Iterations of Man & Nature

Mitch Dobrowner
Bears Claw
Moorcroft, Wyoming, 2010
Brooks Jensen:
We’ve been thrilled, Mitch, to publish your work in LensWork issues #69 (The Still Earth), #79 (Unworldly Landscapes), #91 (Storms), and #117 (Land of Standing Rocks). What motivated you to make photographs of urban locations as landscape work?

Mitch Dobrowner:
I came to Los Angeles some 30 years ago. As I drove down the 405 freeway, the stunning overview of the San Fernando Valley was etched in my mind. Some people think Los Angeles can be ugly, but I thought it was beautiful — one of the most beautiful things I’d ever seen. It reminded me of looking into Yosemite Valley. Maybe it was just the light of that day, but it was the first time I had seen that view of Los Angeles. Years later, I still carried that impression in my mind — how beautiful the city of Los Angeles appeared to me — and I wanted to recreate it.

Brooks:
Your approach with this project is so interesting; you haven’t divided your pictures into the view of pristine nature versus the manmade mess of the city. Instead, you’ve shown us a unity, a parallel, in which you treat all scenes with similar interest and respect.

Mitch:
I’ve always thought that if I could do a 1,000-year time-lapse of the city of Los Angeles, that we’d see how everything we construct is just temporary; that the landscape itself wouldn’t change — but what mankind has built upon it would rise, decay, and then fall again over time. We’re temporary. The land we think we own, we don’t — we’re only borrowing it for the short time we are here. The land will still be here when we’re all gone. In that sense, whether it is a pristine scene from nature, or a view of human civilization, it’s all the same to me.

Brooks:
Through these photographs, you are encouraging us to change our perspective not only of our place on Earth, but also of that space in time?

Edward Abbey

Introduction

Our job is to record, each in his own way, this world of light and shadow and time that will never come again exactly as it is today.

Edward Abbey
Mitch:
Yes. I’m actually hoping to integrate points of view.
In 2013 I was invited by Los Angeles Metro (through
their Art Lightbox Program) to install twelve of my
city images in 12-foot light boxes — to be viewed by
commuters in busy transit stations. The response was
huge. Urban photography is typically street work,
documentary, social commentary, or a lament about
urban sprawl. I was sharing my view of Los Angeles
as a beautiful landscape. The overwhelming response
motivated me to do more work, while the installation
rotated throughout the Metro system for more than
five years.

Brooks:
How did that lead to your thoughts about time and our
impact on the planet and the environment?

Mitch:
Everybody thinks they own their house. We are
invested in ownership. For me, this project allowed
me to apply a bit of a cosmic zoom. We don’t own the
planet. We are only here for a blink in time. Living on
this rock that is spinning through endless space, we
are not even a drop in the bucket. We are just borrow-
ing the planet for a little time and it is up to us to take
care of it — if not for ourselves, then for our children,
grandchildren, and future generations. We may as well
try to see the beauty where we can, and endeavor to
care for and enjoy our temporary home — which, as
far as I can see, is pretty amazing.

Brooks:
By pairing these juxtapositions of landscape and city-
scape images, are you encouraging the viewer to look
for beauty in the world around them by being open to
it in completely different forms?

Mitch:
I didn’t set out to make this project by photographing
these two type of imagery with the purpose of put-
ting them together into one book. That idea evolved
as I kept photographing in both the desert and the
cityscapes — and was a revelation that was part of
the process; one of those “I never looked at it that way
before” moments.

Brooks:
You’ve stated that this isn’t a cause, but rather an
awakening of the beauty found in nature and man.

Mitch:
I don’t think making a spectacle of what it takes to
create the images is important. What’s important are
the images themselves. Photography is my personal
art form and the images speak more about me and
the subject matter than I can ever describe in words.
The pictures evoke what I feel about our planet. The
landscapes here on Earth deserve our respect and ad-
miration. This is what I feel as I stand in front of them:
their stature and prominence overwhelm and amaze
me. I’m just trying to capture them in a manner that
does justice to their significance.
Buildings

New York City, New York, 2007
Stone Fins
Lone Pine, California, 2006
Daybreak

Los Angeles, California, 2018
Bentonite Waves
*Caineville, Utah, 2007*
Goblin Valley
San Rafael Swell, Utah, 2007
Big Cloud
Los Angeles, California, 2010
Hoodoo
Cathedral Gorge, Nevada, 2007
Stone Butterfly

Paria Plateau, Arizona, 2008
Alhambra Rock

Mexican Hat, Utah, 2006
Rain

Los Angeles, California, 2008
Temple of the Moon
Capitol Reef, Utah, 2007
Ship Rock
Navajo Nation, New Mexico, 2018
Monument Valley

Hunts Mesa, Arizona, 2015
Urbane

*Los Angeles, California, 2018*
Hellas Basin
Capitol Reef, Utah, 2012
City Lights
Los Angeles, California, 2014
Hollywood Hills
Los Angeles, California, 2007
Agathla Peak

El Capitan Valley, Arizona, 2006
Sky Light
Los Angeles, California, 2007
Dusk
Trona, California, 2006
Tornado Crossing Power Poles

Syracuse, Kansas, 2016
Acropolis

Factory Badlands, Utah, 2007
Rainstorm
Owens Valley, California, 2007
Pending Storm

Los Angeles, California, 2007
Pectol’s Pyramid

Capitol Reef, Utah, 2012
Tower

Los Angeles, California, 2007
Vasquez Point

*Aqua Dulce, California, 2006*
Slate Playa in Light

*Trona Pinnacles, California, 2018*
Civilization
Los Angeles, California, 2006
Badlands

Skyline Point, Utah, 2006
Serpent's Tail

Paria Plateau, Arizona, 2008
Winter Storm
Black Rock Hills, Utah, 2010
Shiprock Storm

Navajo Nation, New Mexico, 2008
Dawn

Trona, California, 2006
Light Dome

Los Angeles, California, 2008
Rock Family
Joshua Tree National Park, California, 2007
Storm and Silo

*Tribune, Texas, 2015*
The Dollhouse

The Maze, Canyonlands, Utah, 2015
Rainshafts
Woodland County, Alberta, Canada, 2017
Valley Floor

Los Angeles, California, 2014
Tornado Above Farm

Syracuse, Kansas, 2016
Natron Sunrise
Trona Pinnacles, California, 2018
Raven Rock
*Sierra Nevada, California, 2017*
Power Plant

Los Angeles, California, 2010
The Lion
Paria Plateau, Arizona, 2008
Sunrise over Spires
_Somewhere, Arizona, 2015_
Land of Standing Rocks
The Maze, Canyonlands, 2015
Farm

*Inman, Kansas, 2010*
City and Light

Los Angeles, California, 2007
Dome Rock
Sierra Nevada, California, 2017
Moonrise Trona

Trona Pinnacles, California, 2010
Thunderhead

Los Angeles, California, 2008
Dante’s View
De fries Valley, California, 2008
Devil’s Kitchen

Needles District Canyonlands, Utah, 2015
Levels Mesa
Shafer Trail, Canyonlands, 2005
The Crown

Valley of the Gods, Utah, 2006
Storm Over City
Los Angeles, California, 2008
Saucer and Lights
Byers, Colorado, 2014
Goblin in Desert
San Rafael Swell, Utah, 2013
Born in New York City (1956) and self-taught in photography, Mitch enthusiastically describes his relationship with photography in this way: “My photography allows me to regenerate. It gets me to ‘that special place’ in which my soul is at peace. To be able to create what I visualize via my imagination in a single exposure electrifies me.” He describes his home in the Los Angeles area as active and creative, full of life and art. “My wife, Wendy, is an artist and painter — and my inspiration. Our youngest son, Joshua, is a musician who keeps us on our toes. Our older son (Jason) and daughter (Asia) will always be our ‘kids’ even though they are on their own now. Then there is our dog, Jet, and bratty cat, Jax: they are much more than just pets; they are family.”

Other books featuring photography by Mitch Dobrowner

*Prism Series Book #2* (21st Editions, 2011)
*Storms* (Aperture Foundation, 2013)

For additional information please visit Dobrowner’s comprehensive online gallery and website at: [www.mitchdobrowner.com/](http://www.mitchdobrowner.com/)
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