

photograph

DAVID MAISEL: THE FALL AT HAINES GALLERY, SAN FRANCISCO

By Glen Helfand
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David Maisel, *The Fall (Borox 6)*, 2013. Courtesy Haines Gallery

Aerial landscape photography is distinctly positioned between the informational and the abstract. From above, evidence of geological shifts and human intervention appear flattened and alien. William Garnett's photographs of 1950s Los Angeles suburbs are a key example, images that portray a seemingly orderly narrative of development. Such views of ambiguously vast space are simultaneously beautiful and ominous, the cultural and ecological aftermath too apparent for contemporary viewers to simply appreciate their formal qualities.

Fast forward to David Maisel's *The Fall*, works that were photographed in 2013 from Spanish skies, surveying the terrain between Toledo and Madrid. The 11 works on view at [Haines Gallery](#) through March 12 each present variegated patchworks of land use as complex abstractions. The color schemes are dry and Mediterranean – dusty gray, pale sulfuric yellows, and orderly dots of dark green olive groves. The images reveal rich textures marked on the landscape by tractors, planting, weather, and various forms of development.



David Maisel, *The Fall (Toledo 2)*, 2013. Courtesy Haines Gallery

Maisel who has long worked with aerial photography, accepts the ambivalent aspects of this perspective — in the show’s press release he terms the subject of his work “apocalyptic sublime.” *The Fall* evokes more painterly associations than his 1989 *Mining Project*, which depicts the effects of mining pollution and the vivid, toxic colors of compromised waterways in more emphatically artificial and poisonous hues.

The Spanish images are quieter, revealing the ravages more ambiguously, partly because the human interventions appear less directly invasive, but also because of Maisel’s evolving use of aerial perspective. But the result is that they may reflect a contemporary condition in which environmental catastrophe is too enormous to parse. It’s difficult to interpret the source of the curlicue Brice Marden-ish crop circles in *The Fall (Borox 6)*, 2013. The rounded grid in *The Fall (Vicalvaro 3)*, resembles an ancient civilization on the moon, though the artist’s website describes it as an area outside Madrid where development stalled due to 2008 economic collapse. Maisel’s best works result when this kind of descriptive information merges with the disorienting beauty of a heightened perspective.

Ref: <http://photographmag.com/reviews/david-maisel-the-fall-at-haines-gallery-san-francisco/>