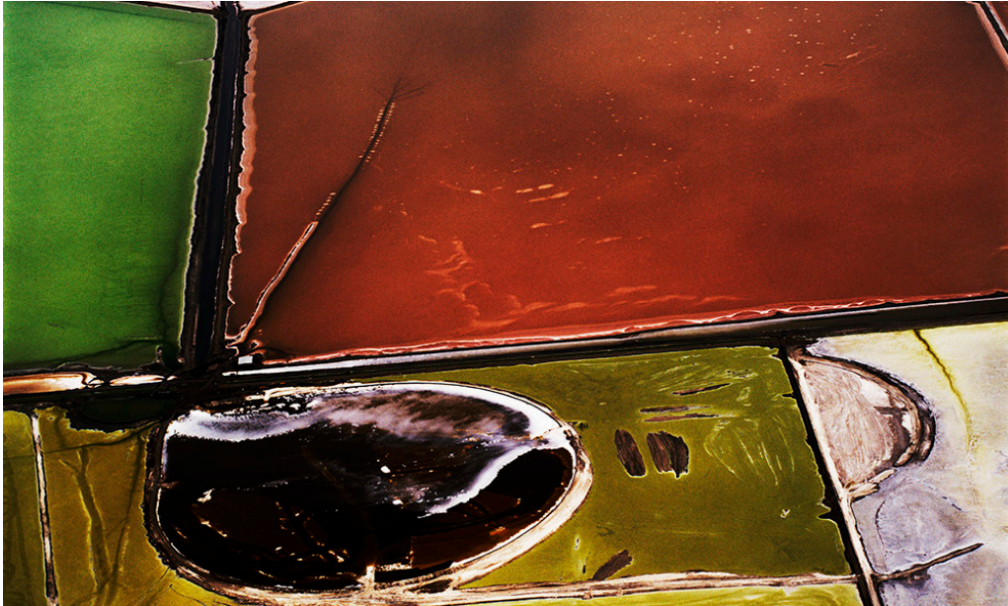


Interview with Aerial / Abstract photographer

David Maisel

12TH AUGUST 2015 ABSTRACT, AERIAL, INTERVIEWS319



– How and why did you get into aerial photography?

My first experience with aerial photography was in 1983. I was invited by my professor, the photographer Emmet Gowin, to accompany him on an expedition to the volcano Mount St Helens, which had erupted several years earlier. The aerial vantage point permitted views of the transformed earth which would never have been attainable from the ground. What fascinated and astonished and troubled me most was not the aftermath of the volcano, but the clearcutting of the area by the logging industry. That experience set the course for much of my future work of looking at what I call synthetic landscapes, that is, sites that have been transformed by human intervention.

– Where do you get your creative inspiration from?

I'm very interested in the photographic work of Emmet Gowin and Frederick Sommer, and also in mid-century painters such as Rothko and Diebenkorn, as well as the artists Robert Rauschenberg and Gordon Matta-Clark, the filmmakers Werner Herzog and Terence Malick, the poetry of Wallace Stevens, the fiction of JG Ballard and Tom McCarthy...I could go on. It's essential to have influences!

– Which places have been your favourite shooting sites so far and why?

Owens Lake, on the eastern side of the Sierras in California. I've been making pictures there since 2001. What had been a vast lake for some 80 million years has been, in the past century, drained and diverted into an aqueduct system to supply water to the desert city of Los Angeles, more than 200 miles away. My series The Lake Project is based on the the environmental transformation of the lake, which has yielded complex, surreal images.

– What equipment do you use to capture these shots?

I prefer the word “pictures” to the word “shots.” (I don't make shots, I make pictures). The images take a lot of work, both as I'm over the lakebed in an a Cessna airplane, as well as in post production during the printing process. I work with a Hasselblad camera and film.

– What do you do besides photography?

I serve on the board of **Headlands Center for the Arts**, an incredible nonprofit arts center located just north of San Francisco.

– What is your favourite photography book?

That's a painful decision to have to make. If I had to choose, I'd say Emmet Gowin's Petra. Exquisite. More of a catalogue than a book.

– What are your future plans with photography?

I'm working on a series of images from a recent return to Owens Lake. I'm also working on a project at a classified military installation in the United States whose mission is to provide development and testing of chemical and biological weaponry and defense systems. Both of these are long term (a decade or more) endeavors. I will have a solo show opening January 2016 at **Haines Gallery** in San Francisco.