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VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

APR 21 THE EARTH: MATTHEW BRANDT

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Even as visually-oriented individuals, photographers know that the eyes are not the only senses available to us. When we experience our surrounding environment, all five of our senses are on full alert—informing us not only what is in front of us, but what it feels, sounds, smells, and even tastes like. Many artists have attempted to engage all of our senses with mixed-media installations, combining a wide range of artistic processes into one work. But for Matthew Brandt, the photographic discipline alone offers many opportunities for more, if not all of our senses to become stimulated.



In order to do this, Matthew Brandt manipulates the medium in incredibly experimental ways. While many photographers will dodge and burn in the darkroom, or even retouch their photographs with ink or paint, Brandt takes his image-making process many steps further, “relentlessly” experimenting with the photograph. In his latest exhibition, *Vatnajökull*, on show at M+B Gallery in Los Angeles, Brandt portrays the Vatna Glacier, the largest ice cap in Iceland, in a remarkably creative way. After taking photographs of the glacier, he makes a chromogenic print, and then exposes this print to fire and heat. Brandt then separates the colors using three individual sheets, and finally presses these onto one image. What results is a three-dimensional image full of burn marks and a unique texture, providing a physical, multi-sensory experience.

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Visually, Brandt's images appear as a mix between surrealism and abstract expressionism. The smooth surfaces and peculiar shapes of the glacier evoke the forms of Dalí, while the burn marks and variations in color remind us of the action painters. Brandt's larger works in the exhibition, such as "Vatnajökull YCM17" and "Vatnajökull MYCD1 (diptych)," almost seem like homages to Jackson Pollock with their erratic and fluid forms overlaying the original image of the glacier. This link to abstract expressionism is not only an aesthetic one, as it is also made

quite evident in the primacy of the process: Jackson Pollock's canvases have been described not as paintings but as primary evidence, a document of the artist's actions, elevating the paint-throwing process above what hangs on the gallery wall. In a similar way, Brandt's artistic process is paramount in the work; we are captivated at how these images were created before evaluating them aesthetically.

Brandt's process is not only an innovative way of creating artworks, but is also highly conceptual, as he always strives to link the medium with the subject in art. With photography, he has found many ways to place the photographic process into conversation with what is being photographed, seeking to "find where they meet." In a previous series, Brandt took photographs of lakes and reservoirs, made them into prints, and then submerged the prints in water taken from the very same lakes. The water caused great variations in tint and color, making the work appear highly abstract. In Brandt's work, the subject therefore plays a fundamental role in the process.

Rather than segregating the creator and the subject, the subject becomes a creator itself, becoming instrumental in producing the final work.



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With this dynamic in mind, the subject of Brandt's *Vatnajökull* series might not necessarily be the Vatna Glacier itself, but the warming temperatures that are melting it. Scientists have postulated that this glacier, the second-largest in Europe, could disappear within two hundred years if the climate continues to change at its current rate. With this in mind, Brandt's application of fire and heat to the print may appear as not only an exciting innovation, but also as a very conscious commentary on the climate crisis. By manipulating his prints, the glacier is transformed from a state of pristine, untouched beauty into a depiction that is much more complicated and challenging. Brandt's process here suggests a direct metaphor for the climate crisis, paralleling what is actually happening to the glacier as a result of a warming globe. In producing remarkably conceptual works through unorthodox artistic processes, Brandt's works engage our senses through their aesthetic charm and stimulate our imaginations about everything the photographic medium is capable of.

