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Art

Reviews

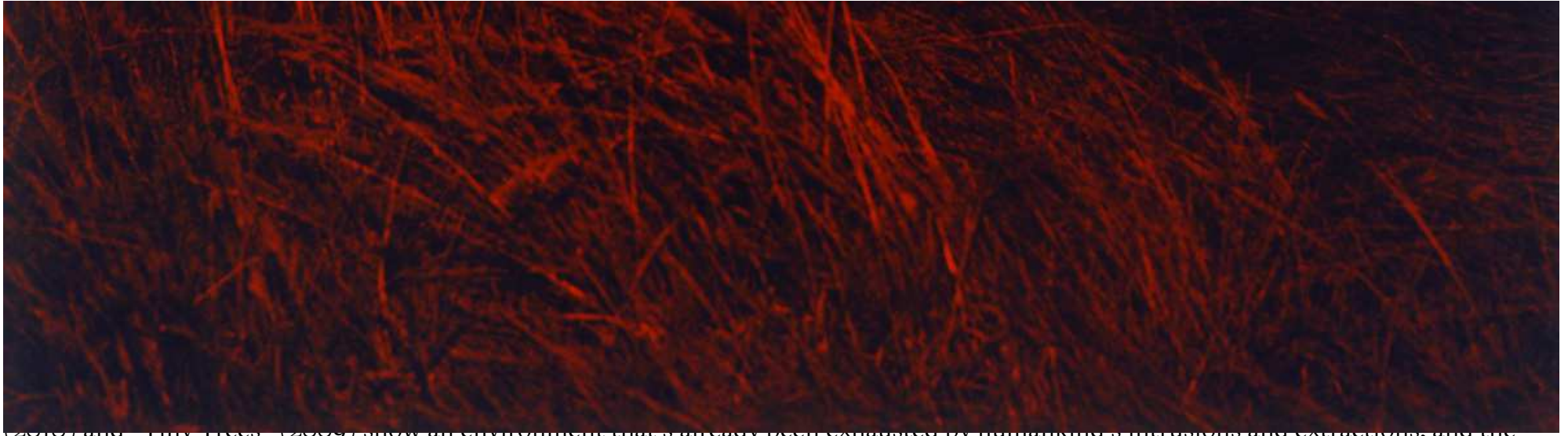
Views From the End of Human Expansion

Five Southern California Views taps into the mythology of the West as an expanse for the imagination, only to decenter the human presence.



Natalie Haddad 22 hours ago





(2010) and *Thin Trees* (2009) show an environment that's already been exhausted by humankind's intrusions and extractions, and the photo installation "Sisyphean Act I" (2010) shows a human exhausted by the never-ending cycle of responsibilities. The mid-century modern home that just barely peeks out above the brush in Jude's "Pasadena, CA" (2007) is an even more insidious portrait of encroaching culture.

Photos like these clearly speak to California's ongoing battles between environmentalists and big business, and to the battles for space between the monied elite and the shrinking middle class and other displaced communities. (LA native Fernandez has focused much of her work on migration, labor, and Mexican-American identity.)

But conquering nature also means conquering solitude, and much of the work in *Five Southern California Views* speaks precisely to the anxiety that underlies human relationships with both open space and the absence of others. The tight focus on glowing light switches screwed to a white wall of what might be a motel room in Jude's "Pismo Beach, CA" (2007) creates a claustrophobic atmosphere intensified by the banality of the space. Instead of the coastal town's idyllic landscape, Jude traps viewers in generic non-place that resonates today with the pandemic's isolation panic.



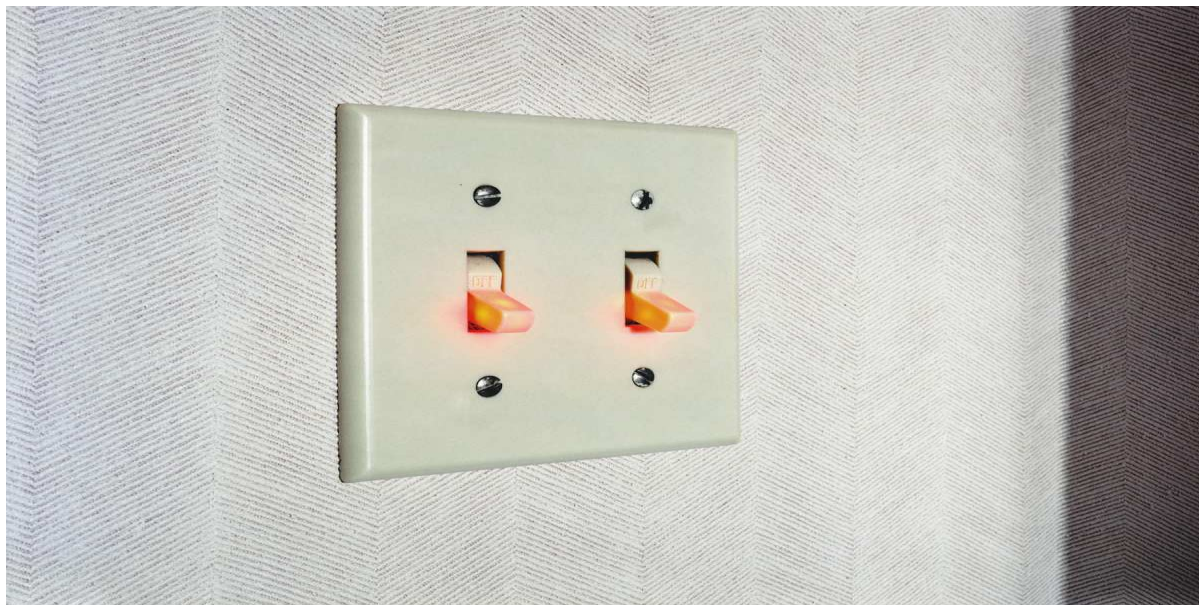
Christina Fernandez, "End of Road" (2010), archival pigment print, 24 inches x 30 inches (photo Natalie Haddad/Hyperallergic)

At the other end of the spectrum is Ruwedel's "Moving Rock #8 (The Racetrack)" (2000/2021), where a few rocks are the only indigenous inhabitants of an inhospitable desert landscape, or Heyliger's "VVVVVVVVVVVVVV (032802F3)" (2021), a glistening sheen of ocean that overwhelms the one tiny stick figure of a person.

The photos that comprise Divola's *Five Prints Portfolio* (1987) are the exhibition's eeriest works, and the ones that most evocatively portray people as the most lost of all animals. In "House," a toy house sits askew amid a web of branches, a tiny intrusion on the natural world, bathed in artificial red light; in "Desire," a bust of a horned animal on a tall plinth, saturated in a deeper red, beckons. "Flying/Falling" centers on a bright pink human silhouette flailing above a pit of neon brush. The image invokes all kinds of strange phenomena, from alien abductions to the legend of hijacker **D.B. Cooper**. However it's interpreted, the person is at the mercy of external forces.

At the midpoint of Divola's series is "Wolf"; in its middle is a red silhouette of the animal against a darkened landscape. The artist has focused on lone dogs in other series: *Stray Dogs* (1990/92) and *Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert* (1996–98). What all the images share is an outsider's gaze on an animal that refuses the lens of human projection — that refuses to be lost on the streets or in the dark of night, or to

be scared off by solitude. Even more than the multifaceted character of the region, *Five Southern California Views* captures the sense of human disorientation or estrangement that the animals resist. It captures the dead end of human expansion.



Ron Jude, "Pismo Beach, CA" (2007), archival inkjet print, 29 inches x 22 3/8 inches



Christina Fernandez, "Sisyphean Act I" (2010), installation, 3 archival pigment prints, a triptych, free-hanging; each panel 24 inches x 170 inches (photo Natalie Haddad/Hyperallergic)



Mark Ruwedel, "Moving Rock #8 (The Racetrack)" (2000/2021), archival pigment print, 44 inches x 50 3/4 inches framed



John Divola, "Flying/Falling" from *Five Prints Portfolio* (1987), vintage dye-transfer print, 20 inches x 20 inches



CJ Heyliger, "VVVVVVVVVVVVVV (032802F3)" (2021), archival inkjet print, 32 inches x 40 1/2 inches

Five Southern California Views continues at Gallery Luisotti (432 South Alameda Street, Arts District, Los Angeles) through April 8. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.

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