

Art and Cake, March 9, 2018

Richard Misrach
Recent Photographs
Marc Selwyn Fine Art
February 17 - March 31, 2018

By Jody Zellen



Throughout his long career, Richard Misrach has made color photographs of the American West, capturing the night sky as well as the detritus left in the desert. He has documented the effects of Hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans in 2005 as well as the 1991 fires in Berkeley. Misrach is interested in the beauty of the natural environment and the effects and presence of man. He has also ventured to contested places, including the border between the U.S. and Mexico, where he collaborated with composer Guillermo Galindo to create *Border Cantos*, a series of photographs and playable instruments crafted from found objects and artifacts. Misrach has made photographs carrying a large view camera to distant locations but also now uses his iPhone and is able to take advantage of what each apparatus has to offer varying from prolonged exposures and detailed imagery to more casual pixelated images.

On view at Marc Selwyn Fine Art is a selection of photographs Misrach created between 2007 and 2018. These images depict the disquiet of the natural landscape and emphasize human presence as a disruptive force that leaves unsettling marks on the environment. The images depict remote locations from California to Arizona including the Salton Sea, the Anza Borrego Desert and numerous small towns from Boulevard, Hinkley, Newberry Springs and Lucern Valley, California to Elko, Nevada.

While large-scale framed prints populate the main gallery, it is the grid of smaller color images hung salon style and push-pinned to the wall in the smaller back gallery space that call attention to Misrach's discerning eye, keen wit and formal intelligence. Misrach states he is documenting the "hieroglyphics of our time." Photographs of graffiti on walls, abandoned buildings and rock formations communicate peoples' need to speak their mind in one way or another— via words or images— about personal and universal struggles and the political climate at large. Misrach's images record these disparate messages. They frame both the details of the actual mark-making and the context in which they appear.

Spanning the wall from floor to ceiling, these casually presented photographs depict spray painted faces, swastikas and numerous call-outs to Donald Trump, including the sentiments, "Trump Sucks" painted on a bolder in Lucerne Valley, California, photographed in February, 2017, and "Trump Eats Farts" from Twin Guns Arizona, 2017, "Eat the Rich" painted backwards on a wall in Hinkley, California, 2017 and "Loyal" sprayed on a dilapidated bathroom wall (2017). Collectively these photographs become a meditation on our changing and unsettling times.

In contrast, the large-scaled framed images are more expansive views of man's presence in the desert environs. In *Effigy #7*, near Jacumba, California, 2009, Misrach photographed a cluster of scare-crow-like figures inside a concrete tunnel. Each is dressed in discarded clothing, their arms are raised and legs spread wide, clearly an image of warning to those attempting to cross the Mexican American border. It is impossible not to take pause when regarding, *Bassinets, Salton Sea, California*, 2009, a photograph depicting a pristine white bassinet centered in a burnt out dwelling, surrounded by debris and remnants from what appears to be a fire. Here, Misrach has captures an image that suggests life and death simultaneously. *Dead Trees, Anza Borrego Desert, California*, 2008/2017 celebrates the mountains and the expansive landscape while also calling attention to the beauty and grace of a field of dead trees not too far from an abandoned storage container, trailer and a port-a-potty. The image of the dead tree branches emerging from the desert sand calls attention to the ongoing drought and issues of climate change.

Richard Misrach has a long history of examining places that are damaged, abandoned and on the outskirts of populated areas. Through his camera he has an uncanny ability to find and frame the beauty that exists in the natural and man-made worlds. Misrach's message is not that man's mark on the world is necessarily bad, but that it is a disruptive force that threatens the natural landscape.

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