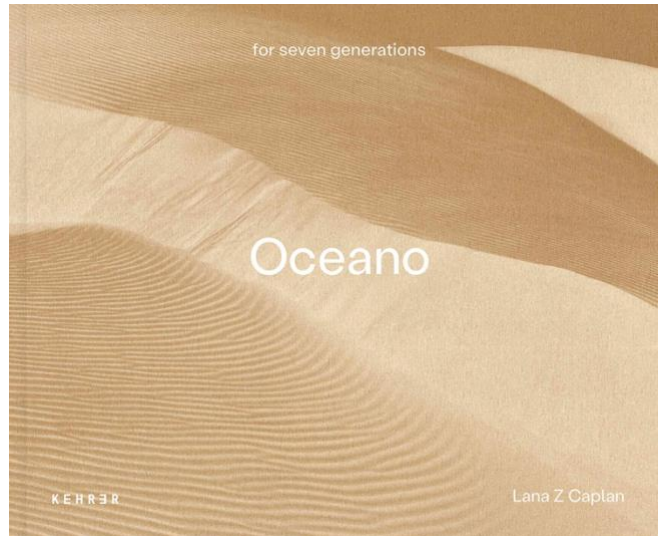


BOOK ANNOUNCEMENT

OCEANO
(for seven generations)
Photographs by Lana Z Caplan

Text by Lana Z Caplan, Matthew Goldman, Hanna Rose Shell
and Mona Olivás Tucker



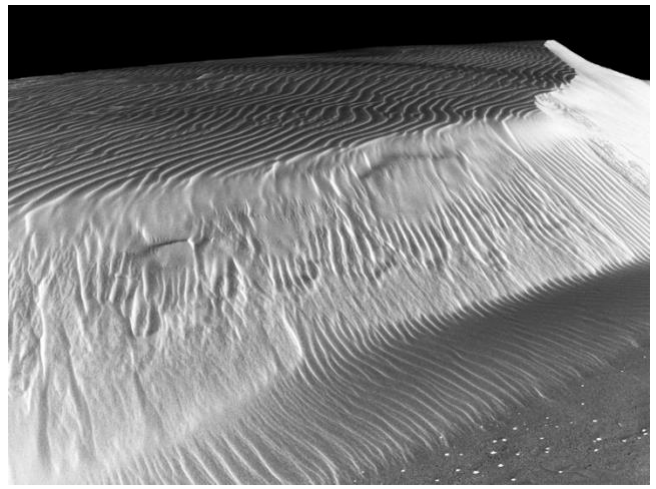
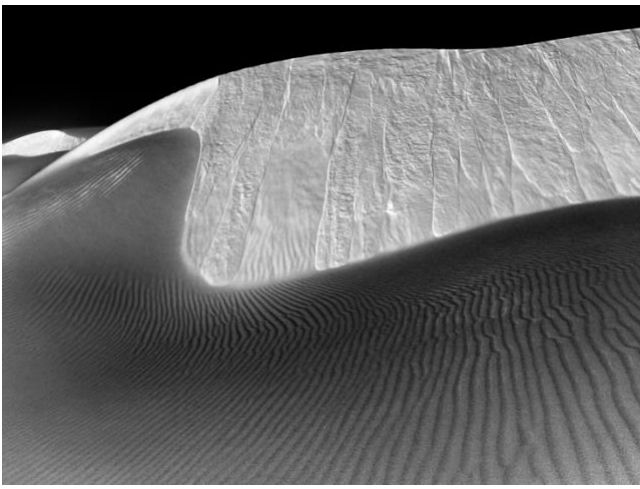
"My seven-year journey of researching, collaborating within the community of Oceano, working with ytt Northern Chumash Tribal leadership, and countless days on the sand became a collection of stories from the Oceano Dunes that aims to destabilize the mythology of photography of the land, of the West, of California ... Ultimately, *Oceano* questions the legacies of colonization, photographic history, utopian ideology, and the future for the politically charged and environmentally threatened Oceano Dunes.

—**Lana Z Caplan**

The Oceano Dunes state park area just south of San Luis Obispo in California is known in part for its majestic natural formations and miles of windswept rolling sand. These are the iconic dunes of Edward Weston's breathtaking photographs; of Cecil B. DeMille's recently excavated and restored sphinxes from his 1923 *Ten Commandments* movie set; of the Dunites—the artists, poets, nudists, and mystics squatting in dune shacks in the 1920's-40's—and of the nearly lost Northern Chumash tribe who holds a vast and rich cultural history going back 10,000 years.

Currently, the Oceano Dunes remain an active and wildly popular recreation site filled with hikers and campers, RV encampments, and members of the local community. Of significant note, 1,000 day passes are issued to off road all terrain vehicles (ATVs) to rip up and down the dunes. Photographer **Lana Z Caplan** now calls this region home herself, and for seven years she has engaged with tribal leaders, land use and city pollution boards, historians, the ATV and RV communities, and other vested people to learn, photograph, and create a visual conversation about the complexities of this unique part of the country.

Her book *Oceano (for seven generations)*, published by **Kehrer Verlag**, is a rich exploration of the histories and intersections of people and place. In her project description, Caplan notes the universal resonance of this specific regional history. She observes, "The story of the dunes is both a specifically local and deeply California story, with unique quirks and interest, and a microcosm presented for reflection on issues that are happening all over the world."



Left: Dunes, 4 (negative), 2020 / Right: Dunes, 4, 2020

Caplan invested herself in not only learning and understanding the vast history of the area, but also spending significant time getting to know the people on a human level that she was photographing. In addition to landscape images of the dunes and surrounding structures and geographies, Caplan provides portraits of some of the RV inhabitants, the ATV riders, as well as individuals who live in the area year round. She also includes photographs of related historical objects and writings.



Left: Sphinx Head, The Dunes Center, Guadalupe, 2018, Restored plaster sphinx parts from Cecil B. DeMille's 1923 *The Ten Commandments* movie set, buried in the sand after filming was completed, excavated in 2017 / Right: Dunite Historian Norm Hammond Holding Painting by Dunite Dixie Paul in Gavin's Cabin, Oceano, 2022.

All of this combines to present a wide-arcing consideration of the significant scope and implications of using and utilizing natural spaces for human gain. Environmental and cultural losses and implications are inherent. Her photographic study of artifacts gives archeological insight into the deeper stories of the Oceano dunes area, and their symbolism in time and place. Threaded throughout the book are quotes from archives of past inhabitants, as well as essays from current tribal leaders, and cultural thinkers.



Left: Dust Circles, Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, 2018 / Right: American Family 2, Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, 2018.

Mona Olivas Tucker, the tribal chair of the yak titʻu titʻu yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe (ytt Tribe) and her son, **Matthew D. Goldman**, deepen the weight of the considerations in the writings they provided for this project. Goldman's essay encapsulates what is at stake with the intersection of landscape and human impact.

He writes, "I watch over special places and feel proud of my ancestors. Walking the Dunes can feel like heaven. On the nights when no one is there, it's a sanctuary. ... During the times when the beach is flooded with people and vehicles, I feel sick and sad. Huge amounts of filth trash is left behind in a place I love. Damage by vehicles is happening to the dunes, damage to animals, birds, plants, and beautiful flowers. Some won't survive and won't be seen again."



Left: Abel, Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, 2022 / Right: American Flag, Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, 2022

Professor, author, and artist **Hanna Rose Shell** accompanied Caplan on an excursion into the dune area and her essay for the book includes observations on both the topography as well as the people and messaging present. The viewer is led along with Caplan and Shell as they navigate the conflicting human interests and agendas with the region. She writes, "There is a defiant aggression in the air, infused with the saltwater, and a controlled chaos of vehicles large and small revving engines, spinning in circles. The smell is a mixture of chorizo and motor oil."



Left: Where Mountains Meet the Sea, Oceano Dunes / Right: Orange Crush, Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, 2022

Throughout her essay, Shell provides context and a historical look at the role the Dunes have played in the film industry, for recreation, and for photographers such as Edward Weston. At the end of her piece she notes the cautionary tale all of this provides. "Across the thin and permeable fence, over which the sand occasionally tops out, untrodden dunes appear to shift position at the will of the wind, ripples showing the vibrations of the wind itself, day by day, week by week. We can only hope that these dunes, in their natural state of flux, will long outlast any temporary line in the sand drawn by human hands or machines."



Left: Blanca and Gabriela, Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, 2022 / Right: Matthew Goldman, yak titʻu titʻu yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

Oceano offers both an interrogation of photographic conventions regarding landscape and representation, a feminist response to the standard masculine landscape, and confronts historic approaches to portraiture by enlisting the past and present inhabitants in performative and co-constructed moments.

About the artist:

Lana Z Caplan is a photographer and filmmaker. Her projects are often inspired by notions of utopia, where one person's utopia is another's undoing. Her exhibition record includes Museum of Contemporary Art Tucson, Institute of Contemporary Art San Diego, Everson Museum of Art, Inside Out Art Museum Beijing, Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo Mexico City, National Gallery of Art Puerto Rico, Griffin Museum of Photography, and numerous national and international film festivals. Caplan earned a BA in Art History and BS in Psychology from Boston University and MFA in Photography from Massachusetts College of Art. After many years in Boston and then Brooklyn, Caplan moved to Southern California in 2014 and is currently Associate Professor of Photography and Video at California Polytechnic State University, in San Luis Obispo.

About the contributors:

Hanna Rose Shell is an author and artist focused on material culture, the history of science and technology, and media aesthetics. She is a professor of Critical and Curatorial Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder and is director of the Stan Brakhage Center for Media Arts, prior to which she was Leo Marx Career Associate Professor of Science, Technology and Society at MIT. Shell received an MA in American Studies from Yale and a PhD in the History of Science from Harvard, where she also studied photography and filmmaking.

Mona Olivas Tucker is honored to be the Tribal Chair for the yak titʻu titʻu yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe (ytt Tribe). Mona is the great-granddaughter of Rosario Cooper, the last known fluent speaker of the tilhini language, which is the indigenous language of the Northern Chumash. Mona was born in San Luis Obispo and has lived continuously in the southern part of San Luis Obispo County. Mona is a member of the ytt Tribe's Diablo Canyon Lands LandBack committee, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo President's Council of Advisors Local Economic Development Committee, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History California Indian Advisory Committee and is a NAGPRA Tribal representative.

Matthew D. Goldman is a direct descendant of Rosario Cooper, who was the last known fluent speaker of the tilhini language, and he is son to Mona Olivas Tucker. He was born in San Luis Obispo and is a tribal member of the yak titʻu titʻu yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe. Matthew's career as a cultural resource specialist spans many decades with his formal training starting at ten years old. Matthew has spent most of his life protecting and preserving the culture of his tribe and his ancestors.

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Media Contact for Lana Z Caplan:

Andrea Smith / Andrea Smith Public Relations

Tel: +1 646-220-5950

Email: Andreamith202@gmail.com