

Returning from a weekend of sprint-car races at the California Mid-Winter Fair in El Centro, Hogan pere, nine-year old John, his seven and five year-old sisters, first weekend of March primetime for inclement winter weather in the Southern California mountains. Sunday afternoon snow started falling heavily so dad pulled off onto a dirt road above Anza-Borrego figuring it was best to wait out the storm. Cooked Dinty Moore beef stew over the Coleman stove, then the kids crawled into a crappy Kmart tent with their slumber party sleeping bags and polyester overcoats while dad got in back of the El Camino protected by the camper shell. As the blizzard raged the wind began howling, the tent whipping in all directions, the children panicking, crying, trying to stay warm, then ran for it climbed in doing their best to fall asleep on the El Camino's cold steel bed. In the morning six inches of snow on the ground so made Slushies out of Cragmont sodas bought at Alpha Beta mixed with the white stuff. Seemed like the right thing to do for breakfast. Luckily a highway patrolman spotted the bedraggled, shivering castaways and had them follow a snowplow up and over the mountain to their way home. Everyone slept very well that night.

THE BURNING WORLD IN CRAGMONT COLORS

Roughly 44 years later Hogan visited Tucson where I immediately floated the notion of driving up to Gila Bend where the Garden State-Phoenix road trip coalition were rendezvousing the next day. The goal a massive, almost mythical 28-foot full pipe way off the beaten track not far from the trail taken by Juan Bautista de Anza's 1774 expedition through Yuma territory on its way to Alta California. He was game so we headed up the 10 to the 8, past the welded sheet metal dinosaurs at the gas station, flew by the delightfully named "populated place" of Smurr, then up Citrus Valley Road, solar panels at the Solana Generating Station on the left, veered by the Painted Rock Petroglyphs site, finally arriving at the rock and concrete "Built by the U.S. Army Engineer District Los Angeles" marker. Started trekking in illegally with the 180 foot high, almost 5,000 foot long earthfill embankment looming ahead, after half a mile the gaping maw of the spillway pipe steadily growing in size upon approach, foreboding, and up close near-colossal and issuing an ominous, continuous current of chilled air. Sighted the diminutive figures of the gang, who'd already skated, up on top of the dam. Yelled ineffectually until one separated from the group descending the precipitous slope. Jersey Drew, that is, always top shelf, when he got down hearty greetings, then as John observed he and I took turns gyrating back and forth on a board specially outfitted with large soft wheels suited to the pitted rough surface of that gargantuan cylinder. Since only a 20-foot wide band of



Man Making Photograph near Raven Butte, Barry M. Goldwater Range, Arizona, March 2014 (Black/Violet with Pale Green Glitter Flocking)
2014 | Mixed media on cotton paper | 20 x 34 inches (51 x 86 cm) | Unique



*Climber Pausing During Trek, Palo Verde Mountains Wilderness Area, near Blythe, California, June 2012
(Dark Orange with White Glitter Flocking)*

2015 | Mixed media on cotton paper | 22 x 16 1/2 inches (56 x 41 cm) | Unique

the accumulated dried muck had been recently cleared by some helpful BMXers had to fakie and kickturn multiple times just to achieve nine o'clock at 14 feet. Exhausting, and exhilarating. After, winded, scrambled with hands clawing the dirt up the incline to meet the rest and went out over the service walkway bridge to the Dam Control House 80 feet over the huge, empty, pesticide runoff-polluted former reservoir. Desolate, stark, bleak, all those adjectives apply, but also majestic and unencumbered. Deserted as far as the eye could see. Otherworldly, remote, almost another planet but totally terrestrial and wrought by man. There our little band stood arrayed high above an earthbound lunar panorama, beholding it, representatively troupers in one of Hogan's succulently-hued, occasionally doom-laden, eminently up-to-date cross-bred photographs-cum-paintings.

Those two disparate, chronologically distant personal episodes are a fortuitous jumping off point for an expositional perusal of Hogan's most recent optical explorations. — Between the burning world, the drowning world, and the frozen world, with J.G. Ballard as an almost inescapable guiding light, who in a so perfect it sounds apocryphal predestination made a powerful impact on our young subject thanks to books by the bard of ecological and societal ruination, *The Burning World* in particular, found lying around in the back of his surfer babysitter's panel truck. Manifested many years later in transporting departures of the mind-altering variety compositionally drawing the viewer in while creating a ruminative distance between them and the world depicted. Through the parched landscape from the Sonoran to the Great Basin and all the sand and stone in between. Hogan's pictures have a hallucinogenic effect, suffused with a sense of synesthesia, in his words, "deliciously flavored concoctions" blended into the decidedly harsh wilds they delineate. Time stands still, of course, as they are photos to begin with, but here the temporal feels even more motionless. Also paradoxically a deep-sea diving expedition, which makes sense, as Jim Waid, a master painter of the intensive desert close-up, once pointed out at his Menlo Park studio in Tucson. "Well, you know, it all used to be the bottom of the sea," he casually commented. Saguaros and scorpions, prickly pears and Palo Verde Beetles, if one discounts the aridity they all uncannily resemble denizens of the submarine depths. Though rooted in the above ground Hogan's work is filled with metaphors of submersion, imbued with trance-like states of concentration induced by images of people ostensibly simply gazing at what's around them in the barrens.

Automobiles figure prominently as befits our still internal combustion age, especially trucks and four-wheel drive vehicles because you need those get out there where the roads are rocky and close to impassable and these pictures can be made. The vessels for the voyage and also an individualistic connection to childhood car race and camping trips. Travel and adventure, dependent on four wheels, to achieve awe in the outdoors. Though they don't appear here Hogan's prior "Vacation" series of national park viewing areas are precursors, outlooks for apprehending and basking in the awe-inspiring. Here far removed from those occupied precincts we're on the other side leaving the day-trippers behind. Sparsely attended wilderness, such as the Barry M. Goldwater Range, where it gets real and these little bands are in the back of beyond where civilization is a faint echo. One can smell, and it's transmitted in the pictures, the all-pervasive dust, the palpable dryness, and the lovely pungent aroma of creosote after a monsoon downpour. Strong sensory vibes, and tactile ones too, don't get too near the dastardly cholla and watch out for lurking tarantulas. The wasteland in all its glory, sublime to be sure, but while the sublime inspires admiration it also incites fear in the face of the incomprehensibly awesome. Baleful, and exceedingly inhospitable. A domain that can lead to a horrifying end like in the final pages of Frank Norris' 1899 novel *McTeague* as the title character and Marcus fight over their remaining water in Death Valley until McTeague murders Marcus, who as he dies handcuffs himself to his killer, leaving him tethered to a corpse awaiting his own abject demise. The void doesn't care about you or the little people in these portrayals, who can be seen as the last remnants after we mostly vanish, damned heirs to climatic or other end times catastrophes. Reduced but enhanced to featureless yet conversely incredibly detailed sparkling silhouettes, everyman and woman, and child, archetypes, cursed desperate mortal forms inhabiting the desiccated terrain.

Scanning the topography with the human shape foregrounded, or in the middle ground, arranged a certain way in the midst of soaking it in. Oftentimes the Rückenfigur, the figure seen from behind summoning up Casper David Freidrich though these take place a long ways from Rügen. Undoubtedly a related sensibility is at play here, a landscape full of romantic feeling, seen by means of a tarnished, wearied, two hundred years further on lens. From a photographic angle, linked to Maxime Du Camp, Félix Teynard, Francis Frith, and all the other 19th century orientalist followed by servants totting large, unwieldy, wooden Calotype cameras and tripods, except sans pyramids and sphinxes. Instead natural contours, crags, and escarpments, and the scenery can frequently be taken for a body, or bodies layered on top of each other. Sensuous configurations populated by puny outlines gone astray in outsize, geological corporeality. And here it must be noted that these vivid, trippy, bejeweled prospects aren't the standard, hackneyed tropes of status quo desert photography. Those didactic, unimaginative surveys of forlorn vistas



A Group of Artists Stopped at the Intersection of Two Dirt Roads, North of Lucin, Utah, July 2014 (Pale Rainbow with Black and Red Glitter Crusts)
2019 | Mixed media on cotton paper | 26 x 36 inches (66 x 91 cm) | Unique

soothing the convoluted consciences of gallery-going, coffee table book-buying ersatz environmentalists driving to the opening in their Range Rovers. Patently Hogan isn't an epigone of those trotting out their expensively produced, helicopter flight-enabled, self-serving rather too habitual condemnations of desecration, specifically related to its scorched yet sexy hinterlands. Categorically more nuanced, acting as antidote and refutation of those pictographic platitudes, these are even lighthearted with an aspect of play and irreverence. The players within lost in contemplation but also having fun, enjoying themselves, genuinely appreciating what they're in and staring at, making these equivocal and open to interpretation and an antithesis to rote denunciations of despoilment.

How they are made, that sets them apart too. After pointing and shooting, pressing the button for decades, Hogan evinced a desire to use his hands. The process is amazing — though that doesn't necessarily need to be known and as with the internal workings of a magic trick maybe shouldn't be revealed. Some clues, though, are allowed. Mixed media, based on photos taken in the field, combining digital and handmade, appealingly hybrid, an incredible amount of work goes into them and it shows. Loose glitter, powder, holographic foils, variegated gold leaf, blisters, with 20 to 30 coats of paint, and a special mobile vacuuming system inspired by a visit to the dentist. Kenneth Howard aka Von Dutch's ghost peers over Hogan's shoulder as he compulsively toils at his worktable painting out the figures and communing with this or that person as he removes them, then brings them back in profile, examining their bodies on an intimate level. Posture and gesture. Figures glint and wink, embossed, built up. No surprise Jay DeFeo's monumental *The Rose* is a touchstone, with its repeated layers generating something sculptural out of what should have, by most standards, remained in the realm of the two-dimensional. Tiny brushes made out of recycled cat whiskers, abetted by a physicians' inspection lamp. Infrared, psychedelic, blurring, sharpening, compression, distortion, rewarding ocular and cognitive experience by means of redaction, addition, and subtraction. Concentrating for long periods of time, prayerful, kindred to the Armenian master violinist and Micro miniaturist Hagop Sandaldjian who meticulously crafted specks of dust and fragments of human hair into extraordinary figurative sculptures contained in the eyes of sewing needles. He also employed self-made tools, sharpened needles tipped with ruby or diamond dust, compiling insanely tiny tableaus out of dust and lint. As The Museum of Jurassic Technology's wizardly David Wilson, who brought Sandaldjian to notice, once drolly remarked, "He was a very calm man." The same, at least in the execution of these flavorful, bedazzling specimens, can certainly be said for this artist.

Reference points abound, from the above-mentioned to Vija Celmins's drawings of near-photographic precision, spooky primeval Black Sabbath album covers, *War of the Worlds*, Richard Archer wandering in the Mojave, and Chesley Bonestell back from Saturn here on earth. And of course Ballard, who had a singular influence over a rarified subset of American early-adult culture in the early 1980s with his dystopian, perennially dour and cataclysmic worldview counterbalanced by a distinctly dry, British wit. Not to mention, like for many of the small subsection of Hogan's generation who were listening to punk, skateboarding when it had been declared dead, and thinking about things, the prospect of mutually assured destruction brought on by cold war global nuclear annihilation. So not cheery, afraid, Armageddon obsessed, while also scornful, devil-may-care, on some level welcoming an onset of chaos and disorder. In aggregate the direct and indirect allusions can be caught, or not, but either way the works work by transcending those correlations as they fall away and one is left with an original vision, something familiar but new, different, completely and unequivocally John Brinton Hogan. And that's worth looking at, that is the trick, the magic of what we see here. Perhaps preoccupied with coming disintegration and collapse, the much-dreaded, highly anticipated apocalypse, or maybe just the undetermined, ambiguous present, flawed, sullied, but somehow still operating and occasionally beautiful. Befittingly and resplendently realized in Cragmont flavored raspberry, orange soda, black cherry, root beer, and lemon lime colors. And as for those misadventures and exploits like the time it snowed and they were stranded or the Painted Rock Dam tour, a foundation for masterful and ingenious transformations amply demonstrated in these mind-bending, multi-disciplinary, multiplex excursions into visual aphasia.

