Great Basin Exteriors: A Photographic Survey

G A L L E R Y N O T E S

FRONT COVER:

Daniel Cheek
Pony Express Trail near Austin, NV
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2006

Adam Jahiel
Horse Shadows, Spanish Ranch, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

Nolan Preece
Wall #11 – Virginia City, NV
archival pigment print
27" x 20"
2004

This exhibit is part of the Nevada Arts Council's Nevada Touring Initiative–Traveling Exhibition Program, and is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Nevada State Legislature. The Nevada Arts Council is a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

GREAT BASIN EXTERIORS: A PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Great Basin Exteriors: A Photographic Survey presents a compilation of three photographers' work who have each documented a changing Western landscape in their own way. The Great Basin is part of the Basin and Range Province that covers most of Nevada and over half of Utah, as well as parts of California, Idaho, Oregon and Wyoming. This vast area is evolving and seemingly becoming smaller as the population grows, travel becomes more efficient and the effects of humans are more noticeable. Cowboys are vanishing, rustic old buildings are falling to development and the landscape itself is becoming cluttered with the trappings of modern civilization.

Photographers are historians by nature. The old saying, "the camera never lies" holds true for these three photographers who have set out on separate paths to capture what is left or what is changing. Adam Jahiel photographs cowboys in Northern Nevada and illustrates a way of life that is being lost forever with stark clarity. Daniel Cheek works with the spaciousness of the Great Basin. He includes small, man-made intrusions in his landscapes that are indicative of a changing West. Nolan Preece presents a look at the rustic patina that is diminishing with restoration and development across the Great Basin.

For these three photographers it is about documenting an environment that is changing or disappearing from the Western landscape. They accomplish this through three distinctive styles and techniques. Jahiel uses the platinum print as a means to archive and preserve his images for the future. Cheek works with an 8" x 10" camera to reproduce the rich color of the Great Basin on chromogenic photo paper; and, Preece uses large format and digital cameras to produce both black and white and color images of high quality.

The vision of this exhibition is twofold: to document this moment in time for current and future generations and to serve as an educational resource for Nevada communities by bringing an awareness of the value of photography in historical preservation. Is a picture worth a thousand words? Clearly, photographs are our visual history. These talented photographers have produced an outstanding body of documentary work worth thousands of words that will be remembered long into the future.

Daniel Cheek

www.danielcheek.com

Hickison Petroglyph Recreation Park, NV
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2006

My photography explores the relationship between people and their relationship with the land. I believe that very few people in the modern age have experienced unadulterated nature. I know I have not. The places we go to experience nature are built-on in order for us to experience it as safely and conveniently as possible. True nature would be too frightening or difficult to access for the majority of us.

—Daniel Cheek

Hickison Petroglyph Recreation Area (at night)
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2002

Premium Gas, UT
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2007

Large format photographers become very conscious of detail and composition in the image. Because they are exposing one sheet of film at a time, and the film is expensive, they must calculate each exposure carefully for critical sharpness, shadow as well as highlight detail and camera angle. The image is also upsidedown in the ground glass.

—Nolan Preece

Near Sand Pass, NV
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2002

With his 8" x 10" camera, Cheek exaggerates this contrived distance through ground glass. The format that he uses requires him to shoot from stable ground, on fair and friendly terrain. Using a large-format camera is a slow, calculated endeavor, not unlike that of writing. Writing, reading and photographing are all in their own ways, opportunities to examine an experience from a distance, and from this distance, we're sometimes better able to understand what we see and feel.

—Sara Distin, Associate Director of Jen Bekman Projects, NYC

I moved West at the turn of the century. In 1999, my girlfriend and I loaded all of our meager possessions in a rented U-Haul and drove the 2,500 miles from Michigan to the wilds of San Francisco. We found the drive brutally boring until we pulled into, what I now realize is, the area that is the Great Basin.

To me, the Great Basin encompasses what I've always considered the epic "West;" the harsh lonely stretches of barren land broken up by sometimes failed settlements; intimidating mountains almost always peaking out of the distant horizon; and weather in its barest forms. I was enthralled and enchanted. As we approached the Sierra Nevada Mountains, I was dread-filled to both tackle the frightening heights, and saddened to leave what I found to be an exciting and historically significant area of the Great Basin.

In my ten years in the San Francisco Bay Area, I've made many trips to the area, always with camera in tow. I've buried my 3-day-old truck up to the axles in the sand around Pyramid Lake, I've wasted entire days and nights staring at rolling numbered wheels in Reno casinos with always the same outcome, I've slept curled up in the bed of my truck perched on a precipice on the winding road up to Virginia City, and many other stories. The light scrapes across the Great Basin like nowhere else on earth. The people who have settled the Great Basin have scrabbled together a tough life punctuated by natural glories most of us will never know. Modern people generally want to conquer the land, the inhabitants of the Great Basin live in a closer communion with the land, the nature of the area is just too strong for us to take over but they live with a great respect for it.

—Daniel Cheek

Virginia City Cemetery, NV
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2002

Fort Churchill Overview, NV
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2007

Effectively comparing the new to the old, Cheek uses the contrast between the ruins of Fort Churchill and the contrail in the sky.

—Nolan Preece

Leadville, NV
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2001

A large format camera is the proper tool for the job of documenting the spaciousness of the Great Basin. Cheek steers clear of the scenic landscape. He gives us a glimpse of the beauty of this place but with tiny encroachments by man, this is intentional and a part of his style. He follows in the footsteps of environmental photographers such as Richard Misrach, Mark Klett and Lawrence McFarland. Cheek is very subtle in many of these photographs, displaying the emptiness of the Great Basin but with the accents of man. The viewer needs to move in close to find the distant power lines, roads, contrails, footprints or ruins—they are there.

—Nolan Preece

Footprints in the sand? What kind of activity could be going on way out here? Cheek has led us to ask ourselves these questions. Actually it is a trail out to the ruins of the Sand Springs Pony Express Station that is ringed by a short nature trail with interpretive signs. This is safe space for modern man out in the desert.

—Nolan Preece

Gunnison Massacre Site, Great Basin Nat'l Park, NV
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2007

Cheek chooses to photograph spaces that are close to the perimeter of wilderness, usually marked by fences, benches and paths.

Near Sand Mountain, NV
chromogenic print
24" x 28"
2007

Adam Jahiel

www.adamjahiel.com

Shane Sanders, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

It was 1974. I must have been 16 years old, and on my first major road trip—driving west to meet my Uncle in Utah and go fishing at Lake Powell. I had a '69 Chrysler Newport 2-door and a buddy of mine who was on his way to Arizona. After I dropped him off in Green River, I headed south all by myself. I remember listening to a tape of Handel's "Water Music" that my mom had given me, and I was driving, and everything was just incredibly big—massive red rocks, vast sky, and you didn't see a soul for hours. That space and solitude just felt right. That's what put the hook in me, and ever since I've had a need for that kind of western space.

The West is a world where points on the map are far apart, where the country is vast, the skies huge, and where, in the scale of things, men become insignificant. Out away from town, there are no pay phones, cell phones, computers or backups; nobody to flag down if you run out of gas or water. If you get lost, you're lost. If you're bucked off and your horse runs, you better start walking.

When I was in California I spent a lot of weekends in the Los Padres Mountains above Santa Barbara. My friends had horses and we would ride and rope and go to rodeos—and, of course I took pictures. There was something interesting to me about cowboys and the whole "western" thing—these were people who weren't afraid of getting their hands dirty, who had to deal with animals and weather and nature, and not the artificial environment of a business office or computer laboratory.

There is something that I find very compelling and almost Zen-like about ranch hands. They are not caught up in materialism or status seeking. And because their world is limited in distractions, what they do, they do well, completely and thoroughly.

—Adam Jahiel

Sticking with something for more than 15 years will get you a different feel than if you just go once and leave. I like returning to visit these guys, and they open up to me as a result.

—Adam Jahiel

Fritz and Snooks, TS Ranch, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

Remuda, Spanish Ranch, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

Jahiel has an incredible eye for action, portraiture and still life. His knowledge about film, its sensitivity to light and how to process it all contributed to the technical expertise of his work. A photojournalist must know his/her equipment and materials so well that it does not interfere with capturing the subject. This was paramount for him to get quality images.

Jahiel works with a medium format Mamiya film camera to get the coverage needed to edit out the best images. The film format is 2 1/4" x 2 1/4" square thus the prints are square. Jahiel easily works with this format and he is very comfortable composing and using the space to his advantage. By producing enlarged negatives from these very sharp black and white film negatives he has an excellent start for making platinum prints. Jahiel has chosen the platinum print because of the beauty and longevity of the process. These images of a disappearing livelihood will be preserved for centuries. A properly processed platinum print consists of only platinum and paper and will last up to two thousand years.

—Nolan Preece

Fish Creek, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

The 'disappearing cowboy' is a huge cliché, however, no matter how much you think you're living in the 'old days,' you're not. That part of the country [the Great Basin] is a slice of the past that's practically disappeared. Those cowboys live in camps, tents and teepees. They have camp cooks, maybe a radio, even if they can't pick up a signal. From morning to night, they're camped out somewhere in the desert, miles from civilization. Because of that, they have to rely on what bare necessities they have.

——Adam Jahiel

Remuda #5, Spanish Ranch, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

Jahiel catches the play of light, the rush and texture of the clouds, the blurry poetry of dust, but most of all, the precise steady energies and weariness of the animals and the cowboys. Though the subject is familiar, the invigorating art of these photos cuts right through all the clichés with intoxicating directness.

—Bruce Richardson, Art Critic,
"The Last Cowboy"

Boot and Spur, Red House Ranch, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

They say that "God is in the details". I am struck by both the vast spaces that dwarf the people out here, and the minute details that surface upon careful contemplation. Saddles, boots, and spurs, along with much of a cowboy's other gear, are usually unique, finely hand-crafted pieces that I think of as 'functional art'. The gear has not changed over the years, and has barely changed through centuries. In a mass-produced world, it is pleasure to see an artisan's one-of-a-kind artistry.

——Adam Jahiel

Bunkhouse #2, Stateline Camp, YP Ranch, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

I don't pose the people or set up my photographs. I prefer reality over artifice. People look right through contrived photographs. The power of an actual 'slice of life', an actual moment frozen in time for eternity, is something that the viewer can sense. I could not stage or construct an image as powerful as the fleeting 'decisive moments' that have presented themselves to my eye.

——Adam Jahiel

Jahiel's West is a place of real accomplishment and emotion, in which the cameraman has captured the seriousness and balletic grace of the job of the cowboy—not just the longing in a little boy's heart.

—Joel Weinstein,
Fort Worth Star Telegram

The Escapee, Stateline Camp, YP Ranch, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

The Wait, YP Ranch, NV
platinum print
25" x 25"
1989–2006

Jahiel, as observer, as chronicler, as artist, is an honest man. That is the highest praise I think I can give. His photographs deliver to his viewers a thing that is precious and rare because it is not staged.

—Mark Spragg, "The Last Cowboy"

Nolan Preece

WWW.PREECE.MYEXPOSE.COM

While trying to photograph this old bar, I spotted this little dog out of the corner of my eye. It made three passes back and forth in front of the bar before I could get my new digital camera to work properly. After the second pass I thought I had blown the shot of a lifetime but almost on que it posed one more time. I'd bet the dog is still there in Austin but I know the bar is now gone.

—Nolan Preece

Old Bar – Austin, NV
archival pigment print
20" x 27"
2003

Any statement about my work would have to include my father and his mentor—Ansel Adams. My father read Ansel's books in the early fifties. I was five when I developed my first print in 1953. We always had a darkroom in the house. I remember well my father setting up his 4x5 camera and waiting patiently for the clouds or light to change.

During winter months while living in northern Utah, photographing with large format cameras was next to impossible because of the subzero temperatures. I started experimenting in the darkroom in order to keep busy with photography. My chemical innovations of the "Chemogram" and "Nolangram" were created in opposition to my fine art camerawork and started a split oeuvre that persists today. One side of this split oeuvre in my work ultimately informs the other and vice verse.

Those of us who have lived here for some time in the Great Basin have come to love the spacious beauty, hidden wonders and historical richness of this place we call home. As a photographer, I have tried to search out the deeper layers of meaning I find in this Nevada environment and portray them in my work. This has not been an easy task; a picture is an elusive thing. The realization that Nevada is a complex place having many interpretations was an inevitable outcome of my search. As with any venture into art, the experience can be the richest part of the journey.

—Nolan Preece

'57 Chevy Truck, NV
archival pigment print
27" x 20"
2010

I came across this immobile '57 Chevy truck near Imlay, NV. Bright turquoise with the red primer starting to show through, it was beautiful and sure enough there was a bullet hole in just the right place so I started to work with it.

—Nolan Preece

The Surrealist subtext of Preece's work seems to lie precisely in the unsettling distance created by our expectation that works this colorful must be about color in some way. Instead they seem to suggest the subversion of color through its very intensity, which makes them quite difficult to take in and curiously elusive in meaning. This, in conjunction with a range of subtle textural effects and ghosts of light fraying the edges of many of the shapes, might suggest our presence at the inception of some cosmic event whether it be the collapse of a star or the birth of a cell, an event however, which may just turn out to be a compelling hoax, an epiphenomenon of our consciousness.

—David Olivant, Reviewer, Interface

Reno Bulletholes, NV
archival pigment print
21" x 24"
1994

The Tom T. Kelly Bottle House is rumored to have 51,000 bottles mortared in place. It received a new roof in 2000. I photographed it in 2002 and with new restoration the window was change in 2005. There is something almost sorrowful about losing this old window. I think about that from time to time.

—Nolan Preece

Bottle House – Rhyolite, NV
archival pigment print
24" x 21"
2002

Walls are a metaphor for the obstacles in life. Walls can look impenetrable or fragile, delicately laced with texture or laden with objects. These walls are barriers faced head on, their aesthetic qualities suggesting the different challenges in life, avoided or overcome.

—Nolan Preece

Wall – Lovelock, NV
archival pigment print
20" x 27"
2005

Bullet Holes, Bodie, CA
archival pigment print
21" x 24"
1994

I see the bullet hole as the trace of an act toward an object, whether the act was playful or serious is unknown to me, but I do feel a strange presence to these old cars and signs as I am photographing them. When I was young I participated in shooting at the relics I found in remote places. I still remember well the power of the gun, how easily it seduces and its capabilities.

—Nolan Preece

Granary Wall, NV
archival pigment print
21" x 24"
2005

The photos are tributes to small-town Nevada's continual demonstration that nothing lasts forever. They're also tributes to the rich, graphical potential of protruding nails and splintery boards you wouldn't want to run your finger along. (Photo history people: Think Aaron Siskind, whose 1930s pictures paid tribute to architectural details and the human stories they represent by looking with such personal attention they almost became something else.) Even though he likes to play with techniques, Preece tries to focus more on the end result, getting an image that works, rather than showing off his technology.

—Kris Varner, Art Critic, Reno News & Review

Bodie Tin Wall, CA
archival pigment print
21" x 24"
1994

They had hammered tin cans flat to make shingles and wall coverings. Very resourceful, a reminder of what can be done when there is a limited supply of materials. The sky was reflecting from parts of these cans creating a sort of cubist painting in my mind's eye.

—Nolan Preece

Wall #4 – St. Mary's Art Center House Out Back, NV
archival pigment print
27" x 20"
2005

Picture a swatch of plain-old wallpaper, pasted on a Virginia City wall over a century ago, with not much going for it except a couple shades of pink and salmon in a subtle wave pattern, doing almost nothing except being pink and salmon. Picture it made a little more interesting by dark brown water stains shaped like heavily-forded countries on a map. Picture it through Preece's lens, after he moves his digital camera around until the lines and edges and blotches start to form the kind of image you might see in an abstract painting. But you can still tell what it is. It's a document of the wallpaper, an attempt to preserve an element of the pre-restoration of St. Mary's Hospital (now the St. Mary's Art Center). It's an image unto itself and a testament to Preece's love for photographic processes and experimentation; an example of the yummy luster an imaginative eye can impose onto some of the world's overlooked stuff.

—Kris Vagner, Art Critic, Reno News & Review

BIOGRAPHIES

Daniel Cheek received his BFA from the Academy of Art College, San Francisco. Cheek has worked as a photographic printer (color and black and white), a photographer's assistant, and most recently, as rights and reproductions manager at Fraenkel Gallery. His recent work explores man's relation to nature and more specifically the ongoing settlement and abandoning of the Western landscape. His photographs revel in the color and light that is specific to the Great Basin area. Cheek has exhibited extensively in prominent galleries and museums in San Francisco, Reno, Seattle, Kansas City and New York. Cheek will be pursuing his MFA at the University of Arizona in the fall of 2010.

Adam Jahiel was educated at the Brooks Institute of Photography (BS) with a major in commercial photography and attended the University of Missouri, Columbia (BJ) majoring in photojournalism. Jahiel began his freelance career doing editorial, motion picture and corporate photography working on projects as varied as the movie "Out of Africa" to HBO comedy specials. Jahiel is also drawn to adventure projects; most notably he was the photographer for the landmark French-American 1987 Titanic expedition. His work has appeared in most major U.S. publications, including *Time, Newsweek, The New York Times, National Geographic Society* and others. Jahiel's work also has appeared in dozens of books, including the acclaimed "The Day in a Life of" series. For years, Jahiel has been photographing the cowboys of the Great Basin, perhaps one of the most inhospitable regions of the already rugged West. These people represent one of the last authentic American subcultures, one that is disappearing at a rapid rate. Jahiel lives in Story, Wyoming.

Nolan Preece received his MFA in photography and printmaking from Utah State University in 1980. Working in a range of media including photography and intaglio printmaking, Preece employs both traditional and experimental techniques, allowing for an exploration of new ideas through what he describes as the intuitive balance between process and concept. His landscape portfolios of the United States and the West, as well as his Great Basin wall series, are now documents of a changing environment that is rapidly disappearing. His portfolios include platinum, silver gelatin, chromogenic, cibachrome and digital prints. His work has appeared in more than 100 juried, invitational and solo exhibitions throughout the country and is included in 24 permanent collections including those of the Nicolaysen Museum, Casper, WY; Western Illinois University, Macomb, IL; Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV; Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Logan, UT; Print Club, Albany, NY; and Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, UT. Preece is a photography professor and the gallery director at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno.

Website Resources

Daniel Cheek	www.danielcheek.com
Adam Jahiel	www.adamjahiel.com
Nolan Preece	www.preece.myexpose.com
Nevada Arts Council	nac.nevadaculture.org
Truckee Meadows Community College	www.tmcc.edu/vparts/artgalleries/

Contributors

Gallery notes written by Nolan Preece with contributions by Fran Morrow, Artist Services Coordinator and Dominique Palladino, Nevada Touring Initiative Associate at the Nevada Arts Council.

Special Thanks

~ Darrell Armuth and Donna Hellwinkel Collection for the loan of their Adam Jahiel platinum prints for this exhibition.
~ Quotes about Adam Jahiel from "In Search of the Last Cowboy" by Ryan Thomas Bell.
~ Photo credits for biographies: Daniel Cheek by Crystal Cheek, 2005; Adam Jahiel by Heather Hafleigh, 2000; and Nolan Preece by Jeffrey Barkhurst, 2010.
~ Lori Kunder of Kunder Design Studio for the design of the exhibit gallery notes and signage.