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Paper Gallery

Dana Jennings

Beauty And Blight, Sharing Common Ground

The sublime is capricious. As the photographer David Maisel shows in his book "Black Maps," a cyanide-leaching field can be just as breathtaking as a lake tucked into the Rockies.

We can while away our lives, waiting for grand epiphanies that never arrive — even as we trample everyday beauty beneath our sullen feet. The artists in the books here remind us that the commonplace can be eternal.

Bae, Bien-U finds the deep soul of the common in the grace of the wind, while Martin Osborne seeks it in the sweet, sad patience of dogs. Garry Winogrand stalked city streets, airports and subdivisions. And Mr. Maisel illuminates landscapes ravaged by humans.

These artists teach us to see, but they also show us a way to be. The work here emerges from stillness and quiet deliberation — no matter how dynamic the image.



Black Maps

American Landscape
and the Apocalyptic
Sublime

By David Maisel
237 pages. Steidl. \$85.



This eye-opening survey of the photographer David Maisel's major aerial projects reveals the terrible beauty of the industrial age. Photo after photo unveils the common, human-created cancers forced upon our landscapes: open-pit mines, hazardous waste sites, nerve-gas depots, the desolation of Los Angeles. These photos tell tales the way scars tell the story of a body — and who knew that poisons could be so seductively iridescent? "Black Maps," rather than focusing on the death of beauty, wrestles with the beauty of death.