

NEWS RELEASE

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***Terra Incognita*, Photographs by Matthew Moore, on View through September at Adkins Arboretum**

With their exquisite color and flawless clarity, Matthew Moore’s desert photographs are enticing, yet they speak of a strange mix of beauty and desolation. On view at the Adkins Arboretum Visitor’s Center through Sept. 29, they capture the allure of the desert environment and the curious ways it is affected by human presence. There will be a reception to meet the artist on Sat., Aug. 18 from 3 to 5 p.m.



Matthew Moore, “Coachella Valley,” pigment print, 24" x 30"

Intrigued by a brief visit to the high desert south of Los Angeles, this Easton artist applied for a month-long artist residency through the Joshua Tree Highlands Artist-in-Residence program in Joshua Tree, Calif. Because of his teaching schedule as an Associate Professor of Photography and Chair of the Visual Arts Department at Anne Arundel Community College in Arnold, Md., he had to request that his residency be in the summer.

“Most people like to go there in the spring,” he said. “It was really hot, but I liked it. It’s dry heat, and it’s technically high desert, so it gets cold at night. What makes Joshua Desert kind of a weird place is that it’s where two deserts merge, so it’s where the terrain changes.”

Located at the intersection of the two distinct ecosystems of the Mohave Desert and the Colorado Desert, Joshua Tree National Park is home to rugged hills, wind-sculptured rocks and a wide variety of plant and animal species. Its beauty and remoteness have made it a haven for artists, hippies and religious zealots, and, in addition to his large landscape photographs, Moore

has included tiny polaroid shots of some of the artists, swap meet vendors and eccentrics he met there. A further wrinkle is the nearby presence of a Marine Corps training ground for soldiers bound for Iraq.

Despite their stunning photographic beauty, Moore's landscapes all have an uncomfortable edge to them. There's something strange, desolate or dangerous in each of them.

In one photo, a broad plain studded with the singular silhouettes of bristling Joshua trees is punctuated by a fallen balloon glowing bright blue from a tangle of scrubby plants. In another, a crumbling pier juts out over the bizarre raspberry pink waters of a finger of the Salton Sea, a large inland saline lake formed by the floodwaters of a failed irrigation project. And in a third, under a sky of seemingly infinite blue, the warm russet glow of a wide desert landscape is interrupted by a battered metal drum that marks the border between the military training ground and the safety of the park.

Moore is fascinated with how the human presence insinuates itself into the landscape, no matter how remote. The shiny blue balloon was likely carried on the wind from a sweet sixteen party in the LA suburbs. In other photographs, he captures pure magic in the glow of distant city lights seen from the night-dark desert, but he also documents the scraggly remnants of half-deserted resort towns that tell of the harshness of this arid place.

Throughout the exhibit, there's a sense of paradox. People are drawn to the desert's stark beauty and its sense of boundlessness and freedom, yet in coming there, they sacrifice the comforts and safety of more conventional lifestyles, and their activities leave lasting scars.

Human activity is a given here in Maryland, where agriculture, forestry, towns and cities have permanently altered the landscape. The spare panorama of the desert is in sharp contrast to the complicated beauty of our lush, green environment, but both places are deeply affected by our human presence. Moore's compelling images spark close consideration of our relationships with the landscapes that we live on and have come to love.

This show is part of Adkins Arboretum's ongoing exhibition series of work on natural themes by regional artists. It is on view through Sept. 29 at the Arboretum Visitor's Center located at 12610 Eveland Road near Tuckahoe State Park in Ridgely. Contact the Arboretum at 410-634-2847, ext. 0 or info@adkinsarboretum.org for gallery hours.

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Adkins Arboretum is a 400-acre native garden and preserve at the headwaters of the Tuckahoe Creek in Caroline County. Open year round, the Arboretum offers educational programs for all ages about nature and gardening. For more information, visit adkinsarboretum.org or call 410-634-2847, ext. 0.

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