

Michael Lundgren (born 1974)

Michael Lundgren's photographs explore the dynamic landscape of the United States desert. In the age of digital, and with colour the default choice of contemporary practice, it is rare to see such mastery of black and white printing. Lundgren's choice of technique is not simply the celebration of a dying art. Rather, it is a decision that aptly matches the tone and sensibility of his poetic message.

In his pared down and powerful way, Lundgren deals with the grand themes of existence. Contradicting the statement that 'photography is dead', his work is alive with literary and philosophical references, both of historical and contemporary relevance. Looking over Lundgren's whole series *Transfigurations*, from which this one representative example is taken, it is apparent that he has spent a great deal of contemplative time in the desert and conveys a very personal view. This is not topography in any conventional sense. His photographs provide a picture of the desert as a site of potential metaphysical transcendence in keeping with a long tradition of American literature, including from Henry David Thoreau to Rebecca Solnit, and of landscape photography from Carelton Watkins to Edward Weston.

As Lundgren has noted, his photographs 'seek to understand beauty and terror, which are inseparable'. The pleasurable mingling of these seemingly contradictory states – beauty and terror – was noted by the 18th century writer and critic Edmund Burke and described by him as the 'Sublime'. Lundgren makes a contemporary 'sublime' statement in this image by confronting the vast expanse of desert horizon with a group of bats swirling around a gaping hole in the ground, the entrance to a cave. The image suggests the revelation of awesome worlds that we cannot normally see, or do not usually take the time to notice, lying perhaps as closely as just beneath our feet.

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