

David Maisel: Proving Ground

Bay-area photographer David Maisel was granted rare access to the highly classified Dugway Proving Ground in Utah's Great Salt Lake Desert. From its inception during World War II, Dugway's early mission for its nearly 800,000 acres was to develop and test chemical and biological weaponry; more recently, the base shifted to developing defense methods against such weapons, and now their disposal.

Working from both the ground and the air, Maisel photographed the abstracted test-grids through which clouds of chlorine gas drift, the nested circles used to measure chemical-release patterns, and the laboratories built for neutralizing biological threats and decontaminating battlefield toxins. Maisel also subjected his aerial images of Dugway to an additional gridding process: a template was inscribed over the photograph, much as land is gridded for cartographic purposes. The two methods of rendering overlap to evoke questions surrounding military power, national security, land use, and the limits of technology and human endeavor.

Maisel's *Proving Ground* is a critical response to the visual and political aspects embedded at Dugway, a site that in Maisel's words is a "hidden, walled-off, and secret site that offers the opportunity to reflect on who and what we are collectively, as a society."

Materials for this exhibition are drawn from David Maisel's archive of the project held at the Center for Art + Environment.