

OCEANO - for seven generations

Photographs and Videos by Lana Z Caplan

HARVEY MILK PHOTO CENTER
50 Scott Street, San Francisco, CA 94117
Curated by Melissa Castro Keesor

Opening Reception: Saturday, January 25, 2 – 5 pm
Exhibition on View: January 25 – March 1, 2025
Book Signing and Q & A: Saturday, February 22, 2 pm
Lana Z Caplan in conversation with Ron Beininger
For more information, visit [here](#).



American Family 2, Oceano Dunes SVRA*, 2018

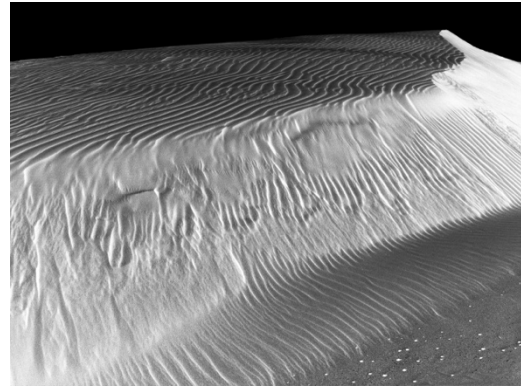
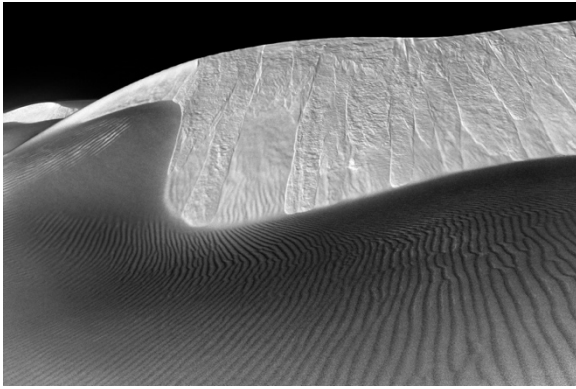
The exhibition is accompanied by a stunning monograph of the same title.

"The story of the dunes is a local and deeply California story that expands to question legacies of colonization, conventions regarding landscape and representation in media history, and the politics of land use" - **Lana Z Caplan**

The Oceano Dunes just south of San Luis Obispo in California are known in part for their 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—a bohemian group of artists who squatted 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 over 10,000 years.

Today, the Oceano Dunes have been transformed into a place that is far from the utopian American West landscape that was embraced by the Dunites. Rather, it is now an active and wildly popular State Vehicular Recreation Area filled with hikers and campers, RV encampments, and members of the local community. California State Parks issues 1,500 day passes and 600 nightly camping permits to the riders for their off-road, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) that they rip up and down the dunes wreaking havoc on the environment. Vehicles grinding sand under their wheels everyday creates dust blowing off the dunes, generating days of the worst air quality in the nation for the nearby residents. The dust contains particulate matter small enough to lodge in the lungs, causing asthma and other medical conditions.

Photographer Lana Z Caplan, who hails from Brooklyn, 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 community, and other vested people to learn, photograph, and create a visual conversation about the complexities of this unique part of the country. 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. Her book *Oceano - for seven generations*, published by **Kehrer Verlag**, is a rich exploration of the histories and intersections of people and place.



Left: Dunes, 4 (negative), 2020 / Right: Dunes, 7 (negative), 2020

In addition to landscape images of the dunes and surrounding structures and geographies, Caplan's solo exhibition, *Oceano - for seven generations* at the historic **Harvey Milk Photo Center**, provides photographic and video portraits of some of the RV inhabitants, the ATV riders, as well as individuals who live in the area year round. Floor to ceiling color video portraits of riders in the style of Andy Warhol's screen tests are projected in contrast to mural size photographs of the undisturbed landscape in striking black and white. She also includes photographs of related historical objects and writings that bring Chumash history and the Dunites to life.



American Flag, Oceano Dunes SVRA*, 2022

Threaded throughout the book and exhibition are quotes from archives of past inhabitants, as well as essays from current tribal leaders, and cultural thinkers.

Mona Olivas Tucker, the tribal chair of the yak tit^yu tit^yu yak ti^hini 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 SVRA* 2022 / Right: The Black Rider, Oceano Dunes SVRA*, 2018

Professor, author, and artist **Hanna Rose Shell** accompanied Caplan on an excursion into the dune area and her essay includes observations on both the topography as well as the dynamic range of people and activities, past and 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 SVRA, 2022 / Right: Orange Crush, Oceano Dunes SVRA, 2022.

All of this combines to present a wide-arc consideration of the significant scope and implications of using and utilizing natural spaces for human gain. Environmental and cultural losses and implications are inherent, charging this cultural landscape with significance far beyond the Oceano Dunes.



Left: Gavin, Oceano Dunes SVRA*, 2022 / Right: Training Wheels, Oceano Dunes SVRA*, 2018

About the artist:

Lana Z Caplan is a photographer and filmmaker. Her conceptual research and history-based projects focus on environmental topics and social justice. Her book *Oceano (for seven generations)* is in the collection of museums including Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Getty Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Boston and The Cleveland Museum of Art. 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.



Left: Rastaman, Oceano Dunes SVRA*, 2022 / Right: Dust Cirles, Oceano Dunes SVRA*, 2018



HS Tattoos, Oceano Dunes SVRA*, 2019

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 tit'yu tit'yu 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 tityu tityu 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.

Book Details:

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136 pages, 75 color and black and white images

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*SVRA – State Vehicular Recreation Area