

Victoria Sambunaris

High and Dry

January 5 - February 18, 2023

Reception with the artist: January 5, 6-8pm

Artist walkthrough: January 5, 5:30 PM

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Yancey Richardson is pleased to present *High and Dry*, an exhibition of seven large-scale color photographs by Victoria Sambunaris, on view from January 5 – February 18, 2023. Known for her extensive projects examining the complexities of the American West, in her new work Sambunaris investigates evidence of the relentless human activity in the vast California desert landscape, from Death Valley to Joshua Tree. A reception with the artist will be held on Thursday, January 5, from 6 - 8 pm.

Inspired by the intrepid 19th-century photographers whose work helped to form an understanding of the region, since 1999 Sambunaris has embarked upon an

extended, solitary road trip each year, capturing the American landscape with a large format, five-by-seven wooden field camera. Highly detailed and dramatically composed, the resulting photographs communicate a deeply layered sense of place and a nuanced view of the complex issues surrounding American land use and management.

For this new body of work, Sambunaris made three cross-country trips in 2020 and 2021. Observing where the desert converges with spaces that are aesthetically and politically linked, including Death Valley, the Mojave Desert and the Great Basin Desert, the work questions traditional and clichéd notions of landscape, our place within it, and our collective roles and responsibilities in shaping it. While initially imagining the desert as abandoned wasteland wilderness, Sambunaris discovered something else. The desert was alive with human activity: dune buggies and motorcycles, campers and miners, military test sites and art installations.

“Beginning with the lockdown, people burst into the desert in numbers I haven’t seen in more than 20 years driving through the west,” said Sambunaris. “Campgrounds, requiring reservations, were overbooked. Rangers and camp hosts were overwhelmed with hordes of fully outfitted luxury RVs and camper vans. The playas or dry lake beds dot the landscape throughout California and have become a destination for the riding culture where endless vacant land distorts perception. Bands of riders and circles of caravans are sprawled throughout the flat basins, many with American flags emblazoned and clouds of dust as they move about the Mojave Desert floor. The incessant drone is punctuated with bullets ricocheting off rocks during target practice.”

Among the locations pictured are Searles Lake, a dry lakebed in the Northern Mojave Desert, where a railway is used to transport commodities such as sulfuric acid, potash, soda ash, borax, coal, minerals and material for the U.S. Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake; the Algodones Dunes, the largest off-road vehicle area for sand dunes in the US; Badwater Basin and Zabriskie Point, in Death Valley National Park, an area of ancient lake beds deposited five to ten million years ago; the All American Canal, an 82 mile aqueduct bringing water from the Colorado River to Imperial Valley; a dry lake bed in Joshua Tree’s Mojave Desert which currently serves as a haven for off-roaders, target shooters, and campers.

Many parts of the desert are vast and uninhabited, but the areas Sambunaris observed reflected a desert alive with human activity and a sense that conjures the early pioneer entitlement of Manifest Destiny. As the country has populated and resources dwindled, the assertion of ownership and unlimited resources has not and is reflected in the receding water in the West. Fragments of the past meet contemporary conditions and create a captivating backdrop for examining our landscape today.

Victoria Sambunaris was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1964, and currently lives and works in New York. She received a B.A. from Mount Vernon College in 1986 and an M.F.A. from Yale University School of Art in 1999, where she has since held various teaching positions. Her work has been widely exhibited in museums and galleries throughout the United States including National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; Museum of Fine Art, Houston; and New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe. Her work can be seen in numerous collections including those of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Sambunaris has received numerous awards, including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2021); Charles Redd Fellowship Award in Western American History, Brigham Young University (2015); Aaron Siskind Foundation Individual Photographer's Fellowship (2010); and the Anonymous Was a Woman Award (2010). A monograph of her work, *Taxonomy of a Landscape: Victoria Sambunaris*, was published by Radius Books in 2013.

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Image shown: *Untitled, (rider), Joshua Tree, California, 2021*. Archival pigment print.