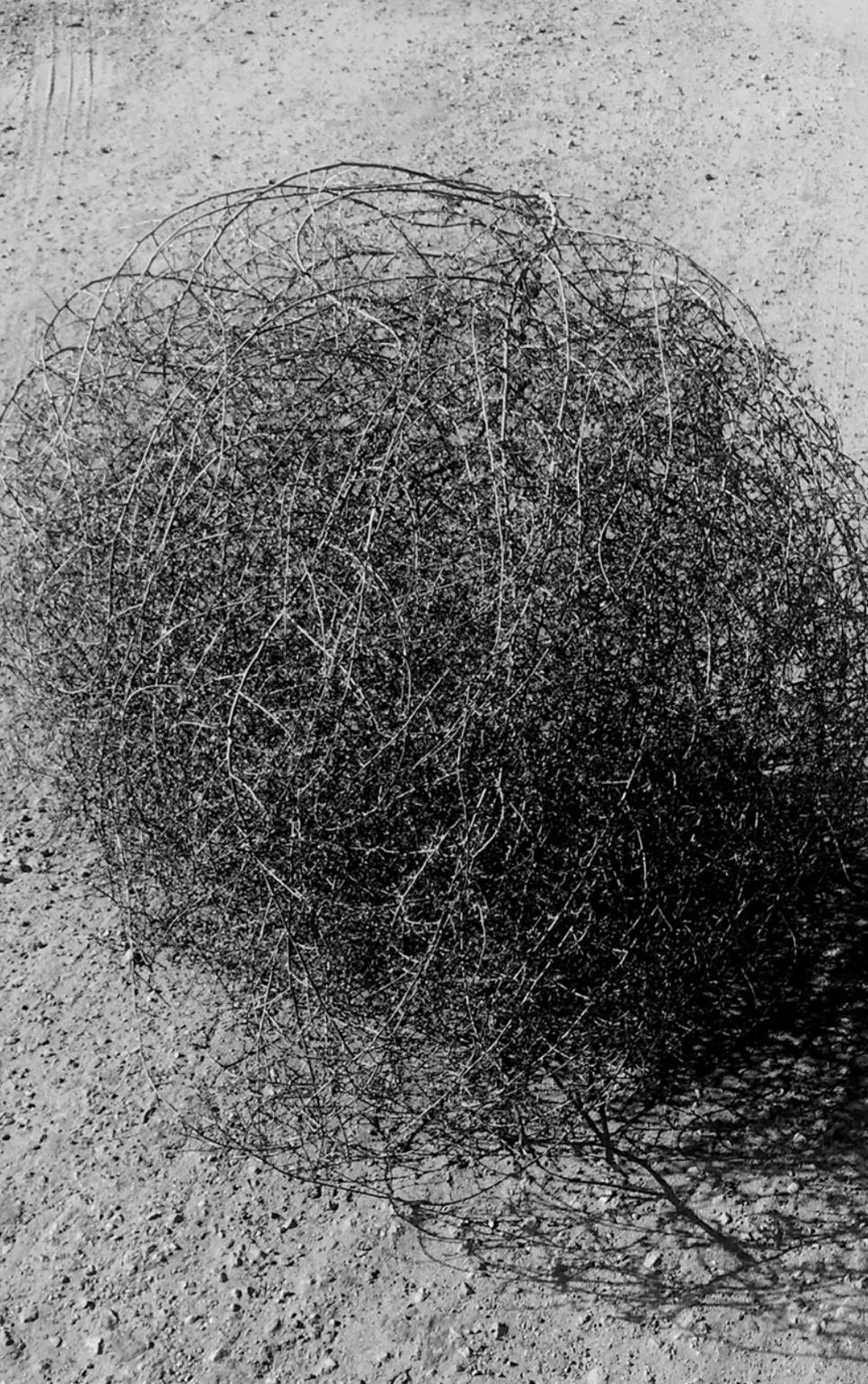
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Welcome to Desert Now – the para-museum of the American wilderness.

Some people get annoyed with those who talk about the imminent end of the world. Nevertheless, the current ecological situation is increasingly dire. The wild is threatened by rapid population growth and development. In the future, will we only experience it in museums?

In every museum of the desert there are differing aesthetic interpretations of nature, conveyed not only through didactic texts, but also, through architecture and scenography. The presentation may range in tenor, from that of an overbearing schoolmaster to varieties of infotainment, yet no matter the tone, such visions reflect the tragi-comedy that is inherent in attempting to represent—and relate to the non-human world.





JOE THE DEAD

Across the dusty mesa and down Route 66, bouncing along the scrub or skipping over dry grass, the salsola tragus, or tumbleweed, is always on the road. How best to harness this freewheeling Western spirit? Exercise your imagination.

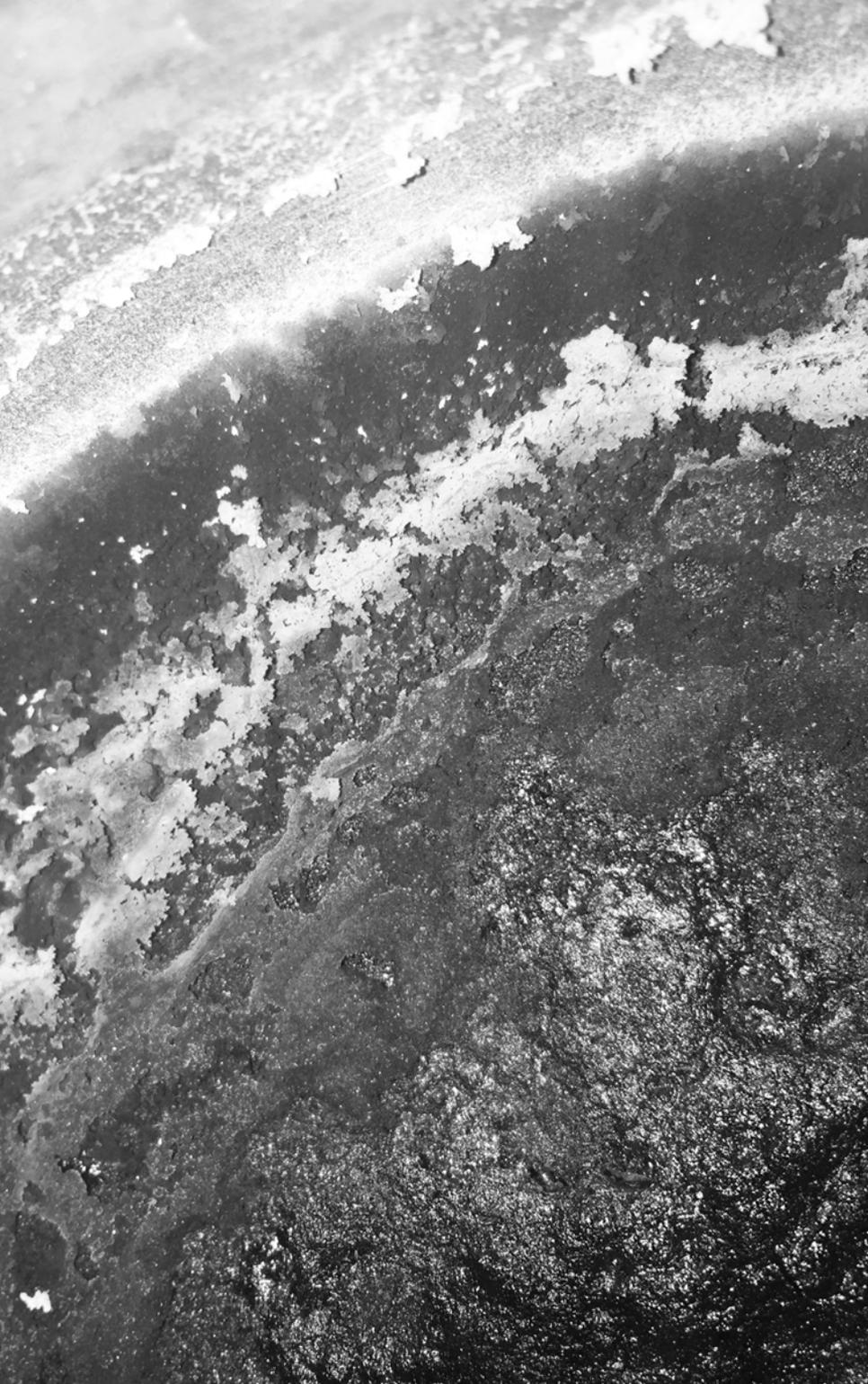


DESERT OF THE REEL

Because one only has a few minutes to reach the audience, it is essential that images and language be simple and vivid. Make every frame and word count, and make the message crystal clear. The content should have the right “hooks”—images or words that grab and hold attention. It’s important not to overload the viewer with too many different messages. Just go for the jugular.

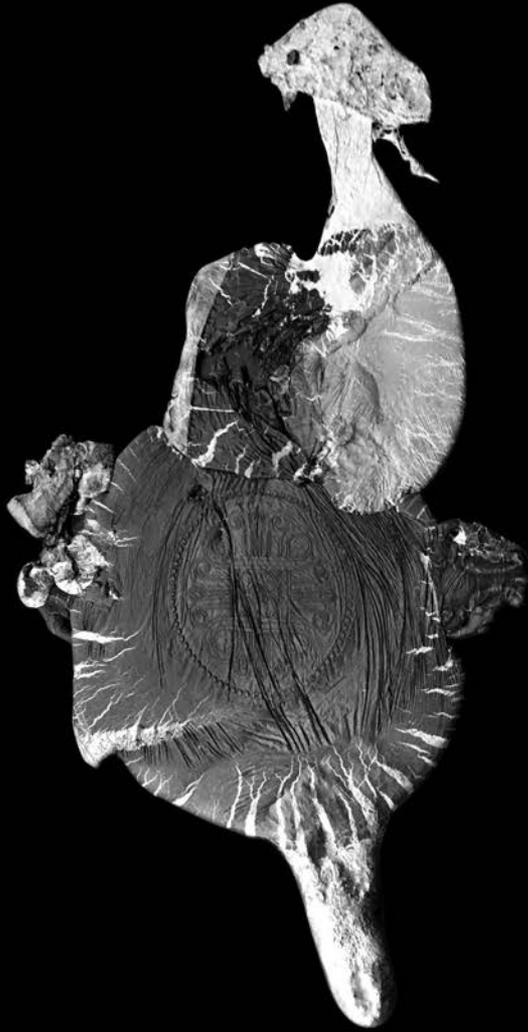
Desert of the Reel. Video, 20 mins, 38 sec. (still)

Originally titled *The Town that Never Was* and produced by the Bradbury Science Museum, Los Alamos in 2012, it documents the history of the Manhattan Project between 1942-1945.



INNER CRYSTAL

If man is the measure of all things, we would do well to understand him better. For suffusing his physiology, trickling in and out of his most obvious self-image, are flows of matter, and even alien organisms. Enough iron in the blood for a doornail, a shifting mineralogical landscape in the bones and soft tissues—to say nothing of the seething mass of microorganisms in his urinary tract, stomach, mouth and nose—man is a geological phenomenon, and a microcosmos. Claims otherwise are just pissing in the wind.



THE TOWN THAT NEVER WAS

Prometheus is head chef in the kitchen of national insecurity. In a super-charged furnace fuelled by split atoms, your spectacular just deserts are being prepared. Losing your appetite? Not every country possesses this jealously guarded recipe but, half a century since its spectacular creation, the whole world is being served. If this is difficult to digest, it remains, nevertheless, food for thought.



OPERATIONS

Plan, section, or exploded view? Even after surveying the scene, only a fragmentary picture is forthcoming.



CLEAN UP – PAINT UP – FIX UP

Cleanliness is next to godliness, or, at the very least, part of an adequate civil defence scheme. According to not-so-recent pseudo-science, brought to you by a national consortium of domestic-use chemical manufacturers in league with high-ranking military brass, a fresh lick of paint and a well-kept home fare much better against the ravages of a thermo-nuclear explosion than a cluttered, unkempt one. Seeing is, of course, believing - so watch the film and draw your own conclusions. As you'll no doubt agree, it's time to get your house in order.

Clean Up – Paint Up – Fix Up. Video, 12 mins, 11 sec. (still)

Originally titled *The House in the Middle* and produced by the National Clean Up-Paint Up-Fix Up Bureau with the cooperation of the Federal Civil Defence Administration in 1954.

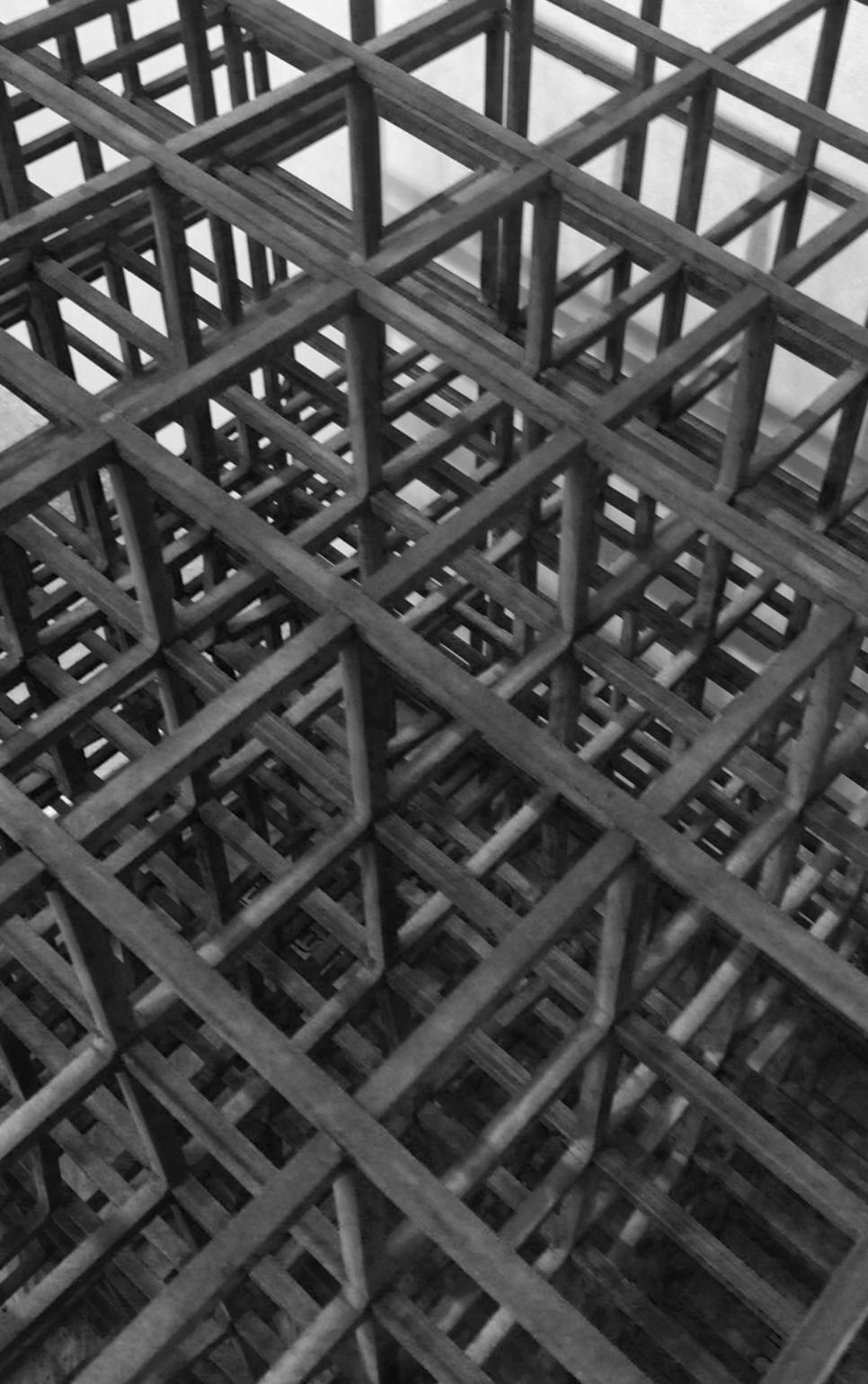


THE HOUSE IN THE MIDDLE

Old paintings develop craquelure, like lines on wrinkled faces. Just as beating sun speeds the latter, atomic shock is a premature cause of aging. Two out three domestic scenes will not be conserved at all. Only the odd one out, the special case, will stand the test of time.

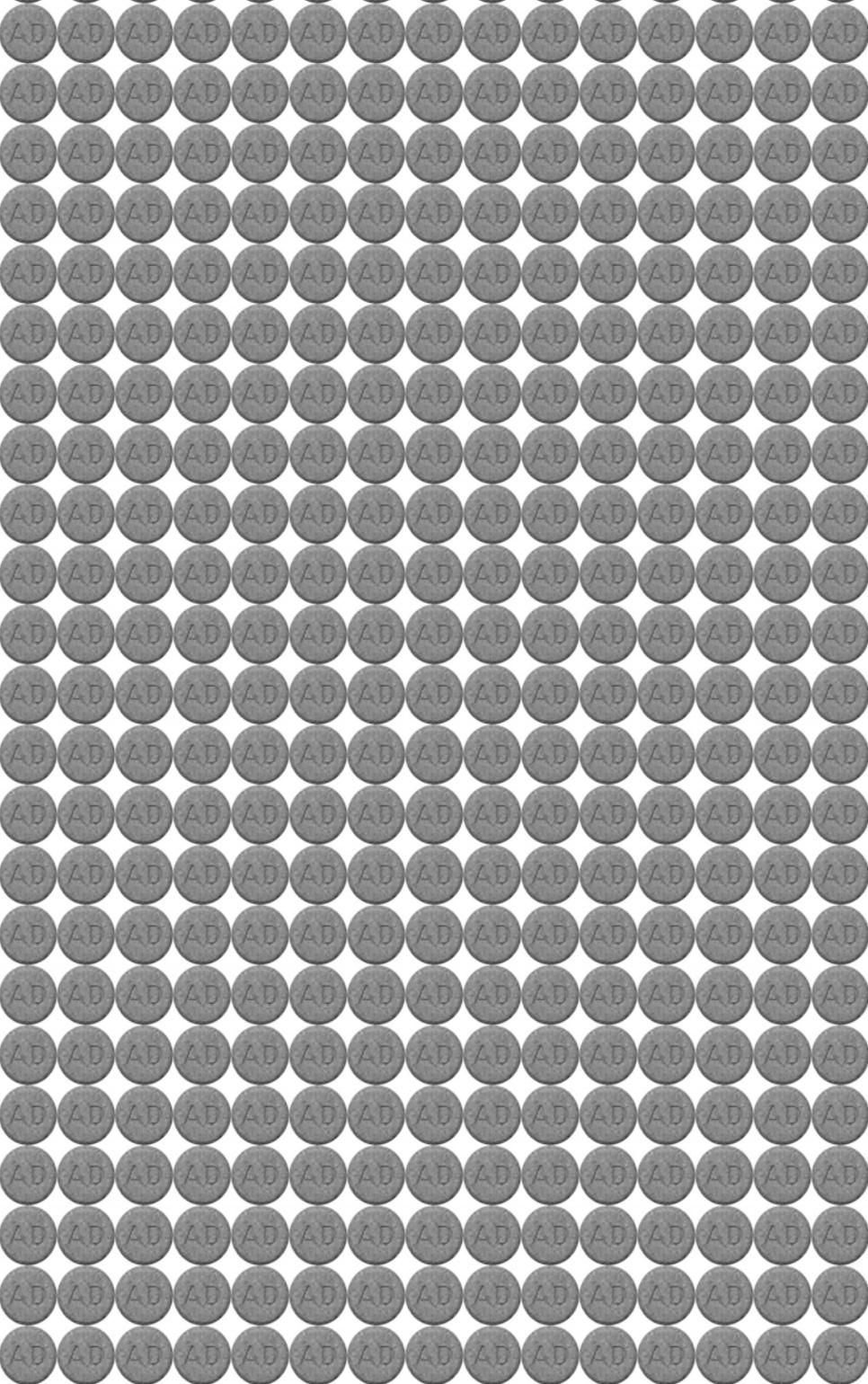
The House in the Middle, 1954. Video, 12 mins, 11 sec. (still)

Produced by the National Clean Up-Paint Up-Fix Up Bureau with the cooperation of the Federal Civil Defence Administration.



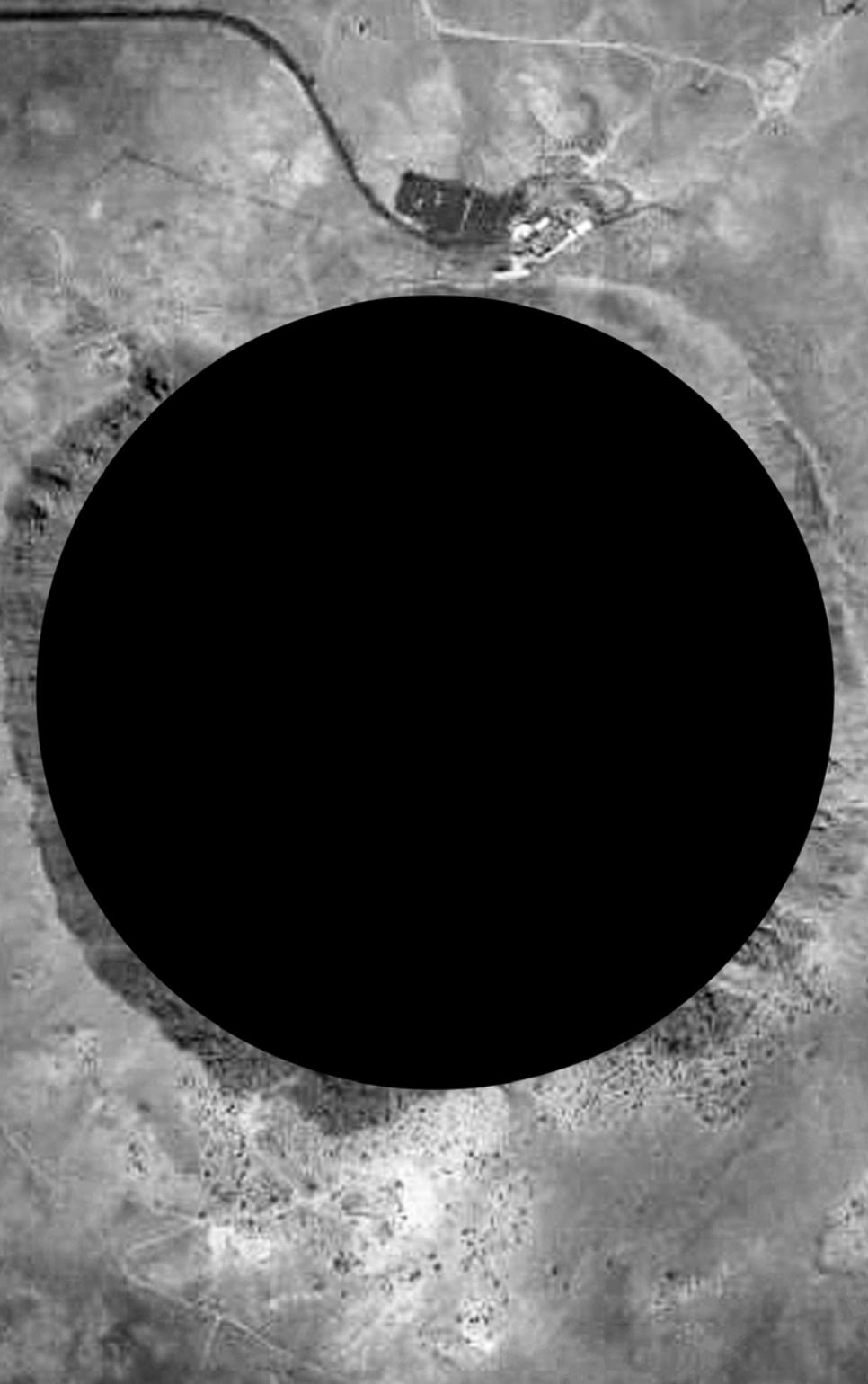
ENTROPOSCENIC

The clean lines and right angles of the cube: deduction and algorithm as modernist muse. The final iconography of closed-system thinking admits no distortion—until entropy shakes loose its internal mechanisms and chaos rules again. One might leave such a process to the general effects of erosion, corrosion, atmospheric pressure and the like, but who has time to wait?



BOMBSPLINTER

The general theory of relativity holds that time slows down when you speed up. Hurling through space, by way of automobile or methamphetamine, heart ticks quickening, it is obvious that some things are built for the ages—like the pyramids. Other things are only temporary confection.



CRATERS

Every 10 million years or so, an asteroid, at least a mile wide, punches into the earth creating an immense dust cloud that blocks out the sun, precipitating an ice age like the one that ended the global reign of reptiles. More often, smaller impacts muddy only the local sky, and life goes on with merely surface scars to bear witness. But in our portion of the millennia, far more frequently, the thunderbolt issues from the hand of man. Hovering above the here and now, every crater looks alike.



EL CAPITAN - THE CLEAREST WAY TO THE UNIVERSE

An unspoiled landscape constitutes its own sort of exhibition. For those who cannot be there in person, a picture is worth a thousand dollars. Emanating from liquid crystal display and framed in brushed aluminum (designed by the Apple Corporation in California and Made in China), the peaks of Yosemite are the promised savior of your screen. Turn on your computer and see for yourself. Does it help? As John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club and pioneering figure in the national park movement once said, "The home is a most dangerous place. Try, then, the mountain passes." Pretty convincing. It's hard to argue with Muir, the gentleman outdoorsman with the white beard of a sage— one part the mystic poet Shelley, one part the utopian naturalist Thoreau. So, pull up a stump and step into the diorama.

El Capitan – The Clearest Way to the Universe, 2016. UV print on sintra board, MDF and wood (detail)



ZAPPELHEINRICH

Whereas nature gestates at a snail's pace, sometimes man offers to play midwife, delivering a quicker and more bountiful harvest. Though quite unexpected, years of atomic testing have accelerated the function of fertility. Vibrations shake the seeds from flora that catch the Southwestern winds, sowing further reaches of the dunes. Today, across its vast sands, the desert bristles with cacti. The history of the bomb writ large upon the landscape: war games, unlikely sire to a bloom of prickly children.



ESCAPE VELOCITY

“Let’s Go!” demanded Marinetti, and he was answered by Gagarin. After the necessary sacrifices of a dog and monkey, the brave cosmonaut would cry the same before climbing aboard Vostok and blasting into orbit. “Fuck Earth!” states the owner of the world’s most successful private space enterprise, as he implores investors to fund a human colony upon the Red Planet.

I JUST WON'T SLEEP, I DECIDED

Tripping highways and dust. The desert landscape does not just speak for itself – a chorus of photographs and visitor centers modulate its tone.



Images from the artists' research road trip, November 2015

Clockwise from top right: Griffith Park Observatory, Los Angeles; National Solar Observatory, Sacramento Peak, Alamogordo, New Mexico; Kennedy Space Center, Titusville, Florida; Space Center Houston; Very Large Array, San Agustin, New Mexico; New Mexico Museum of Space History, Alamogordo, New Mexico; Meteor Crater, Winslow, Arizona; Petrified Forest National Park Visitor Center, Petrified Forest, Arizona; Bradbury Science Museum, Los Alamos, New Mexico; White Sands Missile Range, White Sands, New Mexico



ATROCITY EXHIBITION

All shook up at the prospect of leaving without a keepsake? First, the feeling hits home. Later, the dust settles.

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Thank you to the Team at PyroSmart México

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**DESERT
WOW**