

# Michael Light

- 1 057 BAKER/21 Kilotons/Bikini Atoll/1946
- 2 053 GEORGE/225 Kilotons/Enewetak Atoll/1951
- 3 076/WAHOO/9 Kilotons/Enewetak Atoll/1958
- 4 089/AZTEC/410 Kilotons/Christmas Island/1962
- 5 094/SUNSET/1 Megaton/Christmas Island/1962
- 6 056/ABLE/21 Kilotons/Bikini Atoll/1946
- 7 060/SEMINOLE/13.7 Kilotons/Enewetak Atoll/1956
- 8 085/FRIGATE BIRD/600 Kilotons/Christmas Island/1962
- 9 042/EASY/31 Kilotons/Nevada/1951
- 10 051/X-RAY/37 Kilotons/Enewetak Atoll/1948
- 11 037/ZUCCHINI/28 Kilotons/Nevada/1955
- 12 046/LITTLE FELLER 1/18 Tons/Nevada/1962

From the series, *100 Suns*, 2003

Inkjet prints

Courtesy of the artist

Michael Light's series of photographs, *100 SUNS*, documenting atmospheric nuclear tests is drawn from the archives at Los Alamos National Laboratory and the United States National Archives in Maryland. Light did not embellish or alter the historical photographs, but presents them as images made at the precise moment of detonation. Each photograph is accompanied by the name of the nuclear test, its explosive yield in kilotons or megatons, its date, and the location.

J. Robert Oppenheimer is a physicist who is often referred to as "the father of the atomic bomb." The title of Light's series, *100 SUNS*, alludes to the statement Oppenheimer made upon witnessing the world's first nuclear explosion in New Mexico. Quoting a passage from the ancient Hindu scripture, *Bhagavad Gita*: "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst forth at once in the sky, that would be like the splendor of the Mighty One... I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

# Chris Drury

(left)

## **Life in the Field of Death II**

Soil from the Nevada Test Site

(right)

## **Life in the Field of Death I**

Digital archival print

2008

Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art

Gift of the artist

While working on a project with the Nevada Museum of Art in 2008, British artist Chris Drury met with scientists from the Desert Research Institute who were engaged in research at the Nevada Test Site—a 1,400-square-mile desert and mountain region outside of Las Vegas where the United States has conducted over 900 nuclear tests.

Assuming that the landscape of the Test Site had been exposed to significant levels of radiation from these tests, Drury asked scientist Dr. Lynn Fenstermaker, “What is living in the soil of the Nevada Test Site?”

Fenstermaker identified several organisms living in the soil, including a micro-scopic soil bacteria known as *Microcoleus vaginatus*. She also pointed out that a magnified image of the bacteria bore a striking resemblance to an aerial view of the braided drainage network and playa of Frenchman's Flat—an area where several atmospheric nuclear tests occurred in the 1950s. This comparison became the basis for Drury's photographic artwork *Life in the Field of Death I*, (hanging on to the right), and the inspiration for his subsequent wall installation, *Life in the Field of Death II* (seen to the left).

Using soil gathered by scientists at the Nevada Test Site, Drury stenciled the partial DNA gene sequence for *Microcoleus vaginatus* onto the gallery wall. The letters A, T, C, and G represent the four DNA bases—adenine, thymine, cytosine, and guanine—that create the code for genetic information. Drury hopes his piece will encourage discussion about the known and unknown impacts of radiation, and the risks of genetic mutation on living organisms.

