

Michael Light: Full Moon
Collection IAE2501

Introduction/Abstract

Michael Light selected images made by the astronauts on the Apollo and Gemini missions of the 1960s and early 70's and created a single journey to the moon and back in his book titled *Full Moon*, first published in 1999.

Biographical Note: Michael Light

Michael Light is a San Francisco-based photographer, bookmaker, and pilot whose focus is the environment and how contemporary American culture relates to it. His work is concerned both with the politics of that relationship and the seductions of landscape representation, particularly as found in the arid Western spaces of America. He works with found, appropriated imagery gleaned from public archives and his own 4 x 5" negatives, most often taken from the air. Visual books are at the root of most of his output.

One strain of Light's practice has been to rework familiar historical photographic and cultural icons into landscape-driven perspectives, often with an aerial component, by sifting through large and overlooked public photographic archives. His first such book and exhibition, *Full Moon* (1999), used lunar geological survey imagery made by NASA's Apollo astronauts to show the moon both as a sublime desert and an embattled point of first human contact. His second archive-based book and exhibition, *100 Suns* (2003), focused on the politics and landscape meanings of U.S. atmospheric nuclear detonations in Nevada and the Pacific, 1945-1962.

Another longstanding aspect of Light's production has been to physically fly over both settled and unsettled areas of western American space while photographing with a large-format camera, pursuing themes of mapping, vertigo, human impact on the land, geology, and various aspects of the sublime. A private pilot, Light has a small, two-seat, high-wing aircraft specifically designed for aerial photographic work. He is currently working on an aerial photographic survey of arid America titled "SOME DRY SPACE: An Inhabited West."

Scope and Content

Michael Light first gained international prominence when he completed an archival edit of 32,000 images made by the astronauts on the Apollo and Gemini missions of the 1960s and early 70's, Light selected pictures with an unprecedented sense of photographic history, creating a single journey to the moon and back that highlights the Moon as much as a place unto itself as well as an event. The first person to gain permission to scan NASA masters at film-grain resolution, Light's scans and the direct-digital LightJet prints made from them remain the finest prints available from NASA's lunar explorations. Landscape representation, geology, and a light sharper than anything human eyes evolved to perceive, all reveal a ravishing place largely hidden behind the visual clichés of national and technological dominance.

Light's book, *Full Moon* was published globally in eight editions in 1999, and another four in 2002. His prints were exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Hayward Gallery in London and then travelled to the Sydney Museum of Modern Art and Huis Marseille, Amsterdam. *Full Moon* has been on permanent display at the American Museum of Natural History's Rose Center for Earth and Space since 2000, where millions of viewers have seen it, and was shown in its entirety at the Hasselblad Center in 2006 to commemorate Victor Hasselblad's 100th birthday. Images from the *Full Moon* edition are held in the collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, the



Hasselblad Center in Sweden, the Victoria & Albert Museum London, and the Musee de l'Elysee in Switzerland, among many other public collections.

Materials in the archive consist of project management correspondence, NASA research images, book dummies, two laser discs of the film *Drift: 29 Days, 18 Hours, 2 Minutes*, and press materials.

This archive is currently in process.