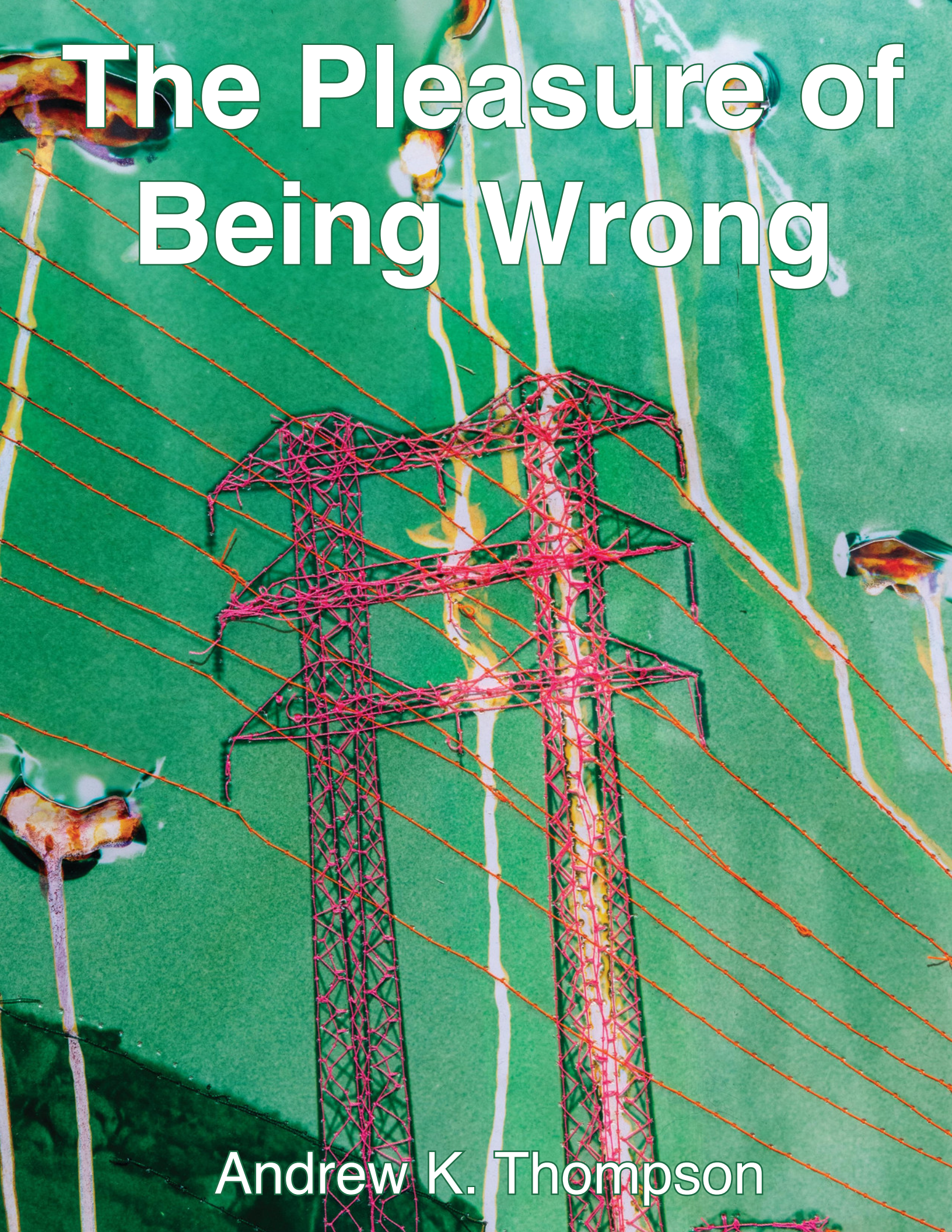
# The Pleasure of Being Wrong



Andrew K. Thompson

# ***Andrew K. Thompson: The Pleasure of Being Wrong***

Curated by Lisa Henry

Riverside Art Museum – DeVean Gallery

September 21, 2024 – March 2, 2025

Cover Image
***Green, Pink, & Orange With Punctured Sky***, 2024
Hand-cut, bleached C-print, thread
20 x 14.75 in (37.47 x 50.80 cm)
Detail

This Page
***The Pleasure of Being Wrong*** in situ
Photo by Jacob Willson
Courtesy of the Riverside Art Museum


***The Pleasure of Being Wrong*** in situ
Photo by Jacob Willson
Courtesy of the Riverside Art Museum

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Mr. Thompson uses chemicals to obscure rather than enhance the image. These splotches and lines mimic the morphology of the trees and power lines running through the image parts of the pictures. They make the viewer fight their way through these surface barriers to get at the images, but really they are making us aware of the picture's surface and actually wed the surface with the image. – **Alan Klotz**

***Yellow, Green, & Pink with Lacerated Sky***, 2024
Hand-cut, bleached C-print, thread
15 x 20 in (38.10 x 50.80 cm)


DO NOT
ENTER
WRONG
WAY

# *Possible Photographies*

by **Shana Nys Dambrot**

Reality is above all else a variable. — Margaret Halsey

In quantum thinking, existence is a state of perpetual change, driven by fluctuations of context and circumstance. Humans, or at least human consciousness, can arguably be viewed in this way as well—as dynamic points of ceaseless interactions; we are both shapers of, and shaped by, the world around us. In Andrew K. Thompson's studio, the same can also be said of photography.

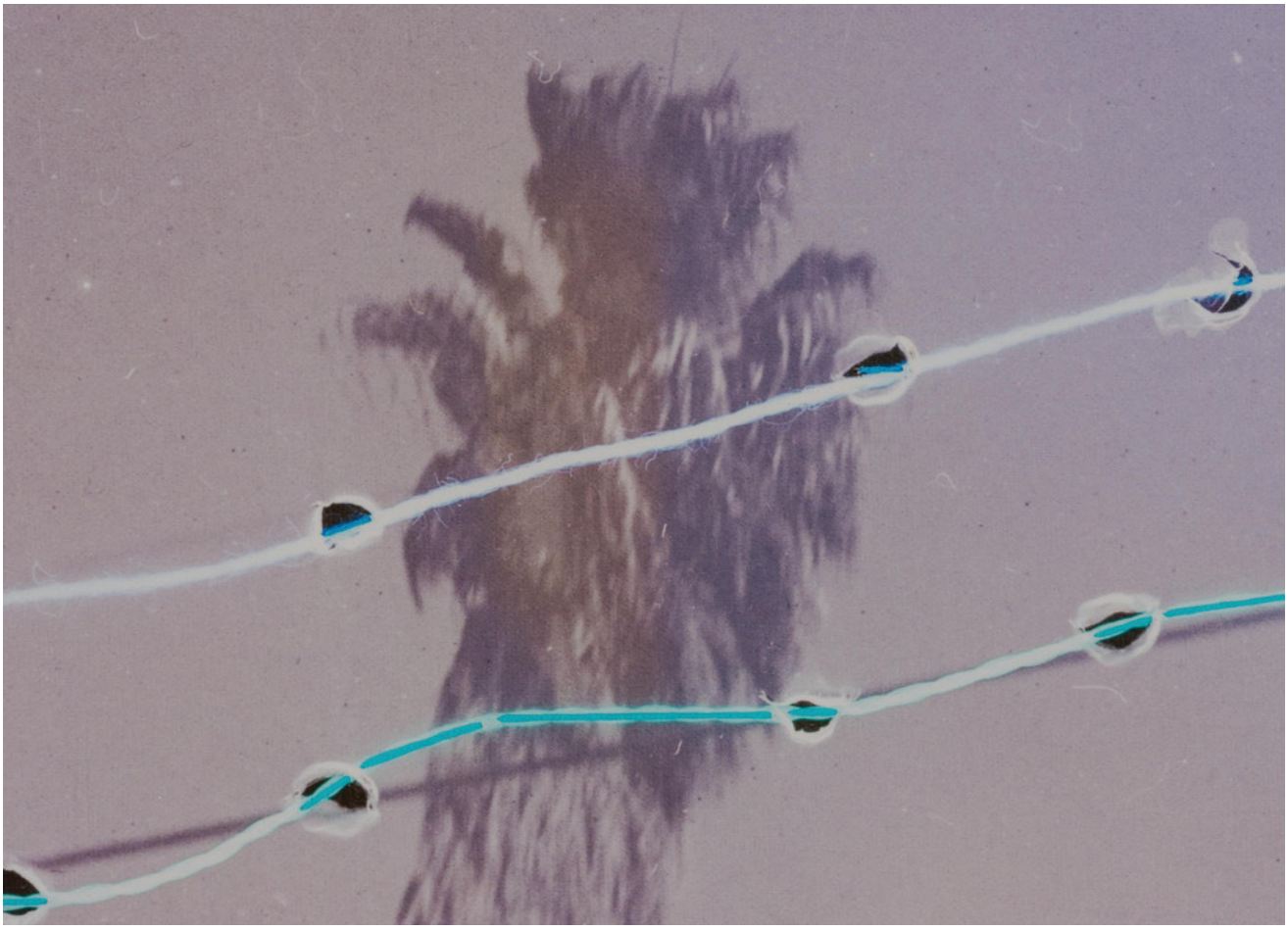
Beginning with the word itself—meaning drawing with light, from the Greek—photography indicates its active function as recording of phenomena, as well as to its physical manifestation as a film negative, or, perhaps, an accumulation of digital data—each of which is both direct and susceptible to manipulation, fixed and mutable. Photography is also the resulting object, the print and the paper onto which it clings, be it light-sensitive or inkjet or perhaps not paper at all but metal, glass, cloth—anything goes these days. All of that—plus its status as a semiotic site for contesting truth and authorship, and for articulating the special properties of the mechanically optical—is stipulated before an artist like Thompson's signature unconventional material interventions even begin.

***Blue and Orange on Gray***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
37.75 x 28.5 in (95.89 x 72.39 cm)

Thompson often experiments with the equipment, papers, and chemicals inherent to the photographic process, going so far as to melt, freeze, and generate flowing fountains of fixative. This inversion of the means of photographic production interrupts and deconstructs the idiosyncratic pageantry of images in which our modern minds swim, forcing us to consider the mechanisms by which photographs are produced—their simultaneous, dysmorphic reality and unreality. There's a raucous philosophical discourse roiling beneath the surface of this aspect of what Thompson does, and an engaging evocation of sculpture and performance work not often seen in photography as a genre.

The images produced in this way have much in common with modalities of abstract, atmospheric, and expressionist painting as pursued by J.M.W. Turner, Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, and Sigmar Polke—mottled surfaces and roughly fractal, organic forms. But most of the work for which Thompson is known involves his treatment of the photographic print itself—cutting, piercing, sewing, and bleaching in actions he sees as, "metaphoric gestures mirroring the assault on the land by humans." Unlike his compelling direct-action abstractions, for this narrative message to formulate, the work requires a picture. For this reason, he favors a lexicon of images expressing the unaesthetic collision of nature and the built environment—palm trees, power lines, and the architecture of infrastructure.

Yet these representational works are in conversation with painting too, expressing physicality and unique objecthood by distressing their surfaces. A photograph is always a stand-in for something real that exists somewhere else, communicating between the mind and eye, informational above all else. But the way Thompson does it, a photograph is also a real thing that shares your body's physical space. Sewing for example ameliorates the flimsiness of flat paper, creating a presence of the artist's hand and a sense of surprise—transcending Sontag's slippery informational and offering no answers but instead asking questions about what else is possible.



***Blue and Orange on Gray***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
37.75 x 28.5 in (95.89 x 72.39 cm)
Detail

## *Nearly Every Palm Tree*

by **Matthew Gagnon Blair**

In Southern California nearly every palm tree is placed. Some were imported in the late 19th century, but most of the iconic palm trees in and around Los Angeles were planted for the 1932 Olympic Games as part of a city-wide beautification project. 40,000 Mexican fan palms were planted, not because they are native to the region, (they are not), but for ornamental purposes. Palm trees were imported because they are cheap and have a shallow root structure amenable to transplanting. They were placed along boulevards decades before the freeway system was built, when cars were less ubiquitous, and when the electrical grid of the region was in a nascent state compared to today.

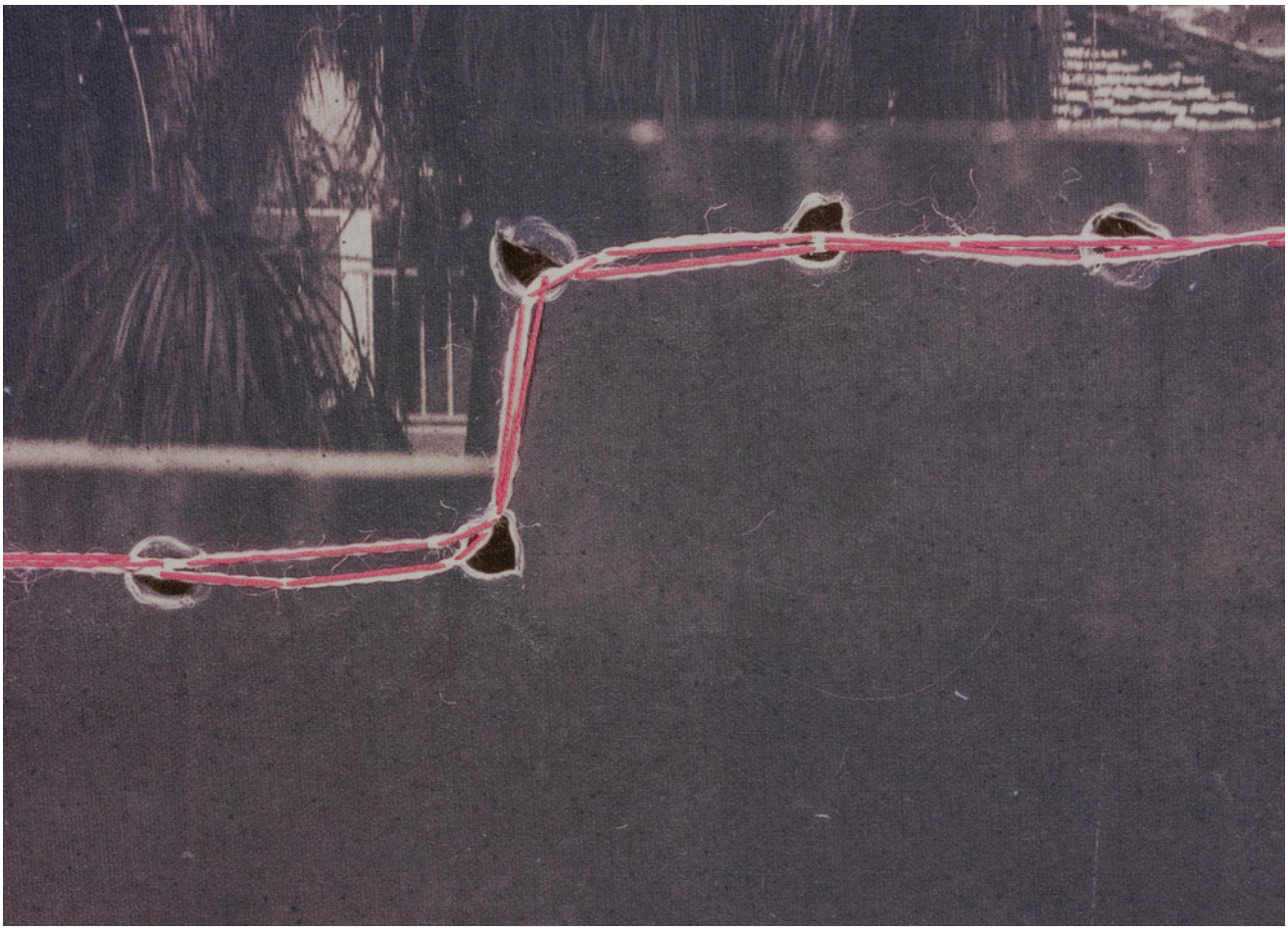
It is also a fact that the palm trees of Southern California are vanishing. They continue to die from old age and disease, and when they do die off they are not expected to be replaced.

So what is one to make of Andrew K Thompson's photos of palm trees and telephone wires? The images have a formal austerity that the artist picks at, like a scab. Overhead powerline sentinels clutch their cables in angry fists. Wooden poles, palm fronds, and dry skies are stitched and punctured. Chemical atmospheres startle the eye with the beautiful

***The Four Sisters - Canvas***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
39 x 29.25 in (99.06 x 74.30 cm)

colors of violence. The pictures themselves are bleached, degraded, altered, and lovingly restored the way a Nana would stitch up a pair of mittens. Subject and the means of documentation are dredged into one thing. They remind you of what a photograph even is, the pliability of the form. They are both scarred and mended. And there's a gnawing sense of discomfort, of Judgement Day in the wings. In some we can almost see Sarah Conner, clinging to the fence as she becomes a skeleton. But less kitsch. Other ones outright slap you in the face. And there's not a soul in sight. Just these telephone wires from the spirit realm. You can hear them sizzling electric heat while the palm fronds burst into magma. The end is near, or the world has ended and we're still here. Or we've long past the end and so we go back to basics, to sewing, to stitching, to making pictures from the clean lines that haunt us. So we mix up chemicals, a little bit of this and that, see what happens, play alchemist in the desert. Create frames and thresholds of pure color. Destroy them, restore them, repeat.

When Robert Frank was shooting the pictures that would become The Americans, he was thrown in jail, accused of being a communist, and once told that he had "an hour to leave town". These pictures feel like that: like you've got an hour to leave town, like things might get ugly at any moment, and there's a moment within that moment where AKT raises a little camera with his hand and sucks a sad poem of America onto film. That's what Jack Kerouac said about Robert Frank, (more or less), but he could have been talking about Andrew K Thompson.



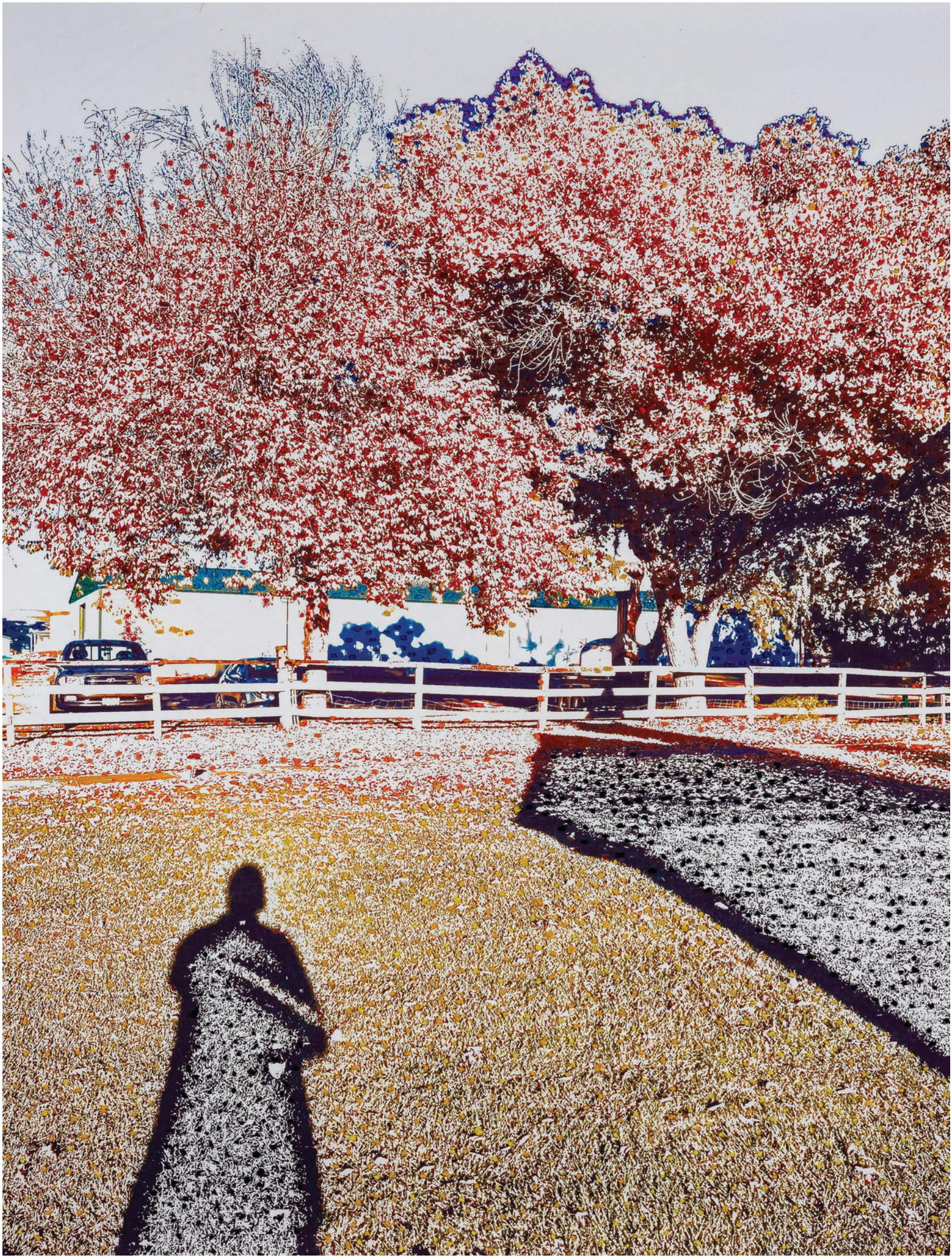
***The Four Sisters - Canvas***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
39 x 29.25 in (99.06 x 74.30 cm)
Detail

Last page
***Shadow***, 2023
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
44 x 33 in (111.76 x 83.82 cm)
Detail

***Canyon (Double Negative)***, 2021
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
44 x 33.5 in (111.76 x 85.09 cm)

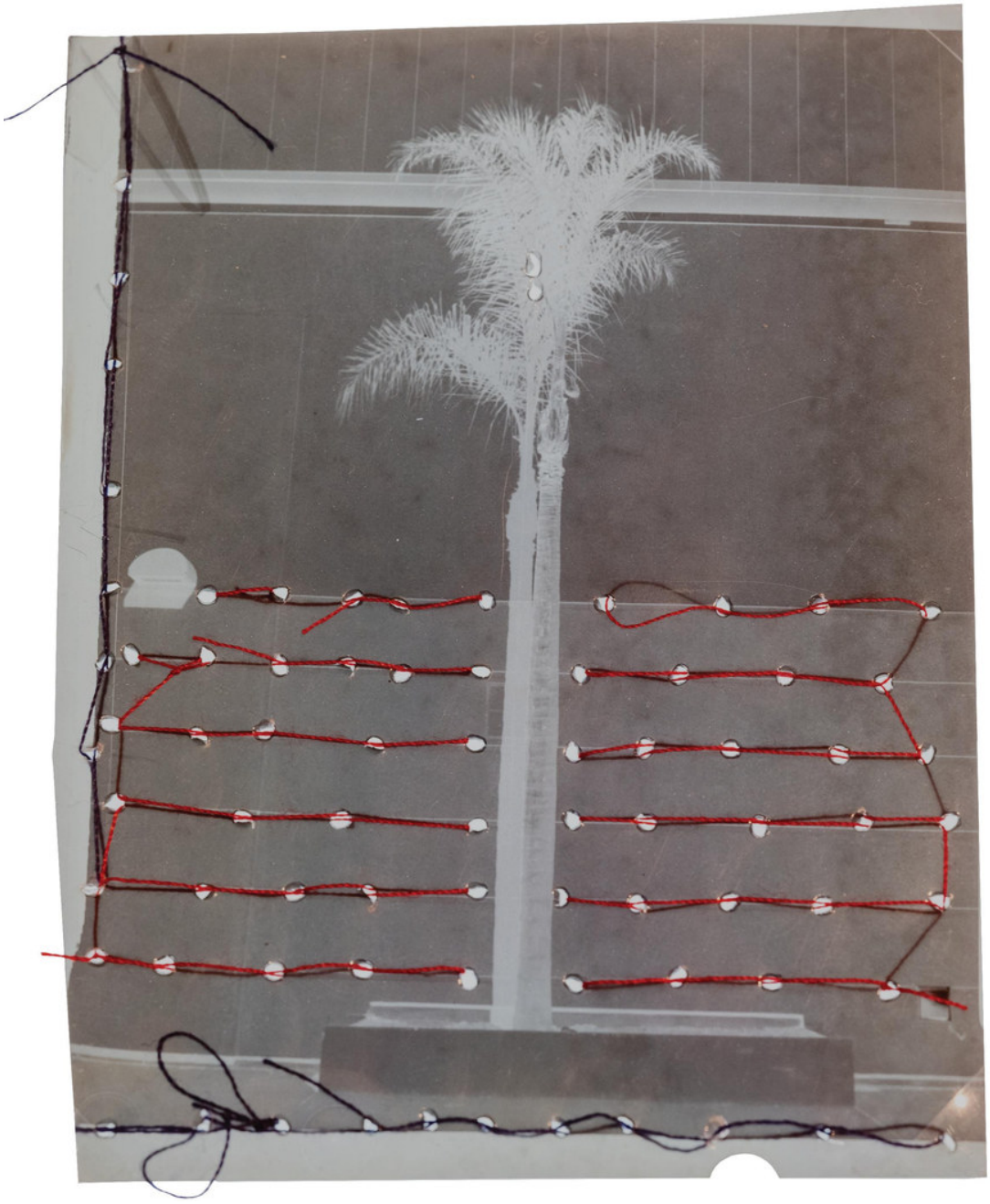
***Red Bush***, 2022
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
44 x 32.5 in (111.76 x 82.55 cm)

***Shadow***, 2023
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
44 x 33 in (111.76 x 83.82 cm)



***Basketball Hoop***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
44 x 32.5 in (111.76 x 82.55 cm)

***Untitled (Yellow Palm Tree)***, 2017
C-print, thread
10 x 8 in (25.40 x 20.32 cm)



***Palm in Red and Black - Negative***, 2024
Silver gelatin negative, thread
4.25 x 3.25 in (10.79 x 8.26 cm)

***Palms in Black, Green, & Red - Negative***, 2024
Silver gelatin negative, thread
4.25 x 3.25 in (10.79 x 8.26 cm)

***The Four Sisters - Negative***, 2024
Silver gelatin negative, thread
4.25 x 3.25 in (10.79 x 8.26 cm)

***Blue Floss Palm - Negative***, 2024
Silver gelatin Negative, thread
4.25 x 3.25 in (10.79 x 8.26 cm)

# *Palms, Prints & Power*

by **Shana Nys Dambrot**

“The painter constructs, the photographer discloses,” Susan Sontag wrote in On Photography. Unless you’re making art with Andrew K. Thompson, in which case, you do both, and also neither. Cutting, piercing, sewing, bleaching, spilling, splattering, dripping distressing; working both in camera and sans lens and sometimes sculpturally; and in a riotous palette of fuchsia, teal, tangerine, indigo, oxblood, sunburn, emerald, aubergine, lavender, and lime, Thompson interferes with his otherwise picturesque subject matter, asserting the physicality of the photographic object, even as he explodes its informational facility.

Combining the appeal of the picturesque with the terror of the sublime, while pursuing a new kind of beauty, the artist has said that the interventions in the production process and the trouble he inflicts on the photographs themselves are “metaphoric gestures mirroring the assault on the land by humans.” As anthropomorphic avatars for both nature—with extra points for being ubiquitous across and emblematic of Southern California—palm trees are metaphor-ready. But they also play themselves in popular culture, as signposts of status and cinematic shorthand, as well as thoroughly populating the history of both painting and photography.

***Colton View***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, thread, embroidery floss
30.5 x 42 in (77.47 x 106.68 cm)
Detail

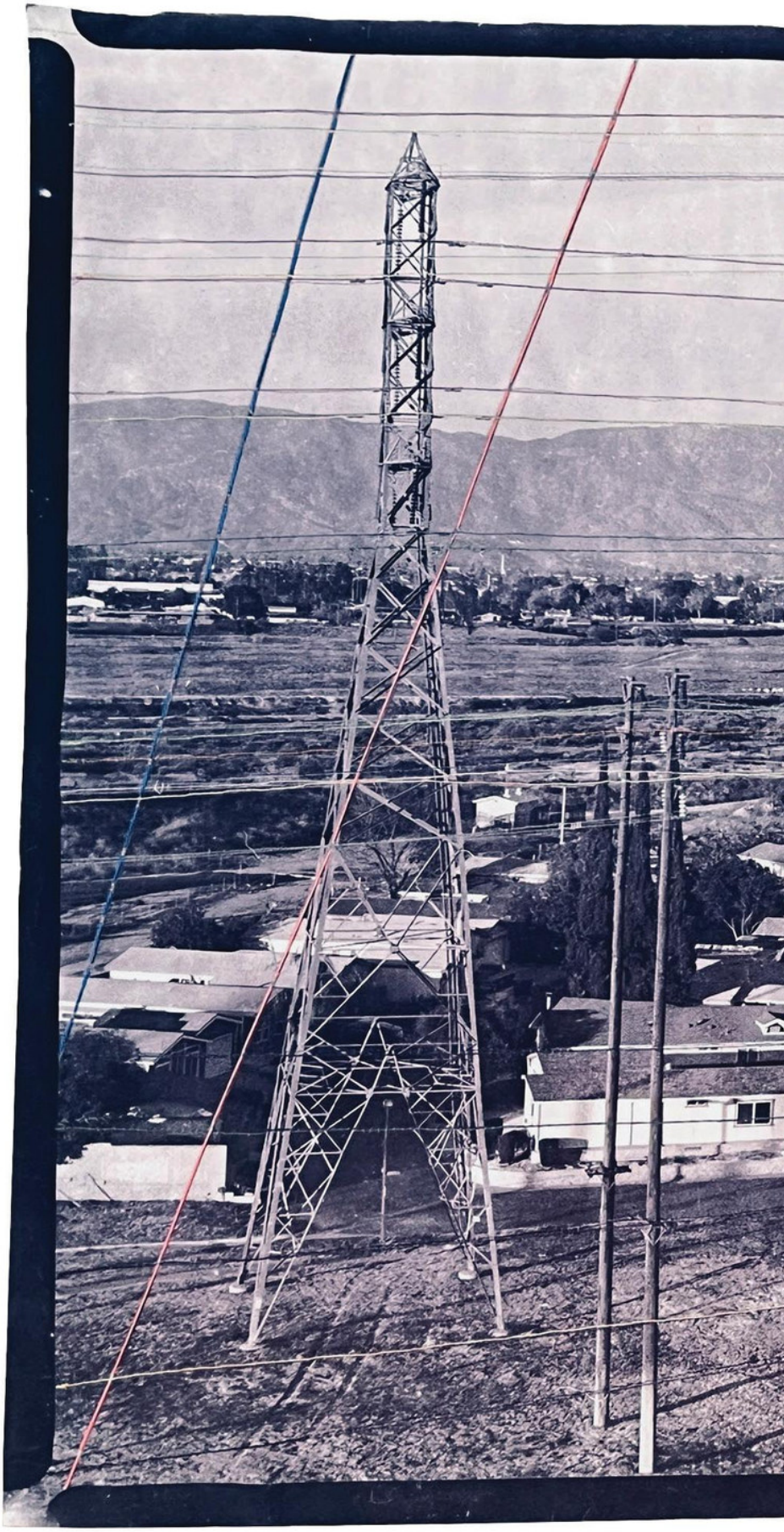
“No image is presumed inviolable in our dance hall of visual politics,” Dave Hickey wrote, “and all images are potentially powerful.” By interfering with them, Thompson interrupts the quick-hit of expectation-driven cognitive scroll, and forces us to confront a visceral embodiment of the threat facing the palms and all of nature—including ourselves.

In addition to the physicality of the prints, whose treatment by the artist challenges both structural premises of the medium and conventions of the genre, Thompson does what most photographers wouldn’t—Thompson leaves in the power lines. Further—he highlights them in frayed threads, whose stitches pierce the paper and whose loose ends tease the eye to look closer. In this way, the ugliness foisted on the trees, on all nature, in the name of human convenience is made to exist in tangible, metonymic form in the photographs, mirroring the phenomenon in the landscape itself. Except for one important difference—the final trick of the alchemy in Thompson’s studio is returning all this ugliness firmly to the realm of the beautiful. With appealing saturated color and organic post-industrial textures—not to mention the spark of delight in discovering the stitching—the message is clear, the image emotional, and the object full of poetry.


***The Pleasure of Being Wrong*** in situ
Photo by Jacob Willson
Courtesy of the Riverside Art Museum

Last page
***The Pleasure of Being Wrong*** in situ
Photo by Jacob Willson
Courtesy of the Riverside Art Museum

***Quiet Rainbow on Gray***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, thread
39.5 x 28.5 in (100.33 x 72.39 cm)



***Colton View***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, thread, embroidery floss
30.5 x 42 in (77.47 x 106.68 cm)

***Blue and Orange on Gray***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
37.75 x 28.5 in (95.89 x 72.39 cm)


DO NOT
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WRONG
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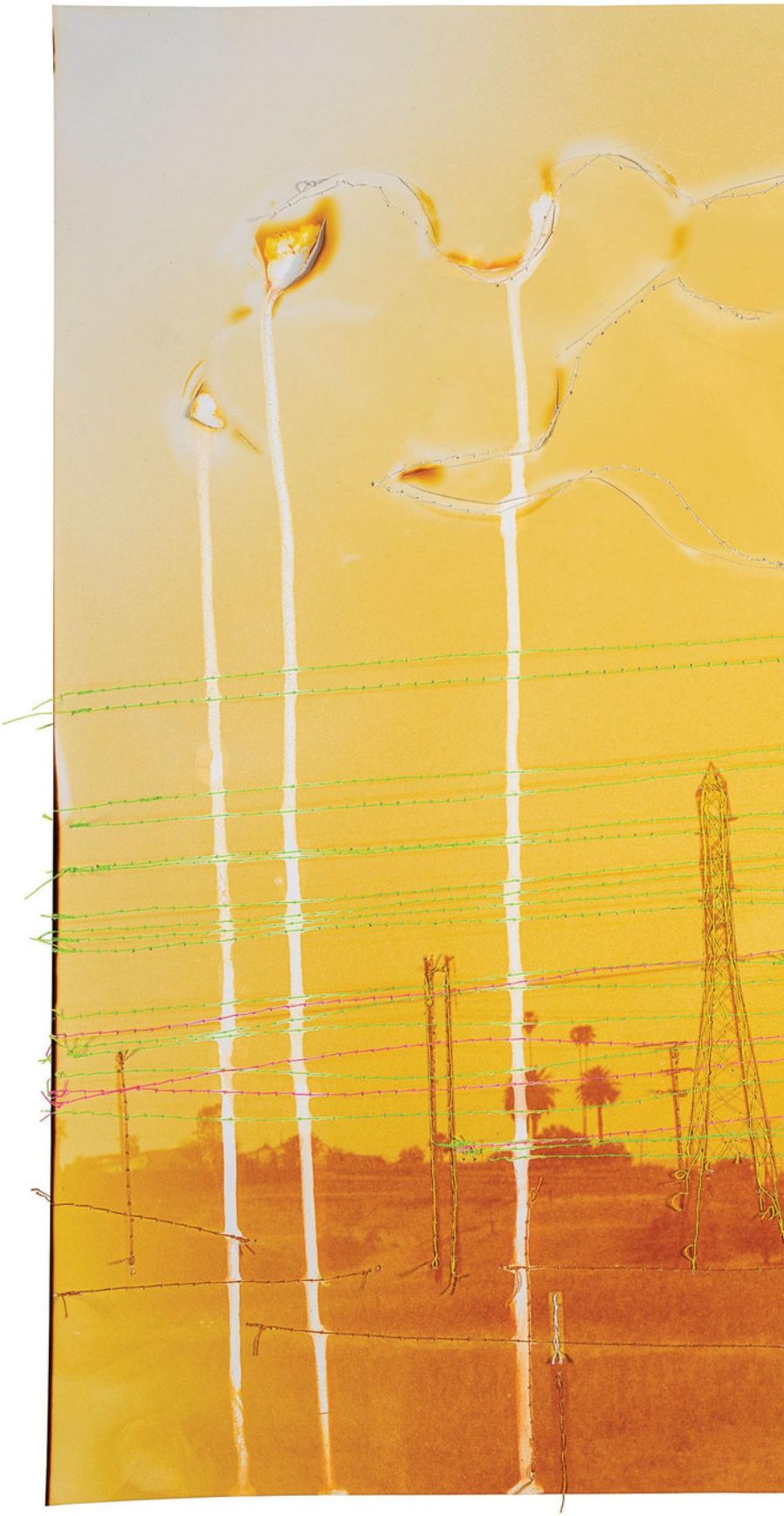
ONE W

***Yellow, Pink, and Blue on Gray***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
39.25 x 29.25 in (99.70 x 74.30 cm)

***The Four Sisters - Canvas***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
39 x 29.25 in (99.06 x 74.30 cm)

***Blue Floss Palm - Canvas***, 2024
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
37 x 28 in (93.98 x 71.12 cm)



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15 x 20 in (38.10 x 50.80 cm)

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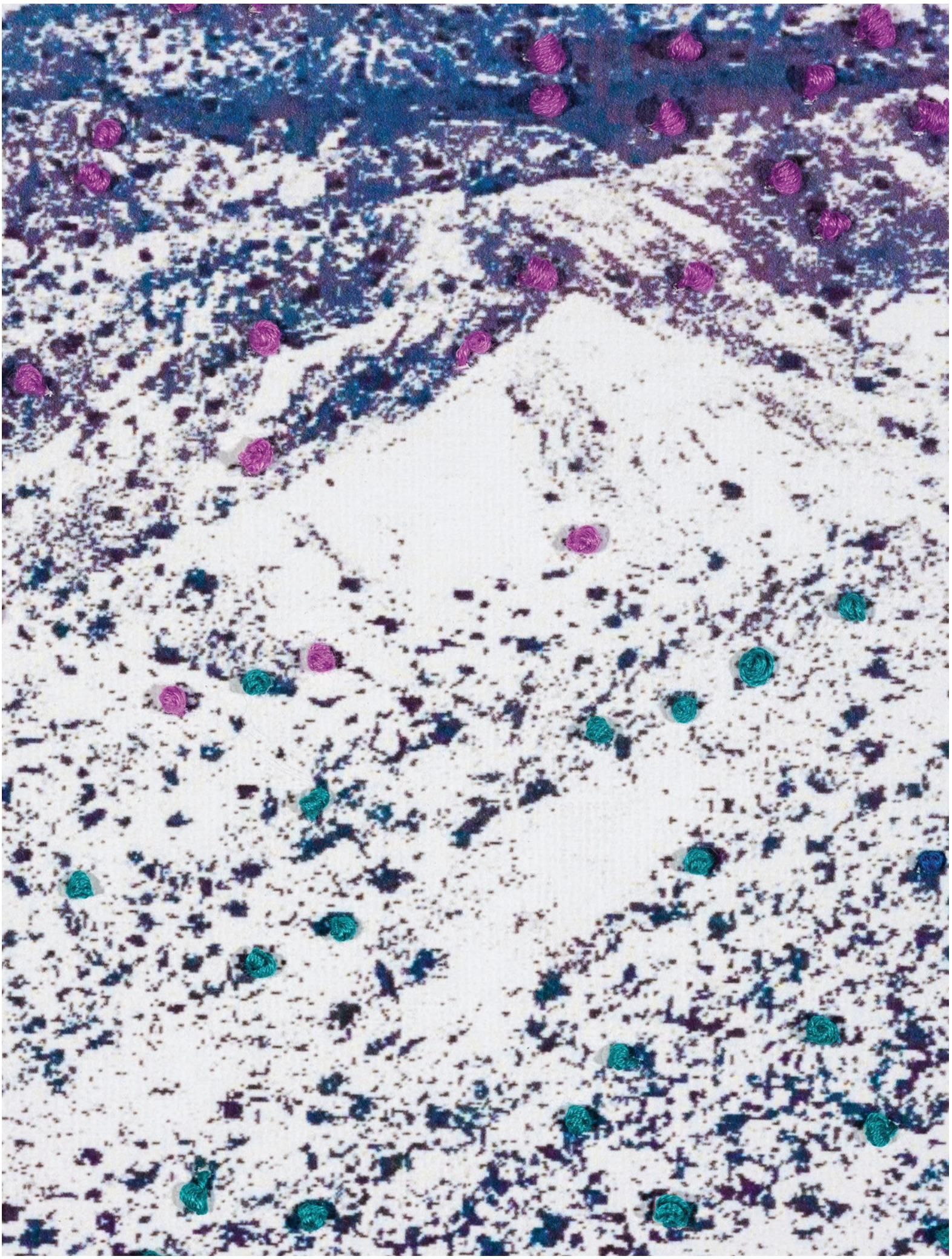
20 x 14.75 in (37.47 x 50.80 cm)

Next page
***Canyon (Double Negative)***, 2021
Archival inkjet on canvas, embroidery floss
44 x 33.5 in (111.76 x 85.09 cm)
Detail



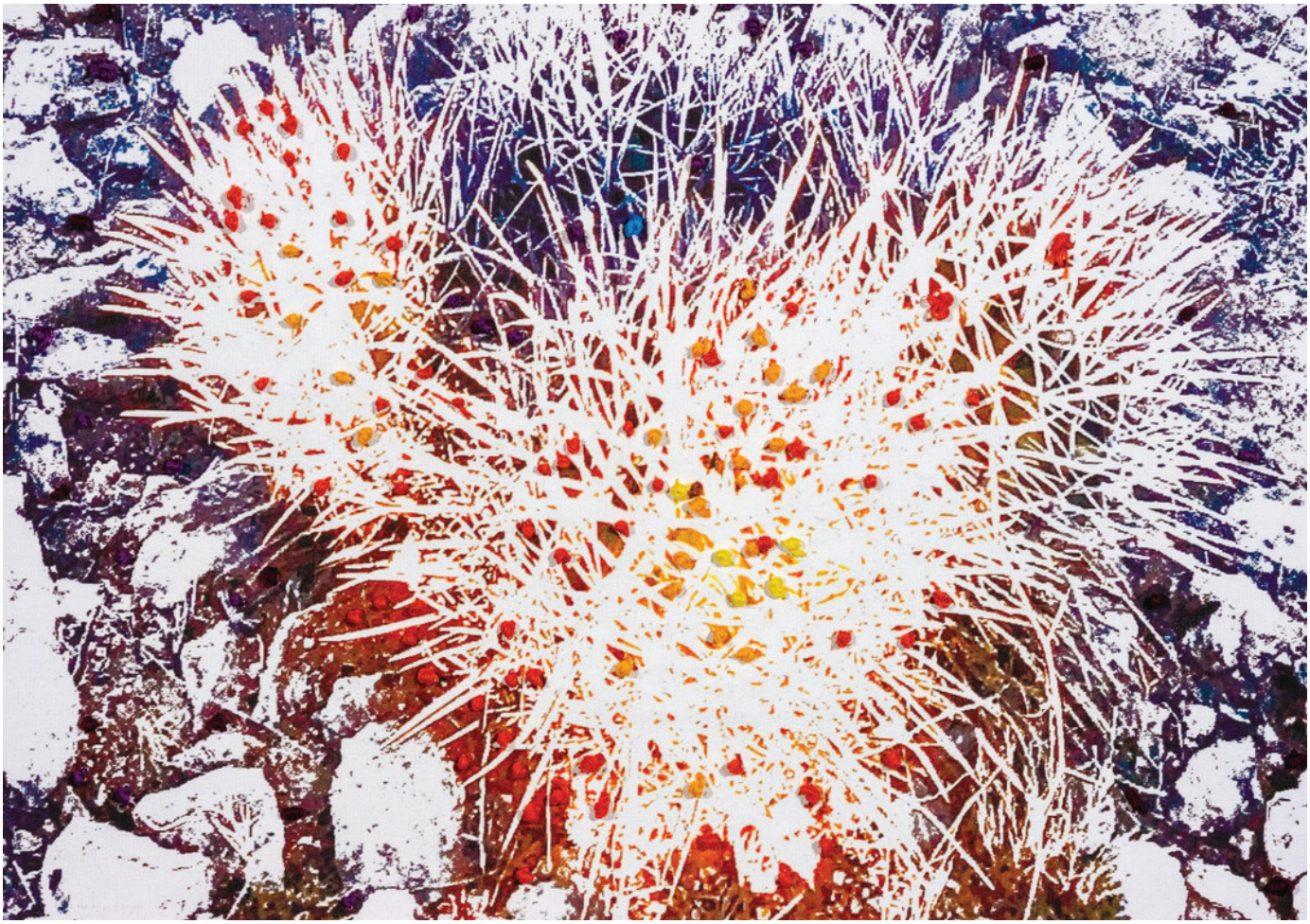
# *Artist Statement*

by **Andrew K. Thompson**

A colleague asked me, “When are you going to start making good pictures?” The implication is that my intentionally cut, punctured, and sewn photographs are somehow wrong, not “Good.” Through a particular lens, my pictures are not “good.” They break conventional photographic norms, regularly manipulated or distressed in some fashion.

My initial response to his inquiry was, “Look at my commercial work.” I have kept a faint but regular commercial practice, most commonly photographing artwork for galleries and other artists. In this role, I must disappear as a photographer. I must light reflective objects cleanly and document them in a way that emphasizes the artwork to make it look fabulous while staying faithful to its “real-life” appearance. My photographic signature is removed or at least reduced to a whisper.

However, he did not accept that answer. “That is your digital work. It does not count,” he replied. While I agree that the “analog vs. digital” debate comes down to cooking food instead of microwaving it, a particular photographic dogma reared its head during our conversation. It is the idea that “good” photography requires proper exposure, a considered composition, and “The Perfect Print.” The negative must be a perfect score that harmoniously performs all eleven zones with the decisive moment’s subject.



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Detail

Yes, they are good photographs. Great even. Still, I am left deflated by this argument. I, too, was trained that way. It was the prevailing aesthetic of the generations before me. Ansel Adams, Minor White, and Edward Weston were like the Eagles to a young Black Flag fan. Bloated. Their images were iconic but overwrought—towering monuments of Romantic formalism for folks to look at nostalgically. Yes, through the propagandistic use of Ansel Adams and Elliot Porter's photographs, the Sierra Club could sway public opinion enough to save large swatches of land for conservation. Good photos can be used for great things.

Those photographs were made at a different time when things were more "innocent." The Cerro Gordo Mines were still operational, extracting California silver and shipping it to a Rochester factory to be manufactured into the film. Silver halides have a price; like

compound interest, it adds up over the years.

Now, the closed Cerro Gordo Mines is a remote ghost town situated near the dry bed of Owens Lake (an ecological disaster in its own right). At the same time, the Kodak factory still produces film despite bankruptcy and historical environmental impact reports. How does one ignore the contradiction that “Good Photographs” also carry the weight of ecological exploitation? How does a photographer working today honestly reflect the environmental impact of human exploitation of the Earth’s resources?

Avoiding analog photography is not the answer. In digital capture technology, cameras have been a giant waste of resources. A Pentax K1000 manufactured in the late 1970s will still function, while a top-of-the-line digital camera a decade old is nothing more than a paperweight. There are plenty of examples of digital waste choking the environment.

I began using a biodegradable developer made from household chemicals like washing and baking soda, sugar, etc. Do I think it will make a difference in my direct environment? No. In a way, it feels helpless, like throwing roses at a riot squad. Yet, it is far more interesting than following established photographic rules without being critical of them. It also demonstrates just how flexible and malleable photography is as a medium. Photography can be done in countless different ways, all with unique outcomes. With this much possibility, why bother holding one method of picture-making over any other? Why take good pictures when you can make fantastic messes and beautiful disasters?

This is why I am not interested in making “good” photographs. I am no longer interested in attempting to conform to photographic orthodoxies. Prevailing customs are not critical of their contradictions. If our environment is a mess, I want my images to reflect that mess, not merely a record of the mess. I want my pictures to look like my environment: scarred, broken, and rundown, not “good.”

**Selected Resume**

**Solo Exhibitions**

**2025** *A Sky Full of Holes*, Museum of Art and History (MOAH), Lancaster CA

**2024** *The Pleasure of Being Wrong,* Riverside Art Museum, Riverside, CA (curated by Lisa Henry)

**2022** *Toxic Exposure: Violence Upon the Land and Image*, All Eyes Gallery, San Bernardino, CA

**2021** *ART @ ONT*, Ontario Airport Terminal 4, Chaffey Community Museum of Art, Ontario, CA

**2017** *Cut, Punctured, Manipulated*, SRO Photo Gallery, Lubbock, TX

**2015** *Light Sensitive*, Robert and Frances Fullerton Museum of Art, San Bernardino, CA

**Group Exhibitions**

**2024** *Expand and Contract: Photography and Mixed Media*, Los Angeles Center of Photography, Los Angeles, CA (curated by Dr. Rotem Rozental)

**2023** *Problematic Palms*, Walter N. Marks Center for the Arts, Palm Desert, CA (curated by Shana Nys Dambrot)

*Life Logistic*, The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture, Riverside, CA

**2019** *In the Sunshine of Neglect: Defining Photographs and Radical Experiments in Inland Southern California, 1950 to the Present,* California Museum of Photography, Riverside, CA

**2018** *Center Forward 2018*, The Center for Fine Art Photography, Fort Collins, CO

**2015** *ABSTRACT*, Filter Photo Festival, Filter Space, Chicago, IL

**2014** *Being Here and There*, Lancaster Museum of Art and History, Lancaster, CA

Photo by Edwin Alvarez Loza

# Artist Biography

**Andrew K. Thompson** is a photographic artist from the Inland Empire of California. His work has been exhibited at the Lancaster Museum of Art and History, the Riverside Art Museum, the California Museum of Photography, the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture, the Walter N. Marks Center for the Arts, the Center for Fine Art Photography, Gallery 1/1, and Klotz Gallery.

Andrew is a competitive bicycle motocross (BMX) racer with a viral video about a frozen asparagus camera. He has been a member of Incredibly Strange Wrestling (1998 - 2004), a punk rock pro wrestling performance group, and was the founder and M.C. of Punk Rock Pillow Fight (2005 - 2014), a national pillow fighting tournament.

Musings on his work have appeared on *Art Life 2.0 Podcast with Andrew K. Thompson* hosted by Xrstine Franco, Claremont, CA (December 28, 2022); *KVC_aRts 91.9 NPR*, San Bernardino, California (August 16, 2017); *The Golden Goal* on Norwegian Television Channel TV2 (2012); and *Saturday Night Live Weekend Update with Seth Meyers*, S36 E22 (May 21, 2011).

His work has been reviewed in *Art in the Plague Year Processes the Experience*, LA Weekly by Shana Nys Dambrot (March 18, 2021), *Being Here and There: Ambiguous Boundaries and Contested Terrains*, KCET Artbound by Larissa Nickel, Los Angeles, CA (January 2015); and *The Here and Now: From A to Z: Contemporary Landscape Photography at MOAH (Museum of Art and History)*, Artillery Magazine by Colin Westerbeck, Los Angeles, CA (March 2015).

# Contributors

**Alan Klotz** (1948 - 2022) was a photo-historian and gallerist specializing in fine 19th- and 20th-century vintage photography and emerging contemporary work for over 39 years. The Alan Klotz Gallery was a founding member of the Association of International Photography Art Dealers.

**Shana Nys Dambrot** is an art critic, curator, and author based in Downtown LA. She is the Arts Editor for the L.A. Weekly, and a contributor to Flaunt, Art & Cake, and Artillery. She studied Art History at Vassar College, writes book and catalog essays, curates and juries exhibitions, is a dedicated Instagram photographer and is the author of the experimental novella Zen Psychosis (2020, Griffith Moon). She speaks at galleries, schools, and cultural institutions nationally, and is a Co-Chair of ArtTable's SoCal Chapter, an award-winning member of the LA Press Club, and a recipient of the 2022 Mozaik Future Art Writers Prize. She sits on the Board of Art Share-LA the Advisory Council of Building Bridges Art Exchange.

**Matthew Gagnon Blair** is an artist, writer, musician, and collectivist based in Montreal. He is a founder of Jean Couteau and Q Bloc, an emerging art space in Parc-Extension. MGB is an eyewitness to 9/11, and a day-one participant in Occupy Wall Street. He was a founder and co-director of the Sanctuary of Hope, an artist-run space in a former church in Ridgewood, Queens; he was associate director of Y Gallery in the Lower East Side; he also taught at Brooklyn College and Metropolitan College of New York. He has exhibited his work internationally and his writings have been published by the New York Times, Maisonneuve, and carte blanche.


ROSS R. DE VEAN GALLERY
"PHOTOGRAPHY IS REPLETE WITH RULES FOR TAKING GOOD PICTURES.
THIS BODY OF WORK IS THE RESULT OF IGNORING AND RE-IMAGINING THOSE RULES."
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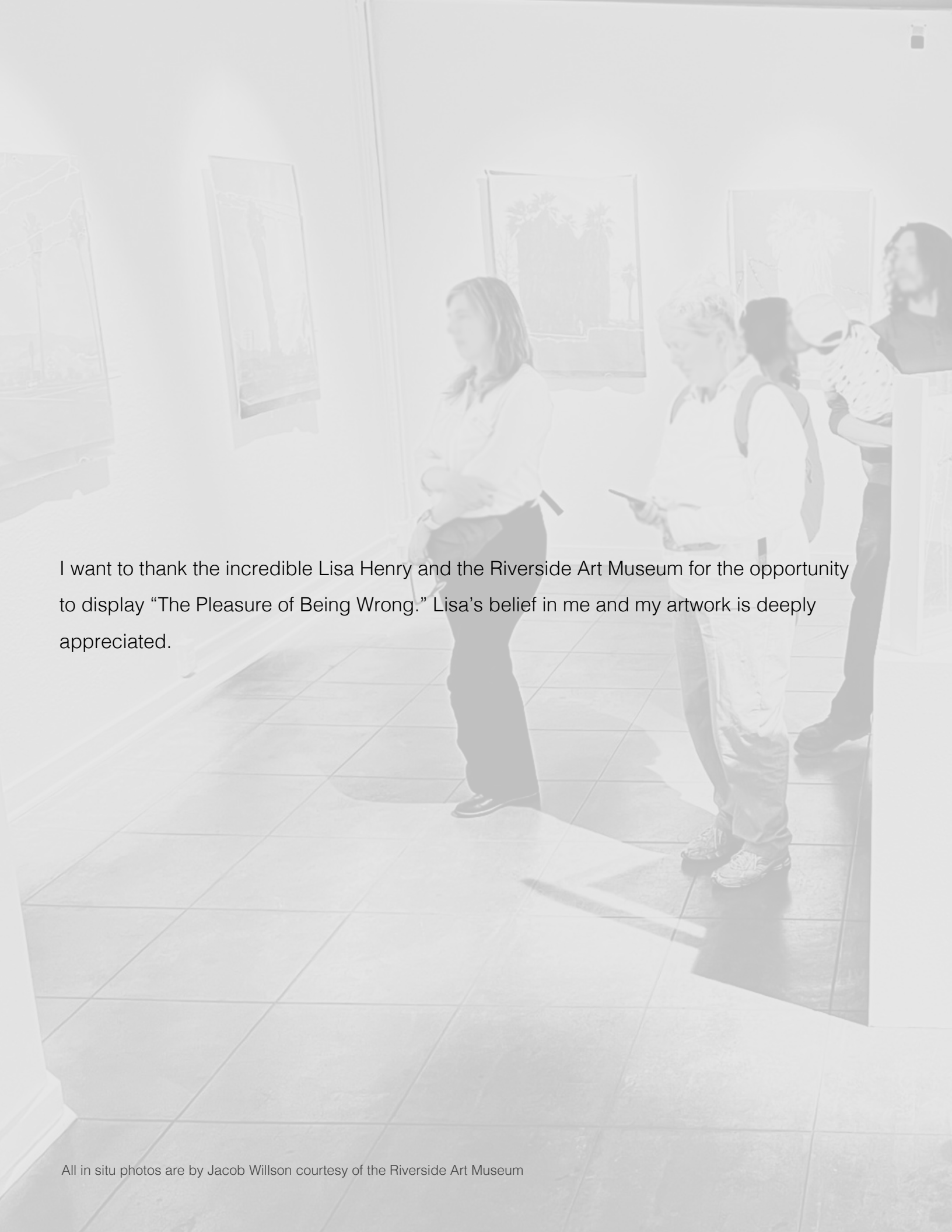
ESTA OBRA ES EL RESULTADO DE IGNORAR Y RE IMAGINAR ESAS REGLAS."
-ANDREW K. THOMPSON



I want to thank the incredible Lisa Henry and the Riverside Art Museum for the opportunity to display “The Pleasure of Being Wrong.” Lisa’s belief in me and my artwork is deeply appreciated.

All in situ photos are by Jacob Willson courtesy of the Riverside Art Museum

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