

# Lana Z Caplan

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## Artist Statement

I have been making films, videos and installations for over fifteen years, but I started my career as a photographer and the traces of this discipline are etched into the way I see in all of my works. The final form my work takes is site and content responsive; whether a single-channel digitally generated reality in essay form, a landscape referent projection, photographs, multi-channel video, interactive installation, or virtual world.

My research is based in social practice, historical research, and a desire to unearth the unseen - seeking to meaningfully negotiate the swirl of world events to make personal sense of our social and political landscape. I employ a reflexive use of my medium and a discursive use of the history of image representation, drawing on the modalities and tropes used in film, television, photography, and video art. This conversation of modalities is quietly central in many of my works as the foundation upon which other topics rest and depart.

As an image-maker, I dance with the malleability and power of the recorded image – the possibilities of manipulation, the limits of veracity with any representation, and the nefarious uses of my medium. Some recent works, such as *Maelstroms* (2015), focus on the use of image technology for other than esoteric or humanistic pursuits, such as drone bombers or thermal cameras used by border control on the US/Mexico border. *Patches of Snow in July* (2017) uses footage of the dormant volcano Haleakala as a backdrop to highlight the role of the news media in the 2016 US presidential election, the feeling of impending disaster in the wake of the election results, and the power of media and polarized agendas to shape society's ideas and language around the politics of landscape, climate change, and climate profiteers. Also discussing the impacts of climate change, *Canaries in the Mine* (2015) catalogs a lost referent in google satellite images – images of a landscape that the medium of video can no longer find and record. *Autopoiesis* (2019) sources media from the internet - including audio from a self-hypnosis "how-to" video, footage from the 2018 PyeongChang and 1934 Berlin Olympics (from Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia*), and music from Sun-Ra's *Space is the Place* - to deconstruct utopic visions of hashtag activism and autopoietic self-modulation in unregulated times.

My current body of work uses multiple modes of exploration - historic, pictorial, experiential, and documentary - to investigate the current political landscape of the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes in Oceano, CA. I aim to pull up the history of this place from beneath the surface to populate the Dune site with a more profound sense of place and meaning, but also as a point of departure for conversation on the issues that extend far beyond this specific place. While the Oceano Dunes often appear as an empty, shifting landscape, through video, photography and virtual reality, my research weaves the rich histories of inhabitants spanning over 12,000 years – from the expunged Native American inhabitants, Cecil B. DeMille's buried (and recently partially excavated) Ten Commandments ancient Egyptian film set, the proto-hippie squatters called the Dunites of the 1930's, to the present-day ATV riders tearing up endangered species and polluting the air.

This seemingly blank expanse of sand has been a fertile *tabula rasa* for each successive cultural engagement. However, today it has become a political and environmental battleground. The 18-mile coastal Dunes complex allows driving cars and off-road vehicles along their 5 miles of beach and into the dune area of area governed by California State Parks. The current 10-year war is between the multi-million-dollar ATV industry and residents in the adjacent communities whose health has been compromised due to the dust the ATVs create.

In her seminal book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag described one of the functions of photography as, paraphrased, "Photography's job is not to explain but to present". Through my work, I hope to unearth, present... and transform. Sontag also wrote, "Photography as knowledge has been superseded by photography as photography", as is my media practice intrinsically reliant on conversing in its own language, although, my social practice drives the content of the conversation.

Please see a sample of my works here:

<http://lanazcaplan.com/portfolio/>