

October 31, 2023, Artillery Magazine Gallery Rounds

Julian Charrière, *Buried Sunshine*

Sean Kelly Los Angeles

September 14 - November 4, 2023

by Jody Zellen



Julian Charrière is a Berlin-based artist whose work often focuses on nature, ecology and the changing climate. For his first Los Angeles exhibit at Sean Kelly, “Buried Sunshine”, Charrière was drawn to the subject of oil and researched the history and photographed the oil fields that dot the L.A. landscape. He has beautifully crafted these investigations into a seductive, mixed media installation that includes the spectacular video projection *Controlled Burn* (2022) and a new series of heliographs titled *Buried Sunshines Burn*.

*Controlled Burn* is a 32-minute video that cycles through the sights and sounds of numerous implosions, flames and fireworks that fill the darkness of the night sky. Shot from above by drone, the footage documents ambiguous and quasi-military—yet now abandoned—spaces such as the cooling towers, rocket silos and oil platforms that are surrounded by ricocheting projectiles. Amidst thunderous roars, attentive viewers who look carefully may suddenly realize that what they are seeing is impossible and that Charrière is projecting the footage at varying speeds and often in reverse, making the footage bewildering. Amidst the beauty and the spectacle, there is an atmosphere of dread and foreboding intensified by the roars of the accompanying soundtrack.

Along the walls in the darkened gallery space are heliographs (photographs on steel plates) of scenes shot on location around Los Angeles’ oil fields. These images are imprinted on high-polished stainless steel with light-sensitive emulsion that incorporates tar from the LaBrea, McKittrick and Carpinteria Tar Pits. Charrière traveled around the state to document local oil fields from above and presents them as subtle, reflective abstractions that need to be viewed in low light to see the nuances of the depictions. These heliographs hover between abstraction and representation, as well as art, history and science as Charrière considers Los Angeles’ dependency on oil and the city’s conflicting relationship with it, especially given increasing environmental concerns.

As the title “Buried Sunshine” suggests, Charrière’s images do not depict sun-filled skies and receding horizons or colorful sunsets. Rather, he is interested in how cities like Los Angeles appear from above and investigates how the intricacies of the natural and man-made worlds intermingle. While amazingly beautiful and seductive, the photographs are about industrialization and the black fluids that travel beneath the earth’s surface. Coupled with *Controlled Burn*, the exhibition serves as a warning of an imagined apocalypse.

<https://artillerymag.com/gallery-rounds-julian-charriere/>

