

Wallpaper*

Desert X returns to the Coachella Valley

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Dive-In, 2019, by Superflex, installation view at Desert X. Photography: Lance Gerber

Amid the white energy windmills, wild lupines sprout up across the dry desert Coachella Valley, bringing new life and a pop of colour to greater Palm Springs. Now, the second iteration of the biannual art event Desert X contributes its invasion of mythical site-specific installations to the landscape, bringing the work of international contemporary artists to the desert during Modernism Week.

Curated by artistic director Neville Wakefield, co-curator Amanda Hunt, and co-curator Matthew Schum, Desert X explores topics from politics to the environment through installation, sculpture, pavilions and billboards. The free event attracted over 200,000 visitors in its 2017 edition. This year, many of the works dotted across the landscape – from Palm Desert to Indio – reflect on our connection to water, while negotiating the harsh desert elements and the mythology of the desert as a venerable environment. 'Our initial mission was created for contemporary artists to be inspired, and to place an international lens on the valley, to spotlight issues we are all dealing with, while starting conversations with all our visitors,' comments president Susan L Davis.

***A Point of View*, by Iván Argote**



A Point of View is the most active installation, from Colombia-born, Paris-based Iván Argote, encouraging visitors to climb up its form and survey the landscape. Five concrete staircases blending influence from pre-Columbian and brutalist architecture were constructed and stamped with poems in Spanish and English. The messages are revealed as you ascend and when you reach the top, you'll see a view of the manmade Salton Sea. 'It's a reflection of the landscape and our relationship with it, while at the same time, it's related to the ecological disaster that is going on at the biggest lake in California – it's shrinking,' says Argote. 'It's a complex situation with so many layers. Historical, ecological, geological and economical.'

***Specter*, by Sterling Ruby**



Moving through the valley, you will pass other environmental installations appearing like mirages in the desert from a large looming orange fluorescent monolith by Dutch-born Sterling Ruby, to a smoking 'Western Flag' projected with LED lights synced with the world's first major oil gusher in Texas by artist John Gerrard from Ireland.

***Dive-in*, by Superflex**



For the opening night, Superflex debuted *Dive-in*, a film that explored global warming and rising water levels with an outdoor screen encased in a pink coral resin structure. As the camera moves closer, fish float by innocently to a vibrating sound and a slow close-up reveal of alien faces in the porous stone, before slowly fading back out again.

***Lovers Rainbow*, by Pia Camil**



Pia Camil from Mexico City has dual exhibits in Palm Desert and Baja that echo the current immigration issues. *Lovers Rainbow* is a striking multi-coloured arch made out of welded and painted rebar cables set against the dramatic mountain backdrop. 'It brings hope and possibility by connecting the two borders,' the artist explains.

Jackrabbit, Cottontail & Spirits of the Desert, by Cara Romero



Drive down Gene Autrey Trail and you will be confronted with five billboards featuring photographs of people of the Chemehuevi, the valley's indigenous group, by Cara Romero. *Jackrabbits, Cottontails & Spirits of the Desert* portrays multiple generations of the Chemehuevi, countering stereotypical images, while offering visibility to Californian Indians. As Romero explains, 'They [the Chemehuevi] are part of the landscape and ontologically tied. Their spirit is alive and they are connected to the land.'

Ghost Palm, by Kathleen Ryan



Two Bunch Palms features a towering *Ghost Palm* by Kathleen Ryan that sits on the San Andreas Fault path. It's steel, glass and glittering plastic fringe blows in the wind and is illuminated at night.

Going Nowhere, by Julian Hoerber



Nearby, Los Angeles-based artist Julian Hoerber uses breeze blocks as material in a nod to local mid-century architecture, geometric properties and psychology for his Möbius strip entitled *Going Nowhere*.

Halter, by Eric N Mack



Further east, the eerily abandoned Felix auto repair shop by the railroad tracks in Coachella has been transformed into a fluidly shifting piece by artist Eric N Mack, who worked with large swaths of donated textiles from Missoni. 'The work is swaying in the wind and the fabric has been liberated,' he says.

Visit us in the Shape of Clouds, by Armando Lerner



Migration and transitory images moving through the desert such as birds, snakes, seashells and rocks, are brought to life with the mural *Visit us in the Shape of Clouds* shown on a massive water tank on the hillside. Designed by local returning artist Armando Lerner, and sponsored by Farrow & Ball, the mural will be a permanent fixture for the Coachella Valley landscape, located near the table grape vineyards and compost station, long after the other installations are gone.

More from Desert X 2019...



It Exists in Many Forms, 2019, by Postcommodity



Peace is the Only Shelter, 2019, by Mary Kelly



Terminal Lake Exploration Platform, 2019, by Steve Badgett and Chris Taylor



Revolutions, 2019, by Nancy Baker Cahill



Ghost Palm, 2019, by Kathleen Ryan



Jackrabbit, Cottontail & Spirits of the Desert, 2019, by Cara Romero