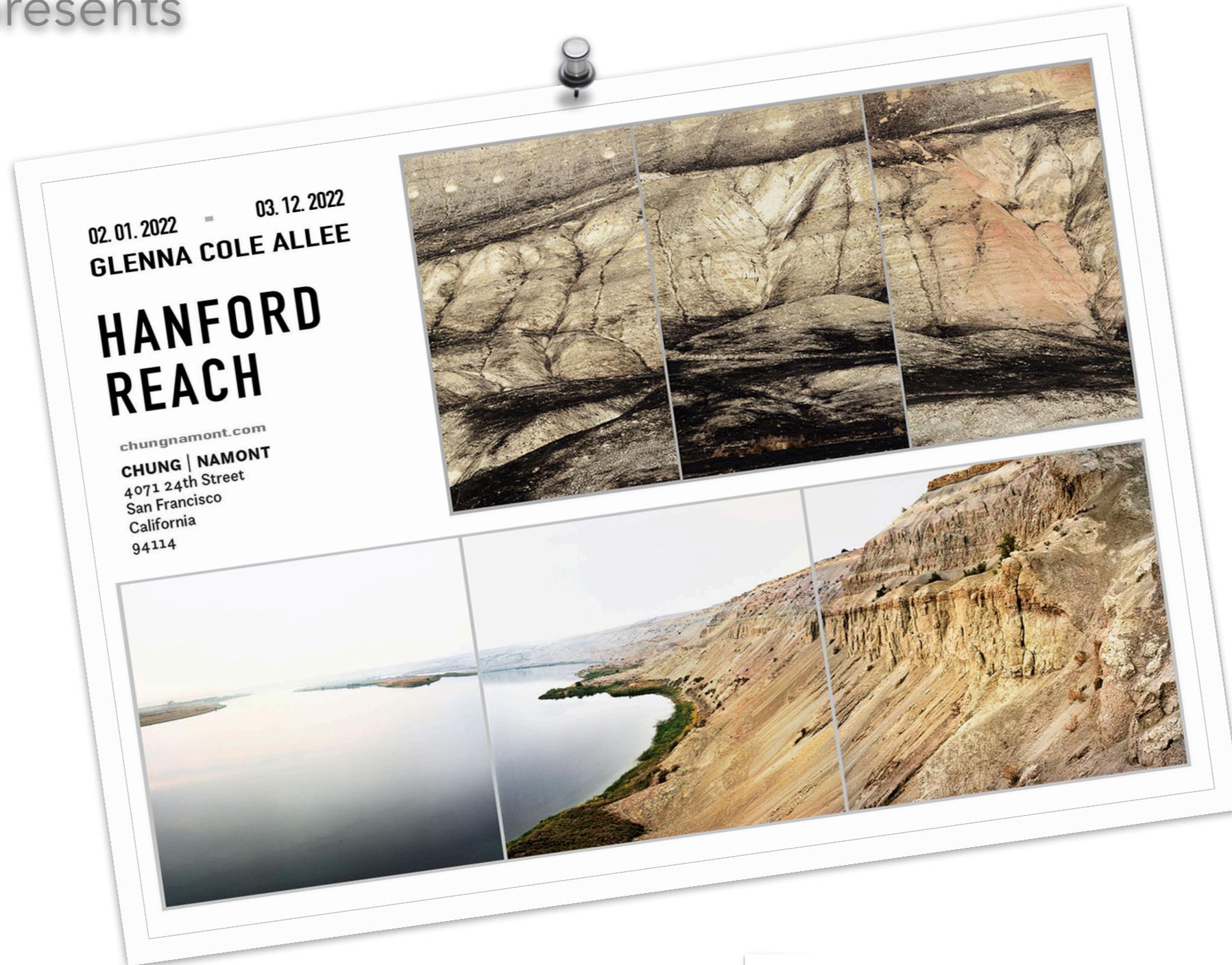


CHUNG | NAMONT
presents



CURATOR'S CORNER

Questions from Emmanuelle Namont

When did you start working within the realm of landscape photography?

Photography has been a way to register my own relationship to place/s since I first picked up a camera. But I was about thirty when I acquired a 1980's Hasselblad, and was really hooked by photography. That simple, perfect camera became a way to explore relationships between culture and place, to articulate observations, to interpret and read landscapes.

These days, my work extends from the realm of landscape photography, rather than residing comfortably within that realm; it's an uneasy home, but also formative. When I photograph the body, the imagery often resembles landscape. In the work I'm showing now, *Hanford Reach*, these kinds of relationships between landscape and the body are very present, both metaphorically and literally.

What got you started on this specific project?

I was not yet twenty when I realized that I was living downstream from an enormous active nuclear zone, reading road maps while driving home to New York City from Portland Oregon. This was the pre-Chernobyl era, there were eight reactors and multiple processing plants at work on the Hanford Area. Many people in Portland seemed unaware of the site, and that interested me. There was a secrecy enshrouding the place and its history, and that secrecy was fascinating.

Decades later, revisiting Hanford, I tried to photograph there. I shared those photographs with the artist Sharon Grace at San Francisco Art Institute. She revealed that she came from the Hanford area, and she bore the scar known locally as "The Hanford Necklace;" she was a thyroid cancer survivor. This exchange was something I could never forget.

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How long have you been working on the project?

It really began to take shape in 2015. I had no idea it would span years. At some point there was a decision to let this project unfold over time, in a manner antithetical to notions of constant production and novelty.

The solitary observation and focus of the thought that I practiced visiting the expansive Hanford territories in all seasons, photographing and learning to record sound at all hours, became, over time, integral to my internal landscapes.

Why did you expand the project into its multiple dimensions in terms of media: photography but also sound, videos? Did you start with the photographs or were you always planning to use other media?

Landscapes like Hanford's are enigmatic, so much of their import is invisible, or barely visible. The various ways they have been impacted, systematically divided and interrupted, and a force such as radiation itself; all are visible only through subtle traces and lingering after-effects. I began by photographing like a detective, looking for clues. But I quickly realized I wanted to listen to how people in the communities ringing Hanford perceived the site, and in that process, the terrain became full of the voices of those I was interviewing. I wanted to create work that reflected a certain dissonance that occurred when these narratives were placed together, and a sense of denial. Also: I was trying to record the night sounds the area. There was so much life passing constantly through a zone that has even sealed off from access, part of it in perpetuity.

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There is a long photographic tradition in the history of the medium, starting with photographer Carleton Watkins in the XIX century depicting the Western American landscape with grandiose views, using large format photography. Where do you locate your practice in regard to that tradition?

I've chosen to create panoramas that do not quite align: they are discontinuous, and sometimes repeat details. Horizon lines don't match up. Some are created from different points of view, some from different locales placed together, to appear continuous. This is my way of addressing the cracks in the panoramic vista/view. Those cracks emerged as I listened, closely, to a variety of perspectives of these landscapes. The practice of paying attention with the camera (and sound collection) is a way to register the stratigraphy of interpretations that are present, at work, in this dynamic phenomenon:

"landscape." This work, then, is "perspectival," as according to the epistemological principle that perception (of any thing) is always attached to the interpretive perspective of the observer.

One curator corrected the mismatches of one of these triptychs, in their museum catalogue; I guess she thought the discrepancies were annoying, and the continuous view much more pleasing. We long for perfect, believable fictions.

CURATOR'S CORNER



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Are there photographers working in the field of landscape photography who have had an influence on your practice?

Sophie Ristelhueber; Roni Horn; Mark Klett; Takashi Arai. I am so fortunate, also, to have studied with Sharon Grace, John Priola, John Roloff, Hank Wessel, Regan Louie, and others.

In one of your essays for the project you talked about the landscapes that you photograph as "landscapes on loan".
What do you mean by this?

This project is named for a zone that currently has been opened to the public as a "nature reserve," after being cordoned off as a nuclear zone for four decades. The future is a giant question mark; Hanford's leaking tanks are a disaster unfolding in slow-motion.

How has the project impacted you as an artist, and in your own practice?

It really pushed me to think about other media, sound in particular. And about modes of mapping, and reading the stories and interpretations that refract off of landscapes in different light/through different lenses. And I never imagined the work would grow into the completely different form of a monograph and interview archive.

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For “Hanford Reach”, you interviewed scientists, Native American elders, cancer survivors, displaced farmers, is there a specific story that “stays” with you today?

One voice that has been present to me often is that of Irene Cloud, a Wanapum (indigenous) elder. She passed away a little over a year ago. According to the regional native tradition her name was not to be spoken for a full year. I’ve thought of her often, and of her quite beautiful narratives that span back to before a dam was constructed that flooding ancient petroglyphs beneath the Columbia River, at a site that now holds a Wanapum Heritage museum. I often think about Toshiharu Kano, a Hibakusha (atomic bomb survivor). And I also think about Jack Rhoades, who is arguably more acutely aware of the dangers present at Hanford than anyone else I’ve met, having been high up in command at the US Department of Energy. His conception of geologic time, in reference to the pasts and futures of this place, greatly transformed my own. His support for my own inquiry (he drove me all over the site), and his mix of fear and pride regarding Hanford greatly expanded my own field of compassion in directions I never anticipated.

CURATOR'S CORNER



What is next in terms of your practice? Any new project or further developments for Hanford Reach?

I’d like to do something very small: minute. That said, there is a possible collaborative project addressing Orca whales that might be swimming my way...We shall see...

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