



CONTEMPORARY DESERT PHOTOGRAPHY

*The Other Side of Paradise*

## JOHN DIVOLA



While John Divola has approached a broad range of subjects, he says he is “currently moving through the landscape looking for evidence of existential desire.” He was drawn to the high desert years before he began photographing the *Isolated Houses*, attracted by the deep horizons, quality of light, and the way sounds traveled through the clear atmosphere. Divola’s images of the small homes meld the desert landscape with evidence of human experience existing outside of mainstream culture. He does not allow the desert’s beauty to negate details of the simple desert dwellings, a minimalist notion of a house containing only one room.

Through his photographs, the viewer is invited to marvel about the lives of those seeking solitude and escape from the city. Others may be socially disruptive and require space to live away from other humans. Divola is attracted by the colors of paint home dwellers use and the personal artifacts that reveal individual personalities and sensibilities.

While photographing the houses, dogs would spring out from the tiny homesteads and chase Divola’s vehicle. He created a companion series of works, *Dogs Chasing My Car In The Desert*. From this experience, Divola says that “dogs are never going to catch a car, and I am never going to capture reality on film. We are both involved in a melancholy kind of enterprise.” ■

*From 1995 to 1998 I worked on a series of photographs of isolated houses in the desert, at the east end of the Morongo Valley in Southern California. As I meandered through the desert, a dog would occasionally chase my car. Sometime in 1996 I began to bring along a 35mm camera equipped with a motor drive and loaded with fast and grainy black-and-white film. The process was simple; when I saw a dog coming toward the car I would pre-focus the camera and set the exposure.*

John Divola was born in 1949 in Los Angeles and received a BA from California State University, Northridge, and both an MA and MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles. Since 1975 he has taught photography and art at numerous institutions, including California Institute of the Arts, and since 1988 he has been Professor of Art at the University of California, Riverside. Among Divola’s awards are four Individual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship, a Flintridge Foundation Fellowship, and a California Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship. Three recent books by John Divola are *Continuity*, *Isolated Houses*, and *Dogs Chasing My Car In The Desert*. His work has been featured in many solo and group exhibitions in the United States, Japan, Europe, Mexico, and Australia, and is represented in the collections of the Palm Springs Art Museum, the Australian National Gallery, the Denver Art Museum, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Seattle Art Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and many more.

*Isolated Houses, N 34° 09.951' W 115° 49.269'. 1995–1998*  
color photograph  
collection David Knaus

