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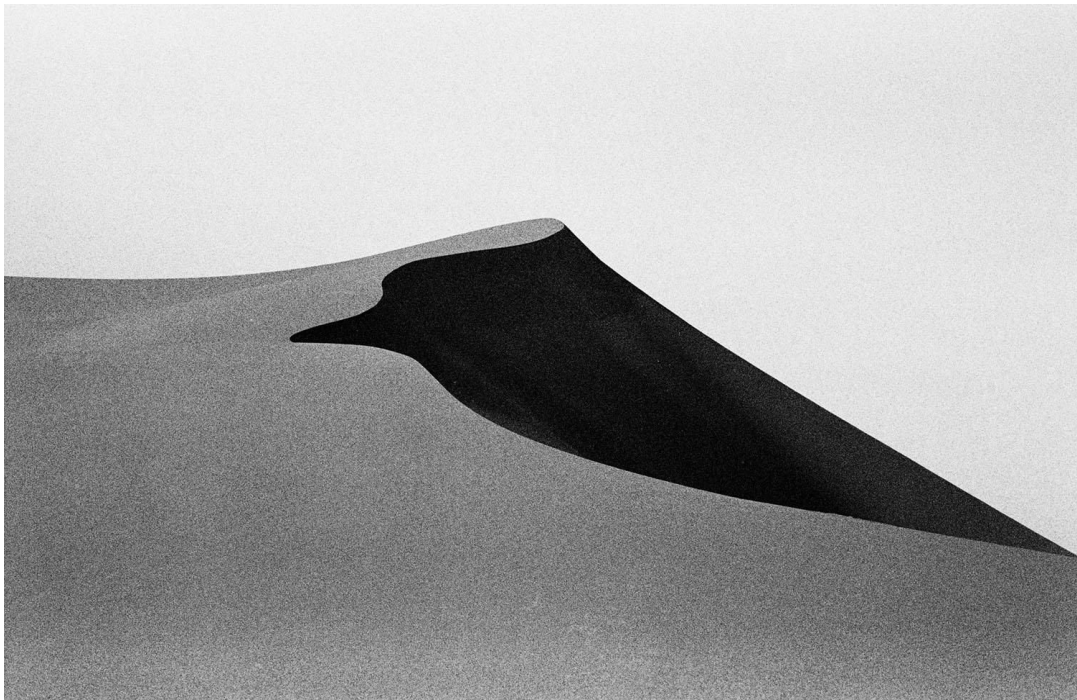
'INHABITED DESERTS'

by **JOHN R. PEPPER**

December 12, 2018 – January 27, 2019

Sunday – Thursday 10:00 am

Opening December 12 at 7:00 pm



The Empty Quarter Gallery, Dubai is delighted to announce the forthcoming exhibition **'Inhabited Deserts'** of the Italian photographer John R. Pepper, from December 12, 2018 until January 27, 2019.



In his essay on 'INHABITED DESERTS' Kirill Petrin writes:

“Most people in the Western world are indifferent to deserts. Deserts are “away”. They are “elsewhere”. They are thousands of miles away and the definition of "empty", and their associations rarely go beyond “arid, dead, mystic, frightening, mysterious, flat, hot, cold, beautiful, ugly, dangerous”.

John R. Pepper's deserts are not ultimately the result of travel photography. His photographs, paradoxically, don't take you to the actual places where they are shot. They take you elsewhere, to a new place for your mind and imagination to inhabit.

Matisse once said his art mission was to provide a mental chair for a working-man. Pepper's photographs, instead of entertaining the viewer, offer a chance to get teleported into these mystical places, to roam the rocky plains, to meditate, to bury in there the stress and burnout of urban life in order to come back with new ideas, newly found calm, or just a fresh outlook on life. These photographs intend to be seductive. Fields of rhyming shades and the rhythm of lines appear so enticing that one may wonder if the images were created by an artist, rather than captured by a camera. It is at this juncture that I started seeing how the camera in Pepper's hands becomes a brush or chisel with which he blurs the lines between capturing something already made, and creating something which has never existed.

Who said that deserts are uninhabited? Pepper's work populates them with our thoughts, our dreams. And any ideas they give birth to, where they entangle, give rise to something new and exciting.”

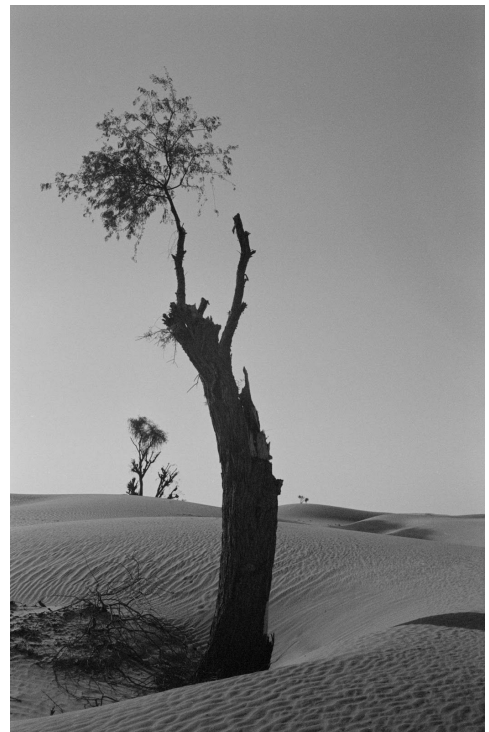
Kirill Petrin, London 2017

ARTIST STATEMENT

Deserts have always fascinated photographers. Often a photographer enters a desert to capture the beauty of the landscape with a setting sun or a beautiful cloud formation and that is the final result. As beautiful as that might be, it was not what I was seeking. I wanted to go further.

My concept, my goal, has been to use the desert as a painter uses a virgin white canvas; and while traveling through different deserts of the world (from Russia to Egypt, Mauritania, Oman, USA etc) I sought to discover what imagery would be revealed to my eye — sometimes it was figurative, sometimes abstract.

In the South Sinai in Egypt, there were tall hills of rocks. Climbing those hills, walking through what appeared to be a simple amalgam of stones, I discovered anthropomorphic figures such as faces, fish, elephants, humans etc. Suddenly the rocks, these non-living elements, were transformed into the opposite: living, expressive, vibrant figures. Traveling in the Nevada desert (USA), or in the vast deserts of Mauritania or the U.A.E. I would look across the plains and see what seemed like “nothing”: dead trees or a grouping of cactus plants. After walking through and around them, allowing my eye to wander freely, keeping my mind empty, without pre-conception, these inanimate objects suddenly became a human being crying to the sky, a couple arguing, a dancer suspended in air. In the dunes of the Empty Quarter in U.A.E, the lights and shadows would transform a seemingly neutral valley into the body of a young woman trying to emerge from the sands. In Oman the moving sun would gradually alter a small valley into a beautiful bird. In still another desert, from inside the small puddle of a dried salt lake, a man appears staring at us, resembling a figure from Dante’s *Inferno* and I, like the painter in front of his canvas, with my small Leica, 35mm lens and Ilford film, attempt to capture this image and the soul buried within.



Conceptually I attempt to find the symbiosis between the landscape before me and the imagery buried within me. I do not seek the image rather the photograph finds me. Through this subliminal search hopefully, my photograph, my “canvas“ becomes an expression of my inner being, of what I feel as an artist.

John R. Pepper, Paris 2018

John Randolph Pepper, Italian, (1958) was born and raised in Rome; he lives in Palermo and works worldwide.

Pepper started his career in black & white analogical photography with an apprenticeship to Ugo Mulas at 14. He published his first photograph at 15 and had his first show at 17.

He studied History of Art at Princeton University, where he was also the youngest member of the exclusive painting program, '185 Nassau Street'. He then became a 'Directing Fellow' at The American Film Institute, (Los Angeles) and subsequently worked as a director in theatre and film for 20 years. During that time he continued to take photographs with his Leica camera always using the same Ilford HP5 film stock.



John R. Pepper, represented by the 'Art of Foto Gallery' (St. Petersburg), and The Empty Quarter Gallery (Dubai), is a 'Cultural Ambassador' of numerous Italian Institutes of Culture in many parts of the world. Since 2008 he has exhibited his different projects 'Rome: 1969 — An Homage to Italian Neo-Realist Cinema', 'Sans Papier', 'Evaporations' in the United States, France, Italy, the Middle East and Russia. He has published three books and is represented in several major museums around the world.

Since 2015 Pepper has been working on his project 'INHABITED DESERTS', where he explores deserts and their effect on time, history and people. 'INHABITED DESERTS' debuted in Paris in November 2017.

In November 2018, the project 'INHABITED DESERTS' has participated at Paris Photo with the Galerie Sophie Scheidecker. In December 2018 'Inhabited Deserts' will open at The Empty Quarter Gallery in Dubai (U.A.E.).

2019 will take the show to Saint Petersburg, Russia, and then again for a tour of 6 cities before returning to Moscow in 2020. In 2021 it will be seen in Switzerland, the United Kingdom and will tour the United States and finally return to Rome.

Technical information: Pepper works with a Leica M6, 35mm lens and uses Ilford HP5 film. He works exclusively in B&W with gelatin silver prints on Ilford Baryta paper, exhibition quality.

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