

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Mind's Eye, an exhibition of new works by Deana Lawson on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from September 9 through October 21, 2023. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, September 9 from 6 to 8 PM. The following is an excerpt of artist notes written by Deana Lawson about a selection of the works in this exhibition.

If a light fall upon a solid body, the body reacts upon the light, which it sends back to the eye with an image of itself.

—Edward Hitchcock, The Religion of Geology and Its Connected Sciences

The genesis of these twelve pictures could be marked by Cardeidra (2023), an image of a woman who straddles the couch with her friend in the living room, while giving me the finger at the same time. The impulse to direct the finger given by Cardeidra was partially inspired by a group portrait of several of my female cousins at a club in front of a graffiti backdrop, in which my cousin Summer—in front—flips the bird while mischievously smiling. As many photo-practitioners know, one is never fully aware of the results of a photo shoot until you receive your negatives back and are able to get to a light table. When I stopped on this picture, I noticed something I hadn't planned for: a significant flare in the adjacent mirror. Initially, I was annoyed at this accident, but it worked on me, allowing deeper reflection of self and other, and the knowledge produced between intention and accident. What to make of this spectral white light (stained cyan), abruptly cut off by the border of the mirror? And then I realized this light connected to a dream I had a year earlier: I was in a small two-seater aircraft, the pilot was in front, and I was directly behind him. We took off and flew to the outer edges of somewhere breathtakingly beautiful...and then. Everything flared into an ominous white Light. I woke up disturbed.

The following autumn, I arranged a private flight on a Cessna Skyhawk to photograph Ivanpah, a solar farm in the Mojave Desert consisting of 173,500 mirrors [heliostats]. My fascination with mirrors heightened when I first learned that many of the earliest mirrors were black. Polished obsidian, used for divination in Mesoamerican antiquity. And further back during the Middle Kingdom in Egypt, mirrors were among the objects most frequently placed in tombs, and they were considered magical tools of the dead. Mirrors represented

the sun and the divine solar power of light. When I first glimpsed the triple solar towers of Ivanpah on a standard Delta flight to NYC in 2021, I knew I had to approach it with my camera. And yet I almost canceled the anticipated chartered flight when I learned my older sister Sherry had died suddenly in Rochester, New York. The pilot, Adam, lifted the Skyhawk gently and we traversed the handsome Sierra Nevada mountains, which appeared as frozen undulating waves. After photographing Ivanpah, on our return flight to Van Nuys, the aircraft's alarm began sounding and red flashing warning lights appeared... "What's happening?" I asked, worried. Adam didn't respond, rather, he turned knobs, and hit switches, and took out his manual. I removed my headset; the alarm was overbearing. *Oh God this can't be happening. Was this the dream of the white light?* The battery overheated, and there was no way to fix the problem mid-air, so we made an emergency landing at Victorville airport.

The photographs taken of Ivanpah and Cardeidra are conduits into understanding wider interests and themes of geo-mythology and memory, ancestral presence, the physicality of photography and its aberrations, self-possession, and the body that doesn't seek authorization from westernized materialism.

Unknown Desert Dunes (2023) brought me back to a discussion with Alex Nemerov in 2019—*what if everything that ever was, shall be, in all eternity, was already captured (photographed?) and stored in another realm.* Nemerov led me to a nineteenth-century writer, Edward Hitchcock, who in The Religion of Geology and Its Connected Sciences wrote, "Men fancy that the wave of oblivion passes over the greater part of their actions. But physical science shows us that those actions have been transfused into the very texture of the universe [...] Material creation receives an impression from all our words and actions that can never be effaced [...] Our words, our actions, and even our thoughts, make an indelible impression on the universe," making space "into a vast sounding gallery/ Into a vast picture gallery;/ And into a universal telegraph." In Solaris by Andrei Tarkovsky, the clouds carry memory, and similarly, Unknown Desert Dunes has its own impressions and fissures of experience and witness embedded in the landscape.

Olmec Negroid Stone Head (Tres Zapotes F). 800BC – 400 BC (2023) is an appropriated picture taken out of They Came Before Columbus by Ivan Van Sertima, which speaks of maritime travel of Africans across the Atlantic to the Americas before Columbus. Van Sertima writes of these peculiar colossal heads excavated at La Venta and Tres Zapotes, “They stood twelve to twenty times larger than the faces of living men. They were like gods among the Olmecs. In this center of La Venta there were great altars. One of these (known as the third altar) was made out of one of the Negroid heads, flattened on top for that purpose. A speaking tube was found to go in at the ear and out at the mouth so that the figure could function as a talking oracle.”

These deeper histories of Unknown_Desert Dunes and Olmec Negroid Stone Head (Tres Zapotes F). 800BC – 400 BC are interconnected with more recent showcases of ancestry and kinship, as pictured in Kareem (2023) displaying the memento mori of his late grandma, and in Arethea (2023) of the poster of her mother, Ms. Brown.

The snake couch cover in Antonette (2023) references the serpent, harking back to the biblical curse, “You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.” Yet baby Skyy (the actual name of the child) in her rose gold snowsuit, offers up a visual promise, taking us into a future, protected by her mother. Both figures are surrounded by a serpent, which represents sentient human beings in the bowels of late-stage capitalism and ecological disaster.

Each of these works is born of an anticipation or meditation on some riddle that lies between this world and some other place. I will leave open to the viewer an interpretation of the rest.

In 2022, Deana Lawson was awarded the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize, an influential and longstanding prize that awards artists and projects which have made a significant and original contribution to the medium of photography over the preceding twelve months. She is the first artist working in photography to be awarded the prestigious Hugo Boss Prize by the Guggenheim Museum in New York, which presented a solo exhibition of her work at the museum in 2021. Lawson’s first museum survey was

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presented in 2021 and 2022 at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston and MoMA PS1, Queens, New York, the exhibition also traveled to the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, in 2022. She has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at institutions including Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2020); Huis Marseille, Amsterdam (2019); The Underground Museum, Los Angeles (2018); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2018); Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (2017); and Art Institute of Chicago (2015). Her work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Lawson lives and works in Los Angeles.