

## **Blue with Exceptions**

### George Air Force Base

Since 2015, I have been pursuing photographic projects at the former George Air Force Base site in Victorville, California.

The George Air Force Base was established in 1941 at the beginning of World War Two and closed in 1992. Due to groundwater contamination, the housing units were abandoned and have deteriorated since then.

My activities have involved photographing the exteriors in B&W, painting inside units, and photographing the interiors with large-format Color and B&W Film. Since working at George, I have completed half a dozen bodies of work. Beginning in 2018, I have photographed with medium-format digital cameras and often used color flash. The broad umbrella title for these photographs is “Blue with Exceptions.”

This site is a rich opportunity for material and atmospheric observation. I am interested in linear deterioration in a cyclical atmospheric environment. The site has an equally compelling social history as an artifact of the militarization of the desert west in the United States during the Cold War and its current status as a Superfund clean-up site.

Formally, I have been interested in how abstraction and specificity operate in photographs. Using colored light tends to push things toward the abstract and symbolic, but the picture is still insistent on the specificity of its genesis. At one point, I began to bring large prints I would install in the rooms to push this further. I have always been a sucker for a picture in a picture.

In 2022, I started using AI to generate various images. I began using animals I might see at the site or in my daily experience. This focus narrowed primarily to rabbits, and particularly songbirds. I had previously worked with this iconography in an installation from 1995, “Seven Songbirds and a Rabbit.” At that time, I was interested in the dead, frozen industrial manifestation of a dynamic living subject. With AI, it is no longer the industrial index of a long-dead physical being. It is now a phantom generated from computer observations of an enormous number of uploaded images. The face of every songbird is illuminated with soft axial frontal lighting.

In this context, I am equally interested in the fact that songbirds represent sensitivity to the toxic (the canaries in the coal mine), and nothing is more anxious than the rabbit sitting at the bottom of the food chain.

With this observation in mind, I have seen a metaphor for the dawning of the Anthropocene in these projects. As a boy, I read a science fiction novel about an archaeologist who worked on a planet covered entirely with structures built upon structures. The scientist of that Civilization struggled to understand their past from the ruins. A surprise twist problematizes their assumptions.

I have always been drawn to the indexical nature of photographs and the observation that they are imprints of a specific time, place, and circumstance. I have attempted to emphasize this by often sequencing the pictures chronologically. Photographs can accommodate a broad range of interpretations, from the concretely informational, social, political, and aesthetic to an index of a specific life and its engagements. I aspire to embrace that messy complexity. In my experience, I can glimpse the existential tangentially, and my reactions oscillate between wonder and terror.