

for seven generations

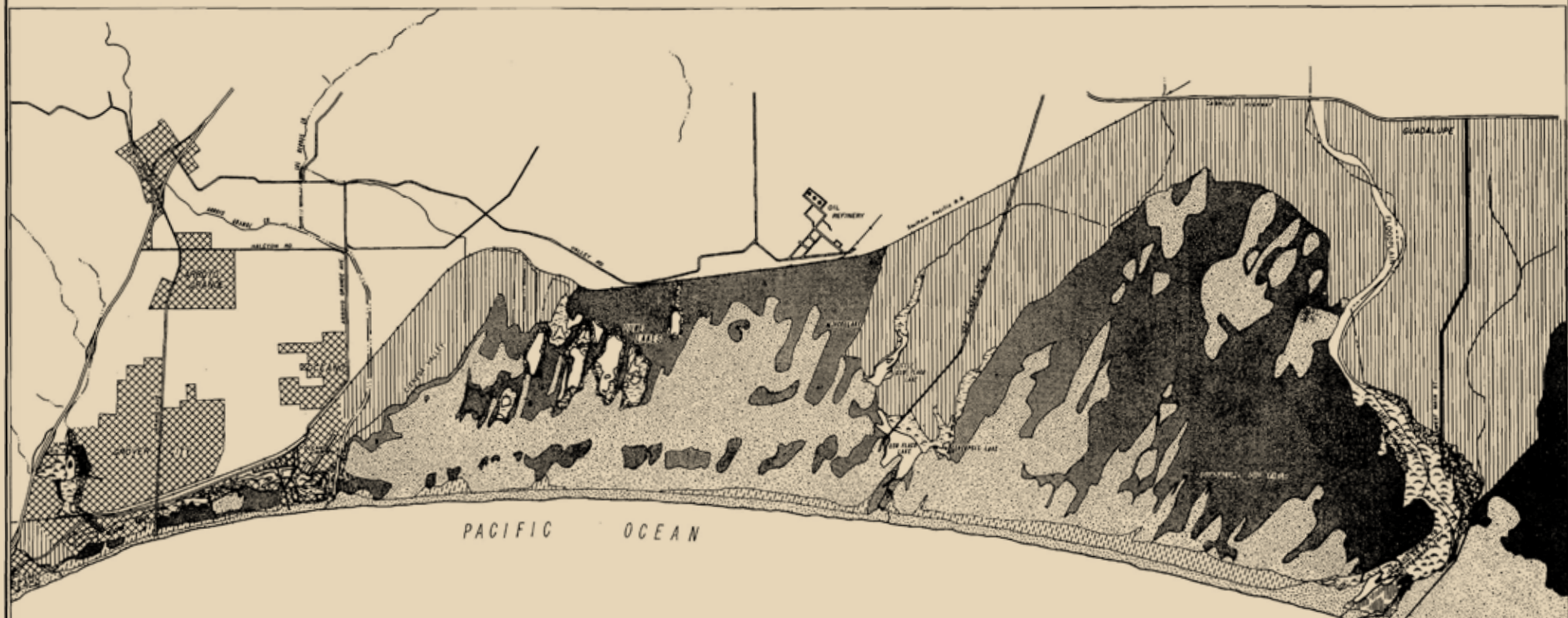
Oceano

KEHRER

Lana Z Caplan

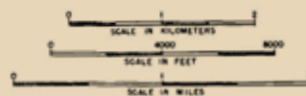
PLATE 8

AREA HABITATS



LEGEND

BEACH	OPEN WATER	PARK, DEVELOPED AREAS
ACTIVE DUNES	FRESHWATER MARSH	RIPARIAN
COASTAL STRAND	SALT MARSH	GRASSLAND
COASTAL SAGE SCRUB	MUDFLATS	WOODLAND
		AGRICULTURE



“But something might be said about the long wave-
pounded Oceano beach with its watery dove-colored
sands where the setting sun burns gold and scarlet,
and the low-lying clouds spread reaches of platinum
and silver with eyelets of ruby and amethyst;
something might be said about the yellow sand-hill country
stretching south from Oceano, changing shape as the
winds change, changing color with the moods of the day.”

Ella Young, from the foreword to Hugo Seelig, *Wheel of Fire*





The Oceano Dunes are in *tithini*, the place of the full moon, the traditional unceded land of the yak tit^ʷu tit^ʷu yak tithini Northern Chumash Tribe.

for seven generations

Oceano









Vanishing and Morality in the Dunes

by Hanna Rose Shell

Ruins make us think of the past that could have been and the future that never took place, tantalizing us with utopian dreams of escaping the irreversibility of time.

The Rancho Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes present a highly textured environment of cultural, aesthetic, and political possibility. Often called simply the Oceano Dunes, and covering eighteen miles of California's Central Coast, they are governed by a complex of federal, state, local, private, and tribal land ownership and usage agreements. In her body of work, Lana Z Caplan explores the Dunes and finds layers of communities that have been alternately celebrated and erased; her project's multiple narratives traverse space and time. Ruins (remains, remnants, relics, vestiges)—from broken headlights, to old movie props, to discarded clam shells—their concealment and their enshrinement, permeate the topographies and temporalities of the dunes.

A tour of ruins leads you into a labyrinth of ambivalent language—no longer, not yet, nevertheless, albeit—that plays tricks with causality!

We drive along the beach after entering through the gates and obtaining a day pass. Cars and some pickup trucks are everywhere. At a certain point we reach the Arroyo Grande Creek, freshwater flowing down from the mountains, and eventually—here—arriving at the ocean. It's after a period of unusually intense rain, so even though usually it would be easy to walk across at low tide, today it is deep. It rushes fast and the water is frigid. We park on the near

side, looking over the creek to an area called the foredunes. After a short wait, we ask a driver if we can go over the creek in the bed of their vast white pickup truck. The undercarriage of the truck, like all the vehicles around us, gets hugely splashed, so that we have to duck to not get wet. Once across, we walk along the beach till a post demarcating the beginning of the official OHV (Off Highway Vehicle) area. Here people who rented vehicles at the park entry can now pick them up. Others—who own ATVs—have brought them along on beds attached to SUVs and trucks, since the first section of the area is for so-called “street legal vehicles” only.

SUVs and pickup trucks are all over down near the ocean, along a flat expanse now at low tide. Many of them have multiple flags flying in addition the mandatory whip and flags required for all OHVs; Spanish-language music is blaring. Political slogans festoon several banners. There are Mexican flags and police/armed services officer flags—these are the ones that have American flag iconography, but the stars and stripes entirely in shades of black and blue. And the “come and take it” flags: black M16 rifles on a white background, flapping in the wind.

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.

Inland, where cars are discouraged (not prohibited but most wouldn't make it in the sand, you sometimes see Jeeps and trucks), the ATVs run wild; the sand is less packed down; there is a vast expanse of undulating sand, ATVs swarming and snailing through. The motor oil smell is stronger, the sounds louder, and there are the periodic squeals of



Figure 1: A wire fence meanders its way toward the beach and the Pacific Ocean, separating the hard-packed riding area from the protected dunes and vegetation. Photo by Hanna Rose Shell, 2023.

wheels caught in the sand. We are the only pedestrians. The ATVs—some owned and personalized, others hired—seem to be coming at us from all sides. They are like bugs, erratic and unpredictable in their trajectories. Some careen in concentric circles; others either purposefully or accidentally jump off the slip faces on the lee side of the dunes.

Fencing is put up—wire and rusted stakes—to demarcate the boundary between the dunescape off limits, and that open to the ATVs. On the protected side, the sand accrues naturally; wind blows sand away from the ocean, in the direction inland, and the sand peaks and piles creating angles of between thirty and thirty-five degrees. On this side, sand dunes exist in an accelerated form of geological time, always shifting and being rapidly made and remade.

The protected areas aim to provide safety to endangered birds including the western snowy plover and the California least tern, vegetation, and a habitat replete with reptiles and amphibians. But also—unmarked—the great *middens*. These middens are piles of long-ago trash heaps that consists largely of discarded shells. The Pismo clams, along with other sea and land creatures, collected long ago by the Chumash, create mountainous forms, mounds that stand out from the dunes, which wax and wane even as the middens stay in place. There are the lizards and terns inhabiting these parts, but all of those stay away from the noise of the OHV accessible area.

At the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area entrance, cars and trucks enter. Every day up to a thousand passes are sold for a nominal fee, allowing for as many people and vehicles as can be towed in by a single engine. Except during periods of flooding, State Parks releases four hundred camping permits daily. And so RVs come in from all over the state and beyond; compounds of families and friends stake out spots by the sea, from which to launch ATVs off into the dunescapes.

In the mornings, before the creek crossing opens—the tractors come out with their plows, creating preliminary tracks for the ATVs, loaded cars, pickups and the RVs to follow; the tractor tracks create their own miniature and short-lived dune-like topographies in the sand.

Exactly a century ago, just beyond where the ATVs now roam, an enormous film crew descended, set to build its own dune-ish dreamland, under the directorship of Cecil B. DeMille. The film *The Ten Commandments* would be both a biblical epic and a modern drama. The story of two brothers with different views on morality and life outcomes (one full of vice, the other of virtue), is introduced through a fifty-minute “prologue” that is in fact an extended recreation of the story of the Exodus.

This story—from the killing by God of the first-born Egyptians, to the return of Moses from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets, and the destruction of the golden calf, and their continuance towards the “promised land” (of a potentially utopian future for the Jewish people)—sprang to life between June and August of that year in the vicinity of what has since been referred to as the “dune buggy and ATV cult.”² Like the Chumash tribal stewards of the remaining middens, those most invested in the film set’s legacy keep the precise locations of the filming (and hence of both extant and future excavation sites) completely secret.

When I look at the quiet, still dunes at the nature preserve, the areas away from the ATVs, on the other side of that porous wire fence, I imagine the impact of the crew—the vast Hollywood apparatus laid out and tied down as much as the dunescape would allow.

A panoply of cultures and peoples came together: not only the famous Hollywood henchmen and leading ladies, but also the multilingual and multiethnic working-class crew. Sixteen hundred workers participated in the fabrication of sphinxes, pharaohs, and gates out of concrete, plaster, and



Figure 2: Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Riding Area.
Photo by Lana Z Caplan, 2018

wood. Thirty-five hundred actors and more than that number of animals took up residence.

A newspaper reporter claimed to have witnessed hundreds of Orthodox Jews on the dunes, chilly as anything, their goosebumps hid beneath a thick coating of liquid glycerin used to simulate sweatiness. This was a film set to be sure, but was also another kind of cultural staging. The people brought together to the Dunes for the film had multiple understandings of the reality of their activities and of the topographies. Among the extras were sizeable numbers of recent Jewish immigrants, apparently mostly of North African heritage. They were hired, true to form, it would seem, to escape the pharaoh's enslavement and wander the desert.

The production wreaked environmental havoc on the landscape; it left trash behind that would only many decades later be recast as cultural resources. Now, a century later, the crew's trash has become treasure. In some cases, canisters of old film, likely used in the production, bear material witness to its passing. In other cases, the relics are slightly comic instantiations of the very moral transgressions the film's prohibition-era message was ostensibly against, from ladies stockings to cough syrup bottles used for bootleg liquor. Periodically, new relics are uncovered and revealed to the public with fanfare.

A visiting reporter, whose article "Old Testament Ways Revived by Players," appeared in June 1923 in *Los Angeles Sunday Times* described, "an unobstructed view of a memorable sight—the encampment of a people on the march. For nearly half a mile it spread in straggling disarray in all directions, this camp of Jews beside the Red Sea. Tents and camels, men, women and children, sheep and goats and burros and geese and oxen, carts and litters. It seemed to be early morning and the smoke of a hundred small fires rose from before the many tents as the women busied themselves with the preparation of the food. It was a happy camp, the

camp of a liberated people bound for their homeland. Here and there a lookout lounged ... 'ACTION.'" Among the actors were "224 Orthodox Jews. Many of them speak no English, they having recently come from Palestine and Turkey and Russia. To these Jews the making of the film was not business and not work. It was a transmigration to Biblical times."³

On the other side of the wire that provides the boundary for the ATV area, stillness and the periodic chirping of birds pervade. In the refuge area, it looks completely otherworldly. Swooping and swirling lines of sand. There are lines of little bird feet. And every once in a while coyote prints, these all in lieu of the tire tracks. Tufts of grasses like babies new hair, with roots gripping into the sand. Ropey tentacles in shades of bleachiest blond. Get closer and they are fibrous, sinewy, hairlike, and nervy.

There are here the quieter human interlopers and thrill seekers. Little ants with sand sleds. At one point they wind through the peaks and troughs of the sand like the line of extras in the scene from DeMille's film, when the Jews wander from Pharaoh's realm towards the sea and the Promised Land. From a distance they could be the wandering Jews in the desert. And farther away still, middens rest amongst the vegetation, which is here allowed to prosper.

In the midst of what is now the OHV riding area, ninety years ago was a community of so-called Dunites. "Drifters and balmy eccentrics" had lived in the dunes since the time of DeMille in shacks scattered about the dunes.⁴ But around 1930, Gavin Arthur, grandson of former US president Chester Arthur, a dynamic and wealthy bisexual sexologist, arrived in the area. The first set of Dunites had made their shacks out of scrap wood and mud from previously abandoned vacation developments that had folded when shifting sands made discerning property lines nigh impossible in the early 1900s.⁵ Arthur used his substantial resources to build additional



Figure 3:
The Israelites, led by Moses, walk across the desert after their departure from Rameses's kingdom. Film still from Cecil B. DeMille's silent religious epic *The Ten Commandments*, filmed in the Oceano Dunes in summer 1923 and released in theaters that December.

cabins for himself, his lover, and others, as well as a comfortable community house for a development he named "Moy Mell," out of which he established a literary journal called *Dune Forum*; he declared "the net" as the symbol of the community's union.

Visitors included photographer Edward Weston, whose iconic images of the Oceano Dunes from that time were what initially drew Caplan here. Moy Mell officially endured till 1939, soon after which Arthur gave the structures over which he had control to the Coast Guard to use as headquarters to patrol the beach for fear of a Japanese invasion. Others stayed on, however, with the last of the Dunites dying only in the 1970s. Now this has been subsumed under the sand highway.

The days of the ATV culture may well be numbered. The dunes became an Off Highway Vehicle Park in 1970 (in the 1950s and 1960s it had been more or less a free-for-all). The region was split into a nature reserve and an OHV park. In 1982, California State Parks took over from the California Coastal Commission. It's estimated that today 1.5 million people a year ride ATVs here, either for day trips or overnight stays; there are regulars from Orange County to Fresno, representing multiple cultures and constituencies.

In recent years, multiple lawsuits and injunctions have proceeded, with complaints ranging from the public health hazards created by the ATV dust, to loss of habitat for wildlife. Opponents of the OHV park present it, at times, almost as if it's Sodom. The county's Air Pollution Control District, as well as representatives from the Northern Chumash, has taken a particularly strong interest. The ATV beachside utopia, with its cultural, family, and political traditions, provides voluble opposition.

I reflect on the broken shard of ATV headlight; it glistens in the light, like cracked citrine. What might it mean to see this and the other shattered shards as something far from Sodom, and rather as part of a utopian project as deep and as significant as that

of the Dunites who made Moy Mell? Or of that utopian project so extravagantly enacted by Cecil B. DeMille's crew of Israelites en route to their promised land? A 1933 poem by Gavin Arthur published in *Dune Forum* begins:

Wind in the dunes
winding a winding sheet
over the corpse
over the corpse in the copse
over the pitiful
city of sinful
weary windblown
ghosts of imaginary citizens

Is the headlight shard a future relic in waiting? At Oceano, and in Caplan's work, we are confronted by the ambivalent relationship between and among human, historical, and natural temporalities, as well as diverse systems of morality and notions of community.

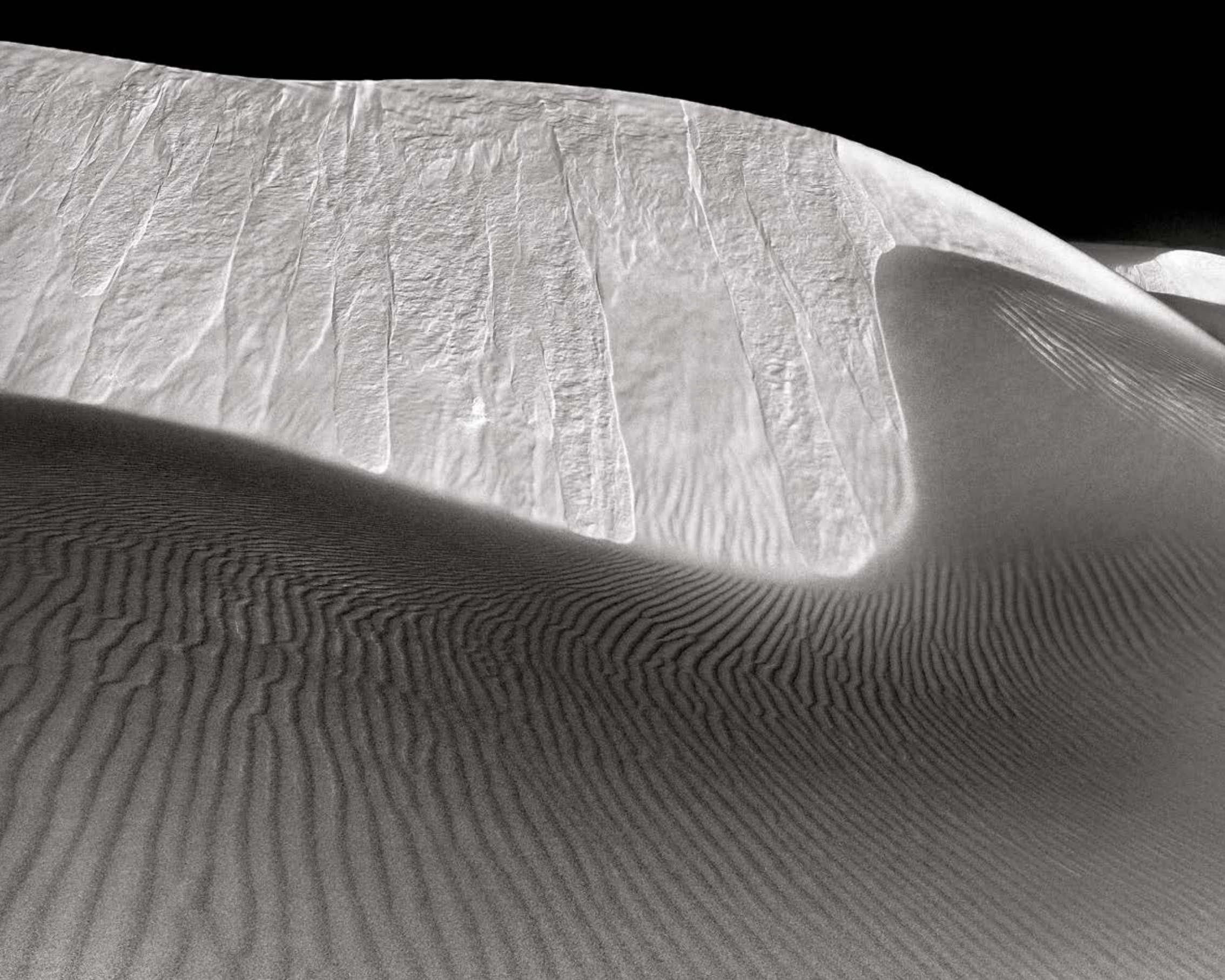
In the OHV area, drivers as young as ten trace and retrace their favorite curves and paths into the sand, leaving marks that it's hard to believe will, in fact, be gone—soon enough—with the wind. Their utopian playground exists in a state of semipermanence that is created through use; and yet this may lapse as the political and social winds continue to shift. 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.

- 1 Svetlana Boym, "Ruins of the Avant-Garde," in *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Julia Hell et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 58.
- 2 Taylor Coffman, in Norm Hammond, *The Dunites* (Arroyo Grande, CA: South County Historical Society, 1992), p. vi.
- 3 Hallett Abend, "Old Testament Ways Revived by Players: DeMille and Company on Location in Desert. Chants and Old Songs When Portraying Exodus," *Los Angeles Sunday Times*, June 17, 1923, p. 8a.
- 4 The reviewer of the Dunite-authored book *Face of the Clam* described the "drifters and balmy eccentrics" as living "on fish and clams and vegetables bartered or pilfered from the Jap farmers. They build and furnish shacks from odds and ends cast up by the sea." See "California Beachcombers," *New York Times Book Review*, January 19, 1947, p. 12.
- 5 Robert V. Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1953).











Early: streaks of brown are turning to brilliant pink against a smoky chartreuse sky. The heralding of winter has begun. This is the magic month of October. Despite the presence of the cat, the birds are joyously chirping.

October 1944

The doves are hoo hooing now, the surf has a brown rim from the creek, soft feathery clouds are streaming out for miles through the blue spring sky. It is time to fix the garden fence, turn the ground, put the seeds in, make a closer well ... and begin the ritual of watering. The roof needs a checking, nails driven in, fresh tar, slats tightened. New ideas for irrigation have come with the new year, new ideas cropping up amongst the old ones.

October 1944

The storm ... creek so high I had to take off my pants and roll up the rest of my clothes to pass ... caught in a cold rain driven right through heavy jacket and sweater on the way home. Took hour or so to warm up even with blazing fire ... but, Oh Boy the glorious color after the storm!

November 1944

Last day of the month and the first rain of the year—after holding back for three cloudy days. Smack! Tap! Spat! How infinite is the Beauty of just one rain! What sweet music to a gardener! I feel myself to be the garden, luxuriously stretched out, catching each drop like a delicious beverage, feeling it soak into me ... the little seeds fairly jumping with energy, so I get up and have breakfast in the dark before dawn.

January 31, 1945

Excerpts from letters written in 1944–1945 by Elwood Decker to soldier and former Dunite Howard Bradford while he was stationed in Europe. Elwood was a prolific letter writer and left behind hundreds of pages of correspondence from the Dunes.



"Just arrived"
A consequence of numerous
false prophecies, and other unseasonable
statements.
Professor Medworthy, Professor Keller, and Spiteasidy
go down to perdition with a job lot of patients.

It is but the joyful end of humanity
It is a very refreshing scene and enough
to make any body
knows "his friends" Professor Medworthy

Prop
Mrs Nell
Ocean











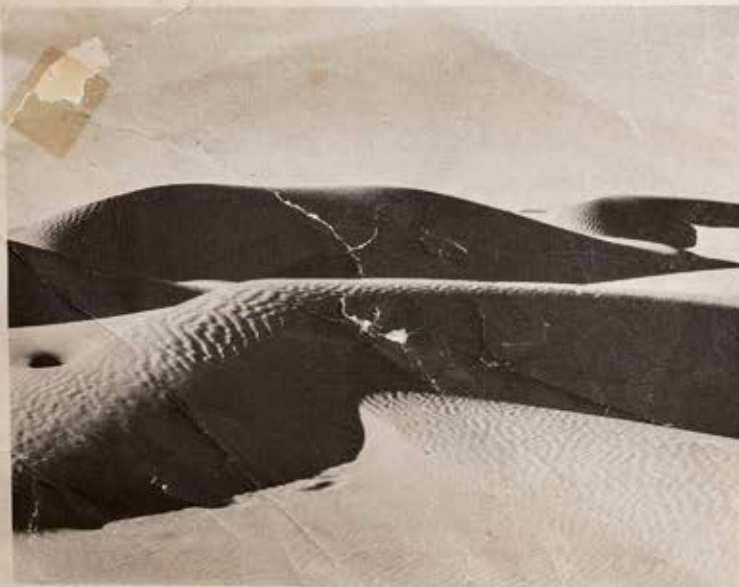
Gavin Arthur founded the utopian artist colony Moy Mell on this perceived high-vibration site in 1931. Arthur was an author, respected astrologer, early gender theorist, gay rights activist, and the grandson of US president Chester A. Arthur (1881–1885). While others lived in salvaged wood shacks, Gavin constructed a cluster of cabins with proper building materials, where his mother would send cases of champagne and whiskey monthly. He hosted artists, writers, and thinkers including John Steinbeck, Upton Sinclair, and Edward Weston during his shooting trips. With a small editorial team living in the community house he built, he published their short-lived vision, *Dune Forum* magazine, from 1933–1934. Images of the dunes by Edward Weston, Chandler Weston, and Willard Van Dyke, among others, were featured on the cover. *Dune Forum* aimed to share the spirit of the conversations at Moy Mell with a collection of political articles, editorials, poetry, prose, images, and correspondence, yet at \$3/year it proved to be too costly for the times.

Nine years his junior and full of muscles, former commercial fisherman **Carl Beckstead** was Gavin's "right-hand man." He became a skilled photographer, learning from Edward Weston while Weston was in the Dunes.

Former screenwriter **Dunham Thorp** moved to the Dunes in 1933 with his wife and young daughter to be an editor of *Dune Forum*. He became an active participant in Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California (EPIC) movement, and in 1934 he left his family in the Dunes and traveled with Gavin Arthur to help Sinclair run for governor.

Poet and violinist **Marion Thorp** frequently spent days in bed behind a closed door in the Moy Mell Community House before her catatonia set in. All the while, six-year-old Ella Thorp trailed behind Edward Weston, carrying his glass plates across the dunes.

DUNE FORUM



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLES WELTON

Subscribers' Number







There was a tremendous thunder and lightning storm last night, right in my front yard. The big window shook and great rivers of heavenly fire darted from one end of the Dunes to the other. It was terrifying yet beautiful. Then it poured down rain.

September 3, 1945

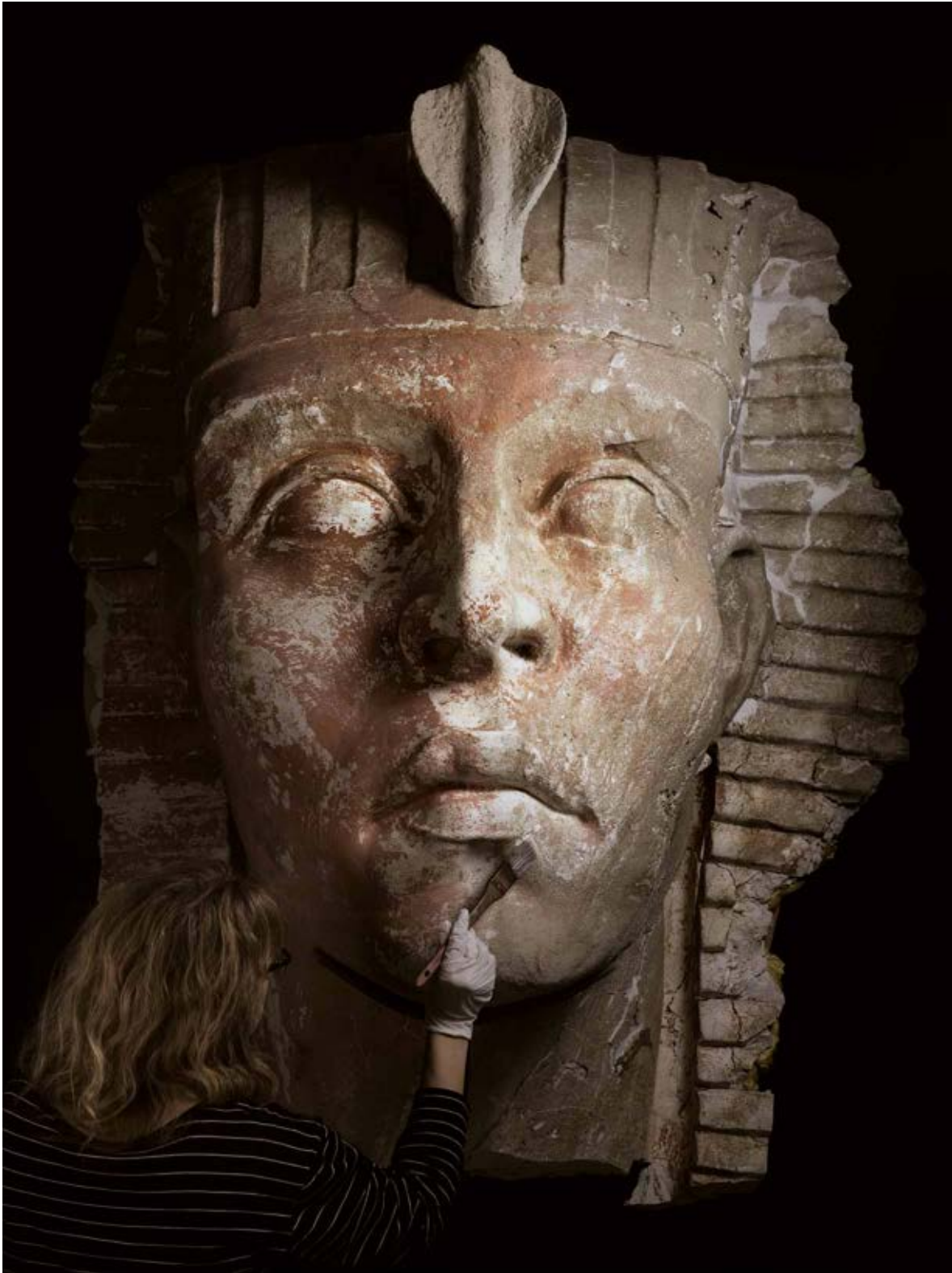
A pure and untouched space was required for the visit of silent Indian spiritual master **Meher Baba** in 1934. But when he arrived, he preferred to sleep in Gavin Arthur's cabin to the new one built for him.

The only window in **Moon Mullins's** cabin was a Model-T Ford windshield he installed on the east side of the cabin. Although it didn't provide much light, it offered a good view of the high dunes. Moon (short for Moonshine) Mullins was also the name of a popular newspaper comic character of the era. Moon left the Dunes in the late 1960s but his cabin remained for some years after he was gone. What became the dune riders' "Sand Highway" sprung up beside it and many riders spent the night in his cabin for the novelty, with their vehicles parked out front.























I'll list a few items of news today:

Jim Coffie last heard of from German prison camp.

Another friend in the Pacific theater died after laying wounded 9 days.

An airplane planted rice in one of the partly drained Dune Lakes this morning for the ducks. Take care of them and then kill them, that's the way it goes.

I pulled up a 28-inch parsnip the other day.

Jim's wife said ... she thought I was "hopeless, and had lost contact with society." Quite a compliment.

The red-white-and-blue sweater you gave me is so full of holes I don't know whether to try to mend it or gently put it among the paint rags.

I haven't seen Blair this year and I've been meaning to hop over and inspect your Dune mansion.

Haven't heard from Gance. I suppose you hear that Hal married Billie, the Ojai girl.

I sold a drawing not long ago and have only worked two days this year so far.

April 27, 1945

Nudist, vegetarian, painter, and celibate evangelist, **George Blais** donned flowing white hair and a long white beard in striking contrast to his richly tanned skin. At times, he heavily indulged in his own home brew and often mediated eight hours a day.

After all the other Dunites had left the Dunes, the well-read astrologer **Bert Schievink** was there, in the same two-room cabin for thirty-four years until his death in 1974. He lived alone but had connections in the community from his weekly visits to town and caretaking jobs, a series of girlfriends, and was known to cast horoscopes for friends and visitors. He often paraphrased the famed astrologer Dane Rudhyar saying ... "The most holy vibrations on Earth are found eighteen miles south of San Luis Obispo." Not long after he was gone, vandals set fire to his cabin. Some personal items were removed before the fire and are now kept at the Oceano Depot, a local history museum, including a few cups which were used to scatter his ashes in the dunes.





*Shankin'
SouthBabe*

POLARIS













Good afternoon, Chair, and members of the board. I'm _____ . I'm an Arroyo Grande resident and I'm also running for 4th District county supervisor. As you can see, I grew up riding in the dunes. I also grew up on the Nipomo Mesa. Went to Nipomo Mesa Elementary School before it was the middle school. I came down with asthma at age ten. I'm not saying that there is a scientific causation, but there could be a correlation ... No one is recommending closure. The question we are asking is how much mitigation is necessary and feasible to protect public health ... The people on the Nipomo Mesa and Oceano have a right to safe, breathable air. And while I respect State Parks and APCD's efforts to come up with a reasonable agreement, the economic and recreational interests of riders and businesses should never take priority over the public health needs of our community.

_____, long time dune enthusiast, first time speaker here And, I am appalled and offended that after forty years of trying to close the dunes, they are still doing this again! What this is is history repeating itself. The Europeans came here over to America and didn't like the natives being their neighbors and they put them on reservations. These people moved into this area, they don't like the activity here, let's bully them into getting our way, and this is how they are doing it. Because they have the time, the money, the political influence, okay, to come in here and try to bully us out of our dunes. We were here first! The dunes were here first, and now they're trying to make it their health issue. If there is a health issue, fine, put a warning label on it like everything else in California. Put a warning label on the wall, it'll hurt you if you bang your head against it! Hot coffee at McDonald's will burn you if it spills on your lap! ... So, I am going to say this, did I know you could possibly die from secondhand sand? But if that's a thing, that's how I choose to go. I will die on that beach with a cigar in one hand and a vodka press in the other with a smile on my face 'cause I spend enough time on that beach with my wife and kids to have that much sand in my lungs! I'm out.

My husband and I have lived on the Nipomo Mesa for over five years now. We are in the direct path, our back yard faces northwest, so we are in the direct path of the hazardous plume of PM10 and 2.5 particulates. I dread the days when we have high winds from the north. I am horrified that we're continually accumulating these hazardous particles into our lungs and because of their size we will never expel them. These particles are like little hidden timebombs, that after a few years of long-term exposure, they'll be causing permanent damage to our lungs and possibly our hearts.

Millions of people you've said go out there every year, a million people a year go out there. I've gone out for fifty years. What I'd like to see is a study of the people who have used that area. Have you studied their health? How's it impacted their health? I'm going to be fifty this year. So, some of these residents have been here five years. I have lived here thirty-nine of those fifty years. A lot of us have lived here the whole time. Can you look at that, instead of just counting dirt? That'd be great.

A lot of people are just in total denial that the sand is creating the problem in the air. What I would ask you to think about, take a handful of normal sand, put it in a mortar and pestle, and you grind it, you grind it twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. One and half million people come over here a year to use that. And so that constant grinding of sand makes powder. And it doesn't take much airflow from the winds to uh, make that powder airborne. The plume that comes through goes about a one thousand feet high, and it's about maybe two to three miles inland and about two to three miles wide.

You have blowing dust down there. Let's go back to the thirties when the Dunites lived there. They had some of their structures they left behind that were buried in sand, from what? Blowing sand, okay.

It's not blowing sand we are talking about. This dust is the particulate matter, I think you all understand. It isn't anything to do with sand itself.

When you get down to the 2.5 micron sized particle, there is nothing in our lungs that allow that to collect. So, it goes to the deepest part of the lungs, the alveoli, which are the sacks, and there's millions of them. And as that little micron particle hits the cell, it starts a bit of an infection. And that kills the cell. Why it's an end-stage disease is because there is no way to stop it and lung cells don't regenerate themselves.

My name is _____, I'm six years old, and please don't shut more dunes down because I like riding my dirt bike and camping with my family and friends. That's all I have to say. Thank you.

My hairdresser at good 'ol Supercuts told me the story last month that when she went in to get her daughter's inhaler, because she has asthma, the nurse opened the drawer. There were so many inhalers in there, she could not count them, and it took her about fifteen minutes to find her daughter's inhaler. You're affecting children, you are responsible for the health, not only the people that are showing up here, but the children at Dorothea Lange Elementary and Mesa Middle School.

We live in California, I'm just saying, it is polluted over the whole state. I'm from the Valley, my kids have inhalers, that's a given, we know that's going to come with it. According to the California Economic Impact Analysis, over two hundred million dollars is spent here, 56 percent of it comes from the Valley. What are you gonna do, what are the residents gonna do? What are—and I hear scare tactics, scare tactics, but that's the truth—what are you gonna do without the income? We bring in income.

So if you shut down the RV use of the park, what will you have accomplished after all this? Nothing. The RVs will be gone, a recreational activity will be lost, tourism will be gone, many jobs will be lost, and millions of dollars will not be put into the economy. However, the winds will still be blowing, the sands will still be shifting, and dust will still be blowing up into the air and on to the mesa, so leave the park alone.

I think that the residents of Nipomo should look at themselves and, while it's not their fault, they, like some other people have said, they moved into an area downwind of sand dunes.

People say to us, "Why don't you move?" Well, he's eighty-two, I'm eighty-one. It's pretty hard to say we are going to up and get rid of all of our friends and go move someplace else. At our age it's not really doable.

[We went] to Mayo Clinic in Minnesota to get the best advice about things. Once we brought up this issue about the silica, or this PMs as we call it, in our air, the pulmonologist's there, eyes lit up, and he goes "Whoa! That's really right in line with what we see happening in your wife's lungs."

The open area in the riding area is causing the dust. If you vegetate that whole area, you probably would minimize the dust, but then there goes our riding area.

This is a health and safety issue and health and safety code, and recreation shouldn't be factored into it. I feel for the people that ride on the dunes that it needs to be accommodated, but the number one priority is the health of the people on the mesa. It's been at least eight years since the cause has been identified and there's really been no meaningful resolution or change.

You are our last hope, our last resort. Please help us.









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Norwegian engineer, economist, and world traveler **Bryn Beorse** (also known as Murshid Shamcher) became one of the first Sufi leaders in America.

Before leaving his Orthodox Jewish family in Brooklyn for California, seeker **Sam Cohen** had become a Theosophist. While living in the Dunes in 1932, he traveled to meet silent Indian holy man Meher Baba in Hollywood, where he was speaking through an interpreter. After the event, several of Baba's prominent disciples came to stay in the Dunes, making Moy Mell resemble an ashram with guided meditations throughout the day. When Baba returned to California in 1934, Gavin Arthur invited him and his eighteen-person entourage to stay in the Dunes. Shortly after their overnight visit, the handsome, penniless young Dunite left on a luxury ocean liner to India, funded by the wealthy women shepherding Baba through California.

Bespectacled with a corn-cob pipe, artist, writer, and master carver **Arthur Allman** built his dune shack to resemble a South Seas island hut from memory of his time in the Ecuadorian Navy. He traded ships he crafted from metal and wood for supplies in town. He spent his last years creating the book of devils, *Evolution*, which ended up in Gavin Arthur's library after Allman's death on New Year's Day, 1937.

*I'm busy as usual, dreaming for all
who haven't time.*
November 1944







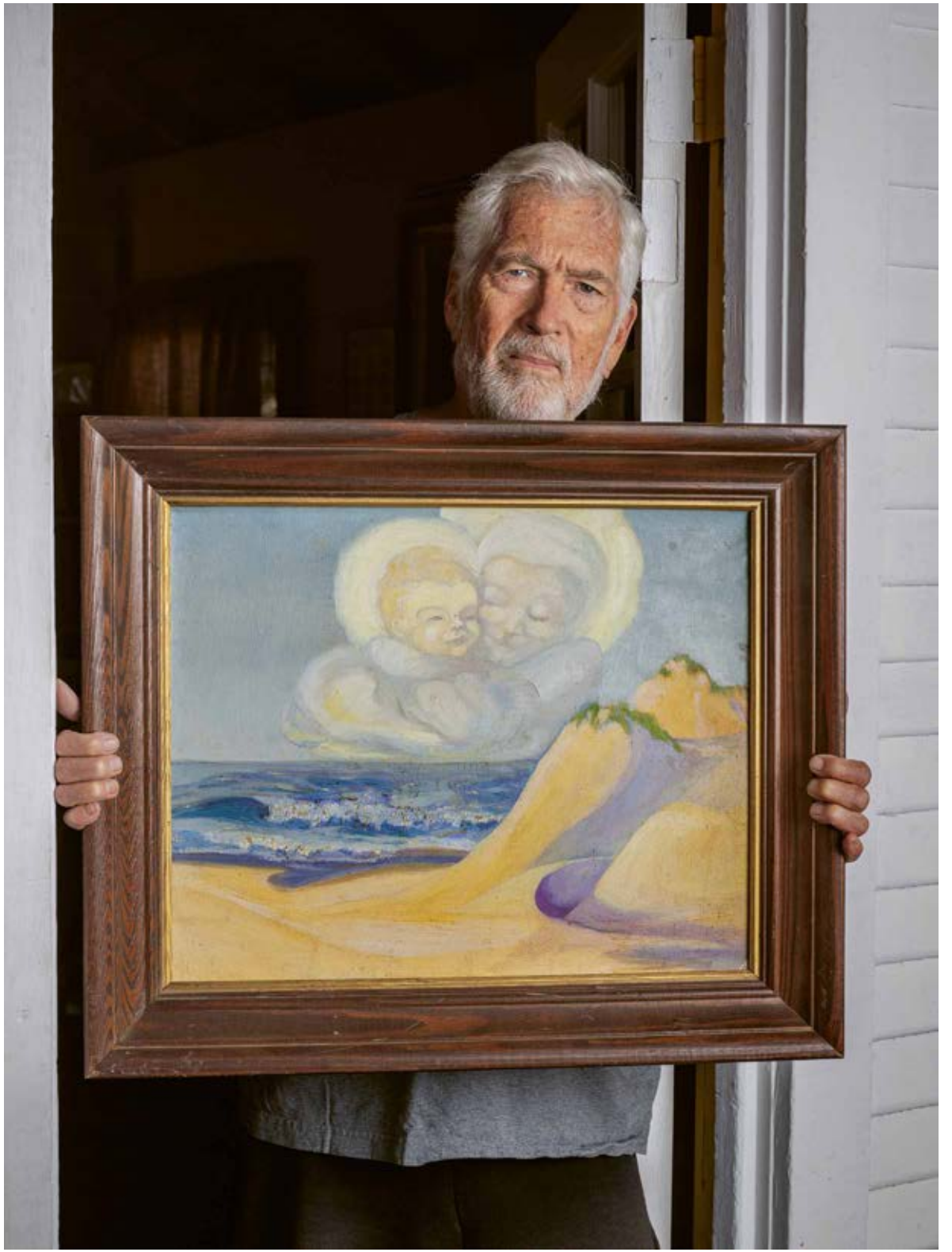




Painter and channeler **Dixie Paul** handmade marionettes with changeable facial expressions, happy on the left and sad on the right. Previously, she had made prehistoric animal marionettes for the early science-fiction movie *Lost Atlantis*. While she painted, she sang unfamiliar tunes that she claimed just came out of her, in a dialect reported to sound like Tibetan chanting. She lived in the Dunes alone in the late 1930s, left in 1941, and came back ten years later with her kids. She sold paintings and fed the family with fresh vegetables from her garden, milk from their goat, and plentiful clams from the ocean.

Artist and mystic **Elwood Decker** painted rainbow colors across the ceiling of his cabin to live inside a rainbow. After thirteen years in the Dunes, he married a beautician, moved to Hollywood, and became an experimental filmmaker and Anandamayee devotee. While in Los Angeles, he studied and exhibited his photography and films—his photograms in exhibitions alongside Man Ray and his films shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He and his wife Ann moved to an Oklahoma monastery for some time, then they returned to Oceano late in life, though not to a cabin in the Dunes. He was the last living Dunite when he died in 1992 at age eighty-nine, on the train tracks behind the Dunes.

Former fashion model, painter, and sketch artist for *Vogue* and *Harper's*, **Emily Dean** left New York City and the fashion industry for the Dunes, where she mostly painted nudes, dunes, and wildflowers. Clever, talented, and beautiful, she used pillow ticking and other items she found to make her own fashionable clothes. By 1940, Gavin's group in Moy Mell had moved on and his cabins were empty, so with Gavin's permission, Emily moved from a remote cabin into the more comfortable Moy Mell Community House. She left the Dunes in the early 1940's with beachcomber John Wingate, who she later married.













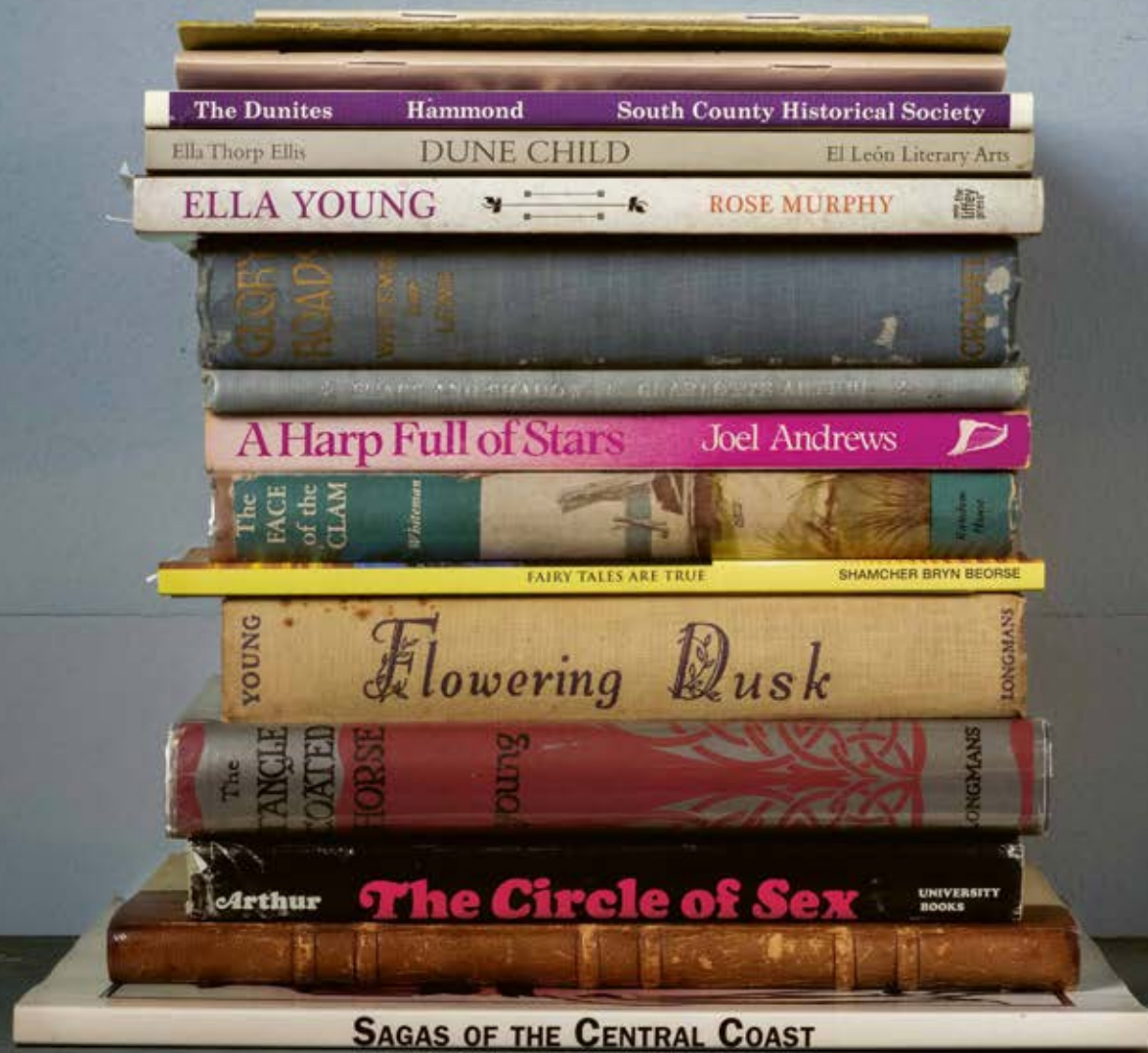
Fearing a Japanese invasion by sea, in 1941 the US Coast Guard moved into Gavin Arthur's cabins in Moy Mell as a base to patrol the beach and the Dunes. They used the utopian colony's community house as a stable for their horses. Many of the books that lined the cabin's walls, stamped with Gavin's grandfather's presidential seal, were thrown out into the sand.

Born in San Francisco to a wealthy Jewish family, mystical Dune poet **Hugo Seelig** suffered the childhood trauma of discovering his father's suicidal body. After attending Stanford University and then working in the financial district in San Francisco, during WWI he moved to the Dunes as an ideal refuge from the madness of a world at war. He preferred living in a tent so he could move around to tune into different vibrations and energy centers. With the help of writer and Celtic mythologist Ella Young, he published *Wheel of Fire* in 1936, a book of poems salvaged from scrawled-on scraps of paper found in his tent.

One of the earliest recorded Dunites was adventurer, poet, and veteran of the Spanish-American War, **Edward C. St. Claire**. He lived in the Dunes until he became ill with tuberculosis and moved just a couple miles east, to a small cottage at the TB sanatorium at the Theosophist Temple of the People in Halcyon. Just before his death in 1927, a collection of his poetry, *Wind Woven Poems*, was published by the theosophists' press. The last line of the last poem reads "This is the end of all the songs I've sung."

Wild swans go gracefully by, sounding their mournful cry as somebody at the millionaire's Gun Club next door has decided to celebrate the New Year by shooting. When I woke up I heard the guns on my right, and on my left the sound of the surf sounded also like a series of explosions because of the sharp crisp air. I imagine a lot of soldiers would rather celebrate it by just looking at the wild white swans and being thankful to see them so close, so graceful, so alive. Personally, I would rather murder a bad habit, yet I suppose we first learn to murder something easier to hit.

January 1, 1945









Matthew

“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. This is a place that can help you heal from trauma and pain. Walking in the dunes, on the beach, or in the water is healing. I’ve seen people who are sick go there to recover. I’ve seen some people scream to the ocean. Healing can happen. During the times when the beach is flooded with people and vehicles, I feel sick and sad. Huge amounts of filthy 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.”

Mona

“As a young girl growing up in Oceano, I went clamming often with my dad, Timothy Olivas. The Pismo clam was frequently the mainstay of our meals. We would have fried clams on nights when we found a lot, and chowder to make them stretch on nights when there weren’t as many. Now there’s a chance that this delicious protein may return to our lives. Clamming isn’t easy as you have to be in very cold water, sometimes at sunrise, with no guarantee of finding legal size clams, but it was still fun. My dad was an expert in finding the good clamming spots. He taught me to see those places, but he was the best.”

To the yak titʻu titʻu yak tiłhini Northern Chumash Tribe of San Luis Obispo County and region (ytt Tribe), the Oceano Dunes Complex in southern San Luis Obispo County is spiritual, breathtaking in its beauty, and fragile in ways that we don’t fully understand. The Dunes Complex goes by many names and has several owners with different restrictions and purposes. Some is owned by California State Parks, there is the Federal Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge, the Chevron Corporation is an owner, and there are other owners. But for the ytt Tribe we don’t think of this place as several places but as one place that is part of our ancestral homeland. We also don’t separate the dunes from the beach or the ocean as in our minds they are never separate from one another or from us.

It is a place we traditionally used for wellness, gathering food, food processing, and other special events. For us it is a place of solace, a place to be quiet, a place to watch the skies in the day and at night, and a place to watch our ocean relatives pass by. It is a healing place, and Tribal Elder LeiLynn Olivas Odom would tell us to go there if we were grieving or troubled.

We are heartened by the slow return of the Pismo clam and call upon State agencies to enforce limits and size requirements.

The Dunes have been providing for us for thousands of years and have provided shelter for others. In recent times the Dunes have provided some degree of shelter to people without homes, and that can be difficult for the dunes, but we also understand that people are in need of a place to spend the night and trying to survive. Many years ago the Dunes provided shelter to the Dunites, a well-known group of freethinkers and artists. But we sometimes wonder if they too were homeless and simply needed a place to live in quiet peace? Things are not the same today.

It is our responsibility to speak out. The Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) is

a dangerous playground, and even traveling from the beach ramps to the SVRA is hazardous. The estimate of pre-pandemic visitors numbered over 1.2 million visitors per year, and it is agonizing to know that the Dunes are being overused and disrespected. This large number of people per year is proven to be an unmanageable number, with deaths and an unknown number of injuries minor and major occurring annually. It is heartbreaking to hear of these deaths and injuries to people.

Tribal people and many others know that large areas of the dunes are undergoing damage, being battered, and may not be able to fully recover. This can’t continue and a way is needed to protect visitors and to ensure respect for the dunes, the beach, and the ocean.

šumoqini means “always” in tʻi:nismuʔ tiłhinkʔtitʻu, the language of the people of tiłhini.



Artist Statement

“Landscape is not the ideological neutral subject many imagine it to be. Rather, it is an historical artifact that can be seen as a record of the material facts of our social reality and what we have chosen to make of them.”

—Deborah Bright

Coming from Brooklyn, I had never lived anywhere like San Luis Obispo. It was 2016 and I settled for my new job in the boutiquey café-lined university town center. Just outside the downtown, there were rolling hills with cattle and vineyards, Trump campaign signs in front yards, and lots of pick-up trucks in shopping plaza parking lots. On my first day of teaching, I found myself parked next to a field of sheep. I was unmoored.

Seeking my footing, I set out to find a place where I had something to grasp. I discovered that the iconic dunes of Edward Weston’s photos were only nineteen miles south of town. I mentioned wanting to check them out to a colleague. She told me about a bohemian group who lived in the dunes, primarily in the 1920s to the 1940s, in a utopian artist colony—where Weston stayed while making his photos. I was intrigued. I went to find their sacred spot, a perceived high-vibration, creative energy vortex. What I found instead startled me—hundreds of vehicles and fleets of ATVs for rent: a frenzy of whizzing wheels, blowing sand, diesel fumes, screaming motors, and flying “Don’t Tread on Me” flags. This was definitely not the utopian, mythological, American West landscape I imagined. Of course, I knew the reality of the American West is not simply the carefully constructed images of the California Precisionists, the mythic emptiness of Timothy O’Sullivan’s survey images, or the hyper-masculine rugged terrain of Hollywood’s Westerns. Yet this is, more profoundly, a landscape of stolen territory, failed utopian ideals, exploited and extracted resources, homeless encampments, and destroyed habitat—with each subsequent inhabitant laying

claim to the sand as their own. These are the histories underneath the familiar tranquil dune images that all came to the surface for me.

Sublime landscape images played a key role in the preservation of wilderness in the American West. Photographs of sweeping panoramas were brought before Congress to petition for the laws that created our national parks. In contrast, appearing as hollow spaces full of possibility in the survey images of the 1860s and 1870s, these early landscape images fueled environmental destruction, indigenous displacement and colonization through land-grabs, settlement, prospecting, railroads, industry, and mining. One hundred years later, photography begins to foreground photographs of “man-altered landscapes” and disaster zones to expose the falsehood of images of the wilderness and spotlight the human impact on the natural world.

The majestic and expansive Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Complex, which includes the Oceano Dunes riding area, is both a state park and a disaster zone. The effect of the mythology of emptiness motors on, over endangered species and ancestral Chumash cultural sites, in plumes of particulate matter, and in seeping industrial spills. In addition to the riding area, there is a now defunct oil drilling site and pipeline that slowly leaked for thirty-five years. The Guadalupe Restoration Project with daily on-site monitoring by three yak tit^yu tit^yu yak tit^hini (ytt) Northern Chumash women has been working to clean up and remediate the habitat since 1994. To the north, pristine dunes, willow groves, and a wildlife refuge are juxtaposed with scarred riding terrain and encampments delineated with caution tape, so close to each other that I hear the roar of the ATVs while carrying my tripod on my shoulder across Weston’s stripped hills.

While making the images for this project, I spent considerable time on the sand with the riders, who were kind to me with their time and resources. In the massive camping and riding village, I encoun-

tered family reunions, weddings, generations of summer vacation traditions, and families bonding through tinkering with motors while cooking over campfires. There were tequila shots for birthday weekends, nightly fireworks in the summer months, a concert with a mass shooting—thankfully with no fatalities—and injured riders regularly airlifted to hospitals from the bottom of steep dunes. However, the future for riding in the Dunes is uncertain.

In early 2018, I started attending County Air Pollution Control District hearings, where plans were proposed to try to mitigate the dust and public health impact of the riding activity. The riders dressed in blue on one side of the aisle and the affected residents dressed in red on the other. Opposing public comments were heard for each proposed plan. After over a decade of these hearings, mitigation plans produced little improvement in air quality. In March 2021, the California Coastal Commission ruled to close the riding area completely by April 2024. Friends of the Oceano Dunes, a group representing the interest of the riders, filed lawsuits in opposition. In the meantime, the riding area remains open.

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. It offers both an interrogation of photographic conventions regarding landscape and representation, and a feminist response to the standard masculine vision of landscape. And this is not an empty landscape. Enlisting the past and present inhabitants as collaborators to enact performative and co-constructed moments, the images confront historic approaches to portraiture (such as reductive stereotypes of indigenous people, typologies like those of August Sander, fabricated tableaux, self-portraiture, and the vernacular).

Assembling these images and texts together, with their range of styles, subjects, and goals for each theme, takes each group of images out of their context, undermining what would seem to be their individual intent, and constructs meaning through their relationships. Ultimately, the work's dynamic historic context, as a locus of human interactions and values, intends to charge this cultural landscape with significance far beyond the Oceano Dunes.



front endpaper



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Index

SVRA stands for State Vehicular Recreation Area.

front endpaper

Map of Area Habitats of the Dunes

Plate 8 from “Natural Resources of the Nipomo Dunes and Wetlands”, a report issued by California Department of Fish and Game, US Fish and Wildlife Service, June 1976.

3 Dunes, 4 (negative), 2020

4 Dunes, 4, 2020

9 Shopping Cart, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

11 Dust Circles, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

13 Camper at Low Tide, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

15 Flags, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2019

21 Gavin, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

23 Aerial Crawlers, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2017

25 Where Mountains Meet the Sea, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

27 Dunes, 3 (negative), 2020

28 Dunes, 3, 2020

31 Evolution, Gavin’s Cabin, Oceano, 2022

Courtesy of Oceano Depot Association

Dunite Arthur Allman was born in Dublin, Ireland, on February 25, 1862, and died in Oceano on New Year’s Day, 1937. Though *Evolution* is undated, a photo from August 1, 1932 shows Allman with this book, lying face down in the sand dunes. The hand drawn text and images tell an anti-Darwinist story of a journey to a haunted castle, where it is believed there is a portal to Hell. Three adventurers plan to dispel the myth of Hell, but instead find devils watching “condemned souls” dropping into protoplasm lakes, processions of “unconverted” witches, souls dipping in pools of red devil tempering fluid, and heaps of “just arrived” mummies dropped into perdition on a meat hook.

33 Training Wheels, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

35 Orange Crush, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

36 Blanca and Gabriela, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

37 American Family 2, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

39 Sundial, yak tit’u tit’u yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

41 Dune Forum, Oceano Depot Museum, 2022

Courtesy of Norm Hammond

“This DUNE FIRE [sic] attracts not only the inhabitants of the oases, but similarly-minded neighbors from the rich valleys of the hinterland and the forested Mesa above the Lakes; visitors, too, from the metropolitan areas to the north and south, poets, scientists, musicians, artists, coming for relaxation from the universities and towns, drawn here by the dunes, the warmth of the fire, the freedom and friendliness. One, perhaps, will bring a lithograph he has just made. If so, it is hung on the bare walls of the Community House, to be commented upon and criticised [sic]. Another will read a poem she has just written. The conversation deepens gradually. It may become a symposium of contrasting ideas. An important synthesis is sometimes reached. It is to reproduce, as nearly as a printed magazine will allow, these fireside conversations, symbolic of similar conversations all over the west, that the DUNE FORUM [sic] is being launched in this tentative issue.”—Excerpt from Gavin Arthur’s opening editorial of this 1933 Subscriber’s Number introductory issue. Cover image is by Chandler Weston, Edward Weston’s oldest son. Both Chandler and Edward’s second son, Brett, photographed in the Dunes before Edward had a chance to visit.

43 Hitchhikers, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

Hitchhiking down the coast. Morning departure after a night in the Dunes.

45 Clam Forks, yak tit’u tit’u yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

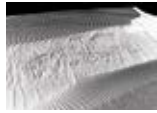
47 Kelsey Shaffer, Riley and Hayden Laguna Reburying Undersized Clams, yak tit’u tit’u yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023



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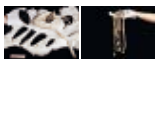
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49 Entrance to Gavin's Cabin, Oceano, 2018
Gavin Arthur lived in this cabin off and on through the 1930s. In 1946, after being used during WWII by the US Coast Guard with Gavin's ceremonial permission, it was moved to Oceano, where it served as a vacation rental for many years. In 2003, it was donated to the Oceano Depot Association. The cabin was moved to its current location behind the retired Oceano Train Depot in 2010 and is now cared for by historian and author Norm Hammond and the Oceano Depot Association. It is the only remaining Dunite structure.

50 Dunes, 7, 2022

51 Dunes, 7 (negative), 2022

52/53 Sphinx Head, Sphinx Torso, 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.

55 Tracks, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

57 Night Crawlers, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

59 Fog, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

60 The Eisemans, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

61 Campfire, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

63 Abel, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

65 Bert's Cups, behind the Oceano Depot, 2022
Courtesy of Oceano Depot Association
Bert Schievink's cups were saved from his cabin after his death in 1974. These cups were used to scatter his ashes in the cove in the Dunes where he lived for thirty-four years.

67 Rastaman, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

69 Solar Powered, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

71 The Black Rider, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

73 American Flag, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022

75 Pismo Clam Shell in Hand, yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tithini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

77 Dunes, 6 (negative), 2020

78 Dunes, 6, 2020

83 San Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District hearing, March 21, 2018, City of San Luis Obispo Council Chambers. Screenshot from livestream, courtesy of SLO County APCD, slocleanair.org

84-85 yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tithini Northern Chumash items housed at the Mission Museum, San Luis Obispo, 2018

87 Bottle Caps, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

89 Steven Shane Goldman, yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tithini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

91 Wall of Fame, The Dunes Center, Guadalupe, 2023

93 Arthur's Boat, Oceano Depot, 2023

Donated by Mark Weedon to the Oceano Depot Association, courtesy of Norm Hammond

Hand-carved wooden boat made by Dunite Arthur Allman in the 1930s.

95 Boots and Beer, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

97 Girl with the Red Sweater, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

99 For Sale, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2018

101 Artifacts, The Dunes Center, Guadalupe, 2023

Items recovered from the sand during archeological excavations of the sphinx of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* 1923 movie set. The fragment on the bottom right is a piece of a Kodak film tin. Though DeMille's film was set in ancient Egypt, replicas of Roman coins DeMille gave to the film's extras were found.

103 Dunite Historian Norm Hammond Holding Painting by Dunite Dixie Paul in Gavin's Cabin, Oceano, 2022

Painting courtesy of Oceano Depot Association
Norm Hammond is the steward of the story of the Dunites, writing and compiling several books about and by Dunites, and archiving a collection of their works and ephemera. Norm moved to the area in 1967 and made a living as a fire-fighter. Not long after he arrived, he was out walking in the dunes when he came across Bert Shievink's home in the



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back endpapers



Dunes while seeking out the source of smoke he saw rising. Norm discovered Bert cooking in a grove. Bert showed no interest in engaging with Norm, and that was the end of their interaction, but it marked the beginning of Norm's fascination with Dunite culture. Norm spent considerable time with Dr. Rudy Gerber, friend and doctor to the Dunites, Dunite Elwood Decker when he returned to live in Oceano, and many others who knew or descended from Dunites. I met with Norm numerous times in his archive and at his home where he generously shared stories, poetry, letters, and artworks from the Dunites for this project.

105 Hudson and Frank Smith, yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

106 Eliyanah Smith and Her Grandfather S. Shane Goldman, yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

107 Pier Liquor Mural, Oceano, 2022
On Pier Avenue, a few hundred meters from the Pier Avenue entrance to the riding area.

109 Matthew Goldman, yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

111 Eliyanah Smith and Her Great-Grandmother Mona Olivas Tucker, yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tilhini Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023

113 Books, in Gavin's Cabin, Oceano, 2022
Books by and about Dunites from the collection of Norm Hammond

115 Dunes, 1 (negative), 2018

116 Dunes, 1, 2018

118 Mona's Family, yak tit'yu tit'yu yak tilhini (ytt) Northern Chumash Tribe, Oceano Dunes, 2023
Top row (left to right)—Hudson Smith (Mona's great-grandson), Frank Smith (Mona's grandson-in-law), Steven Shane Goldman (Mona's son, ytt Non-Profit Board

President, ytt Tribal Council Member), Mona Olivas Tucker (ytt Northern Chumash Tribal Chair), Matthew Goldman (Mona's son); Bottom row (left to right)—Hayden Laguna (Lorie's granddaughter), Kelsey Shaffer (Mona's cousin, ytt Non-Profit Board Secretary), Lorie Lathrop-Laguna (Mona's cousin, ytt Tribal Secretary, cultural monitor for the Guadalupe Restoration Project), Riley Laguna (Lorie's granddaughter), Willow Olivas-Manos (Mona's niece, cultural monitor for the Guadalupe Restoration Project), Hannah Smith (Mona's granddaughter), Walker Smith (Mona's great-grandson), Danielle Goldman (Mona's daughter-in-law).

120 Self-portrait, Oceano Dunes, 2023

back endpapers

Letter from Elwood Decker to Jim Coffie, November 2, 1942, 2023

Courtesy of Norm Hammond

Dunite Elwood Decker met Jim Coffie when they were in the army together in the late 1920s. Coffie stayed on for a career in the army. They remained in touch until the end of their lives.

Contributors

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.

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. Her monographs include *Shoddy: From Devil's Dust to the Renaissance of Rags* (University of Chicago Press) and *Hide and Seek: Camouflage, Photography, and the Media of Reconnaissance* (Zone Books).

Mona Olivas Tucker is honored to be the Tribal Chair for the yak tit^yu tit^yu yak tithini Northern Chumash Tribe (ytt Tribe). Mona is the great-granddaughter of Rosario Cooper, the last known fluent speaker of the tithini 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. She is also an associate member of the ytt Northern Chumash Nonprofit Board of Directors and a member of the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County. Mona was the 2023 recipient of the Bill Denneen Environment Award, which celebrates individuals who make significant contributions to the environment of the Central Coast of California.

Matthew D. Goldman is a direct descendant of Rosario Cooper, who was the last known fluent speaker of the tithini language, and he is son to Mona Olivas Tucker. He was born in San Luis Obispo and is a tribal member of the yak tit^yu tit^yu yak tithini Northern Chumash Tribe. Matthew's career as a cultural resource specialist spans many decades with his formal training starting at ten years old. He was taught in the traditional way by his aunt, LeiLynn Olivas Odom. With extraordinary commitment, Matthew has spent most of his life protecting and preserving the culture of his tribe and his ancestors. Matthew is an outdoorsman, wood-carver, gardener, and kite flyer. He has spent countless hours walking in the dunes of Oceano and many other places throughout San Luis Obispo County.

Acknowledgements

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And to the magic of the Dunes.

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The subtitle for the book *for seven generations* comes
from a phrase used by Lorie Lathrop-Laguna, ytt Northern
Chumash Tribe, in a phone conversation with Caplan—
“Our decisions are made while thinking seven generations
into the future“. The Seventh Generation Principle is
believed to date back to the twelfth century Great Law
of Peace of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

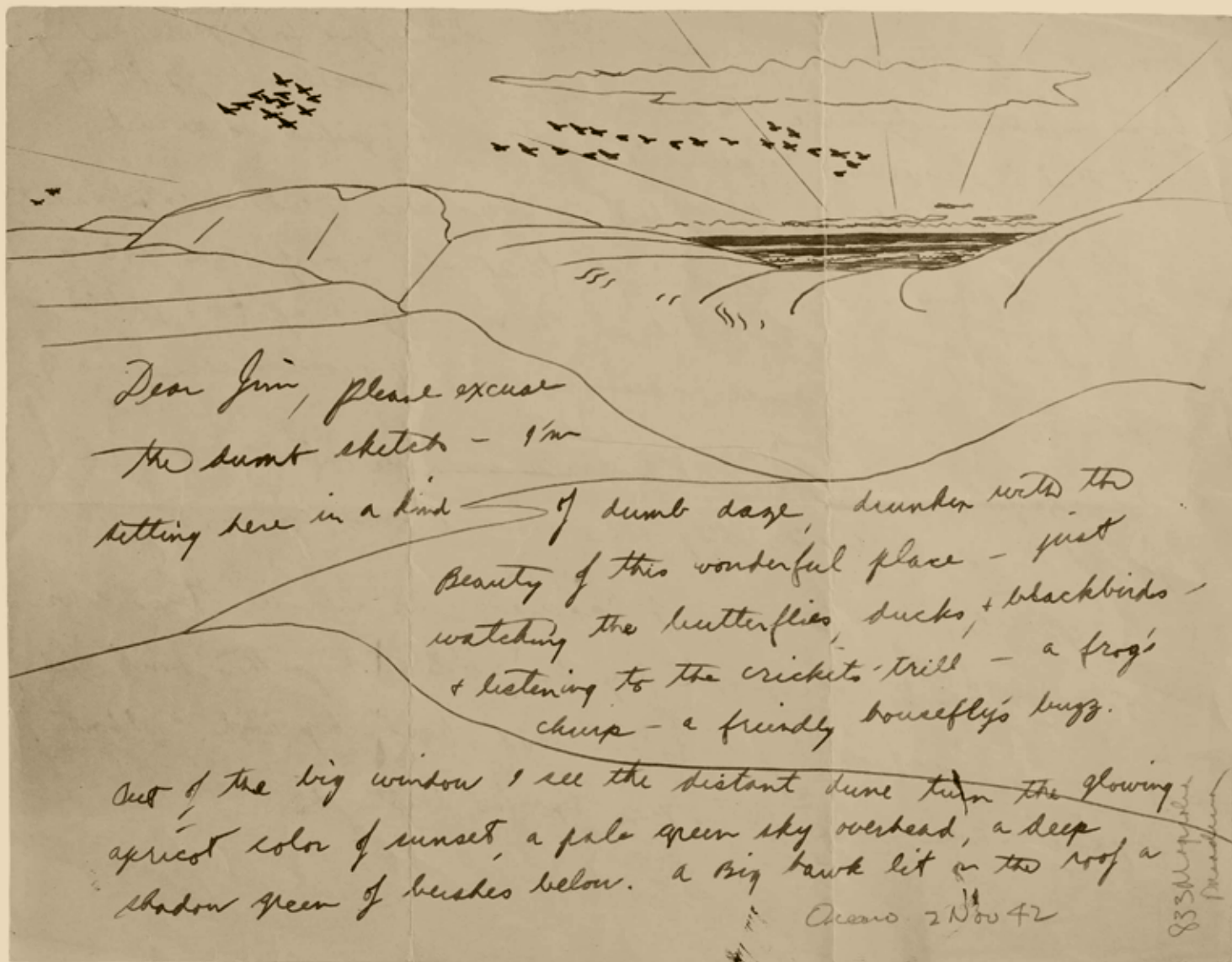
Quote on page 1 is by Ella Young from the foreword to
Dunite Hugo Seelig's book of poems *Wheel of Fire* (Oceano,
CA: Round Table Book Company, 1936).

Quotes on pages 30, 48, 64, 92, and 112 are from letters
written in 1944–1945 from the Dunes by Elwood Decker
to soldier and former Dunite Howard Bradford while he
was stationed in Europe.

Quotes on pages 80–83 are from public comments at San
Luis Obispo County Air Pollution Control District hearing,
March 21, 2018.

Quote on page 121 is from Deborah Bright, “Of Mother
Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry Into the Cultural
Meanings of Landscape Photography,” *Exposure* 24, no. 3
(1985): 5–18.

Dunite text compiled with assistance from and
permission of Norm Hammond and his books:
Norm Hammond, *The Dunites* (Arroya Grande, CA: South
County Historical Association, 1992);
Norm Hammond, *Elwood: The Spirit of the Dunes*, e-book
(Seattle, WA: Amazon Digital Services, 2014).



Dear Jim, please excuse
the dumb sketch - I'm

sitting here in a kind of dumb daze, drunker with the
beauty of this wonderful place - just
watching the butterflies, ducks, + blackbirds -
& listening to the crickets' trill - a frog's
chirp - & friendly housefly's buzz.

Out of the big window I see the distant dome topped the glowing
apricot color of sunset, a pale green sky overhead, a deep
shadow green of bushes below. a big hawk lit on the roof of a

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moment ago, the train wheels + ocean waves give forth their rumbling
from an unseen distance, the silver leaves of the willow sway gently
- + there is Susie in a corner silent + still, so dignified, so absurd.

What men hunger for is here in abundance - endless entertainment
Beauty + peace ... but it is the first step out of town that is
the unbelievably hard step to take ... the one step away from public
blindness, lust for approved possessions, empty opinions concerning sanity.

Somehow I got here while partly under the influence of drink -
yet it proved to be the only place I could sober up in.

so what? after years of happiness I'm informed there's a war
on - maybe to make people pay for a lot of things they don't need
- anyway, "come on boy! if you can't fight, chop wood." I don't
suppose it's much use telling them I prefer driftwood

