

The Mojave Project: A Transmedia Exploration of an Archetypal Landscape

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The Mojave Project is an experimental transmedia documentary and curatorial project exploring the physical, geological and cultural landscape of the Mojave Desert. The Mojave Project reconsiders and establishes multiple ways in which to interpret this unique and complex landscape, through association and connection of seemingly unrelated sites, themes, and subjects thus creating a speculative and immersive experience for our audience.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Mojave Desert is the most symbolic and emblematic of American deserts. It is both near and far. Exotic and mundane. Proximate but remote. Fragile and eternal. Rural yet urbanized. Surprisingly, ninety-five percent of its terrain is accessible by some type of road within three miles of any location therein.¹ Still, most people encounter or experience the Mojave through the comfort of their air-conditioned car, driving Interstate 15 between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. For many of those passing through, the Mojave Desert remains misunderstood. Obscure. Remote.

So how does one go about illuminating, documenting and disseminating such a multifaceted and expansive landscape that spans California, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah?

Relying on the Internet as the primary platform for delivery of content, *The Mojave Project* suggests new relationships between the proximate and the remote through a varied transmedia collection of written dispatches and associated multimedia features that challenge any singular legibility or fixed perception of this particular space. *The Mojave Project* is an attempt to create a contemporary and divergent repository of knowledge archiving this arid landscape while addressing outdated stereotypes and perspectives, diversity, current ecological issues and other timely concerns facing this unique region.

The Mojave Project is told through the voices, stories and research of historians, geologists, biologists, cultural geographers, native speakers, visionaries, land management officials, military personnel, miners, desert rats, environmental activists, aerospace engineers,

land speed racers, along with diverse cross-section of the region's residents and stakeholders.

The Mojave Project materializes over time through deep research and direct field inquiry involving interviews, reportage and personal journaling supported with still photography, audio and video documentation. Field dispatches are shared throughout the production period at mojaveproject.org and online at KCET Artbound, our publishing partner. Installments include those of notable guest contributors. A program of public field trip experiences and satellite events explore the diverse communities and sites of the Mojave Desert. The initial phase of the project is designed to make ongoing research transparent, inviting the audience into the conversation as the project develops.

As Nevada Public Radio's Scott Dickensheets explains in his 2015 *Desert Companion* magazine feature titled, *Zeit: Mojave*:

The Mojave Desert is large, and it contains multitudes: It's a landscape, of course, and an ecosystem, obviously (several, in fact), yet it's also a resonant emptiness, a zone of conflict, a culturescape, a headspace and much more. If you task yourself with documenting and interpreting it, no single piece of writing, no film, photo series or art project could possibly be adequate. Which is why artist Kim Stringfellow pretty much decided to do it all.

The Mojave Project is her multidisciplinary, multifaceted, multi-everything attempt to grok the muchness of this desert. "An experimental transmedia document," she calls it. Accumulating at mojaveproject.org, it's a slowly but steadily growing cache of documentary writings, photo galleries, sound files, maps, reproduced documents and more, and she plans to expand it into exhibits and curated events. An "immersive experience" is her ultimate goal.

The Mojave Project will culminate as an installation incorporating the published research journals, photographs, film shorts, documents, maps along with other collected ephemera and objects gathered over the four-year production period. The project was launched at MOAH (Museum of Art & History) in Lancaster, California during summer 2017. Partnering with LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) through support from The Andy Warhol Foundation



Figure 1: The Boneyard with Tehachapi Pass Wind Farm, Mojave, CA. (2015)

Curatorial Fellowship program *The Mojave Project* will be exhibited during late fall/winter 2018.

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PROJECT THEMES

Desert as Wasteland

How has our valuation of the Mojave Desert changed over time? What outside forces and historic precedents, including federal and state land management policies, are responsible for the varied attitudes toward this desert? How do the indigenous peoples of the Mojave consider this landscape historically and into the future?

Geological Time vs. Human Time

In no other landscape are humans more directly confronted with the magnitude of geological time than in deserts. How does one perceive the passage of time and respond to our own mortality while encountering the sublimity of the Mojave Desert? What geological events have determined the evolution of this region's biota within this unique and spectacular landscape?

Sacrifice and Exploitation

Nineteenth century explorers realized early on the region's potential for lucrative mineral extraction. Numerous waves of exploitation and mismanagement of the Mojave's abundant resources can now be readily viewed upon the land. What are the consequences of these past and future activities on this landscape and its ecology?

Desert as Staging Ground

Sited within the Mojave Desert are five major U.S. military installations and several commercial aerospace research facilities. The

remoteness and physicality of this desert region has positioned it as the ideal site for technological aerospace innovation, military training and weapon experimentation. How has region's military presence transformed the Mojave's landscape and how has its culture shaped its civilian inhabitants?

Space and Perception

The sheer physical vastness and suggested "emptiness" of the Mojave Desert has attracted artists for staging various actions and interventions while, in turn, inviting inquiries into human cognition and the sensory processes that determine how we perceive and make sense of our physicality within this arid environment.

Danger and Consequence

Early explorers and westward settlers crossing the Mojave encountered a foreboding and hostile place that is the lore of legend. Modern technologies now make travel through this extreme environment seemingly effortless, but mishaps and even death can result for those unprepared. Illicit and nefarious activities ensue outside of the eyes of the law within the more remote expanses of this region.

Movement and Mobility

Today's desert traveler often only experiences the Mojave while they drive at high speed within the air-conditioned comfort of their vehicle. Speed and movement are further represented in Chuck Yeager's 1947 historic X-1 flight that broke the sound barrier to the land speed trials held annually at El Mirage's dry lakebed.

Transformation and Reinvention

Deserts have long been sought as places for contemplation, meditation and renewal. Past utopic communities were formed within the Mojave in an effort to foster a communal life independent from the restraints of mainstream society. Who were these past interlopers and characters? How are the current denizens and communities of this arid region evolving and reinventing themselves today?

ENDNOTES

1. David Darlington, *The Mojave: A Portrait of the Definitive American Desert* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 35.



Figure 2: Tourists lay claim to Badwater, Death Valley National Park, CA. (2016)



Figure 3: Giant Rock, Landers, CA. (2014)

Figure 4: Antelope Valley subdivision, Lancaster CA. (2017)



Figure 5: Bathers at Tecopa Natural Hot Springs, Tecopa, CA. (2016)

Figure 6: Gem-O-Rama, Trona, CA. (2014)