

THE EYE OF
JASON WILLIAMS

J. CADE KEITH

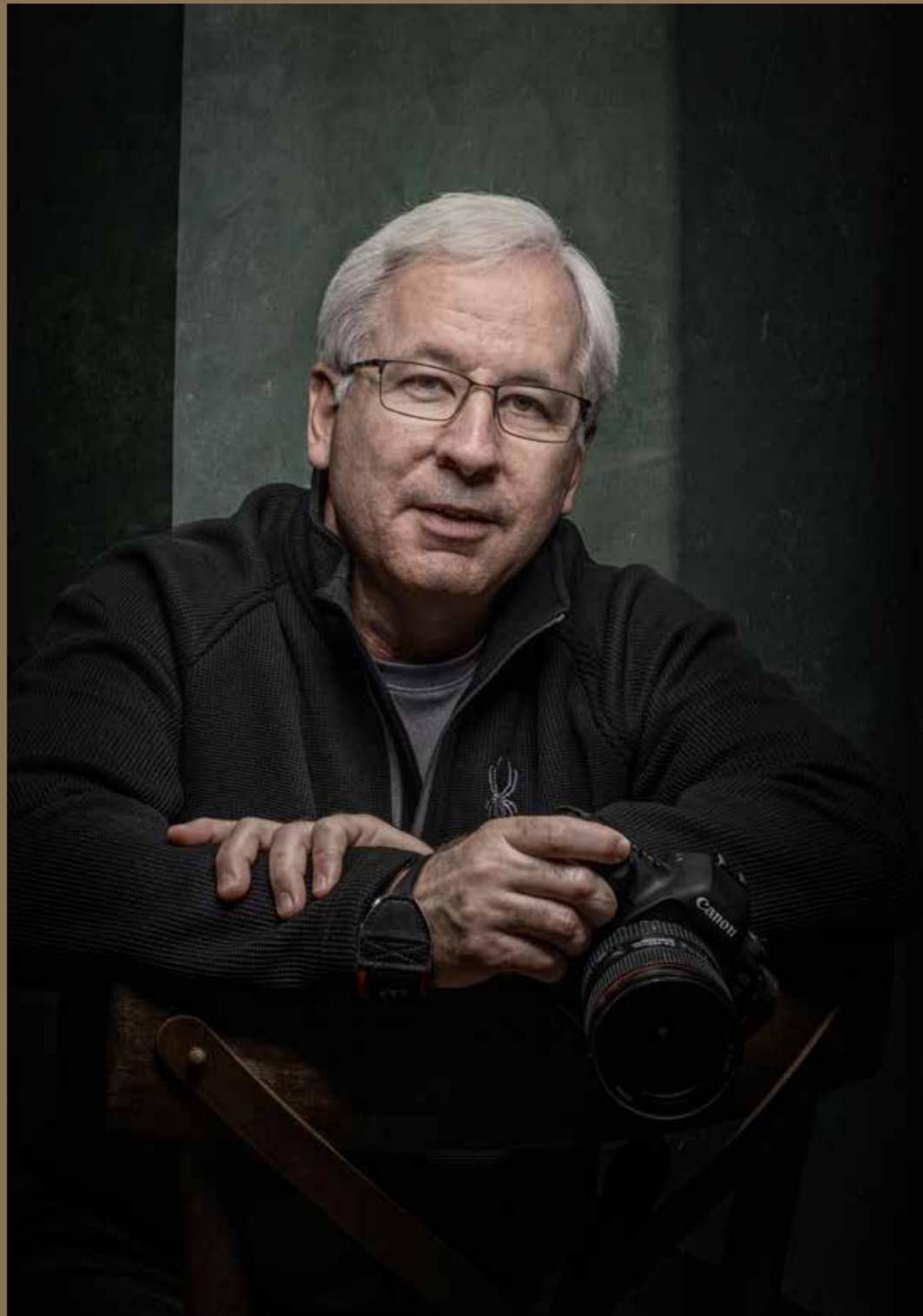


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» FIG. 1 | Hardy Klahold, *Portrait of Jason Williams*

INTRODUCTION

// LINDA FAIRCHILD >

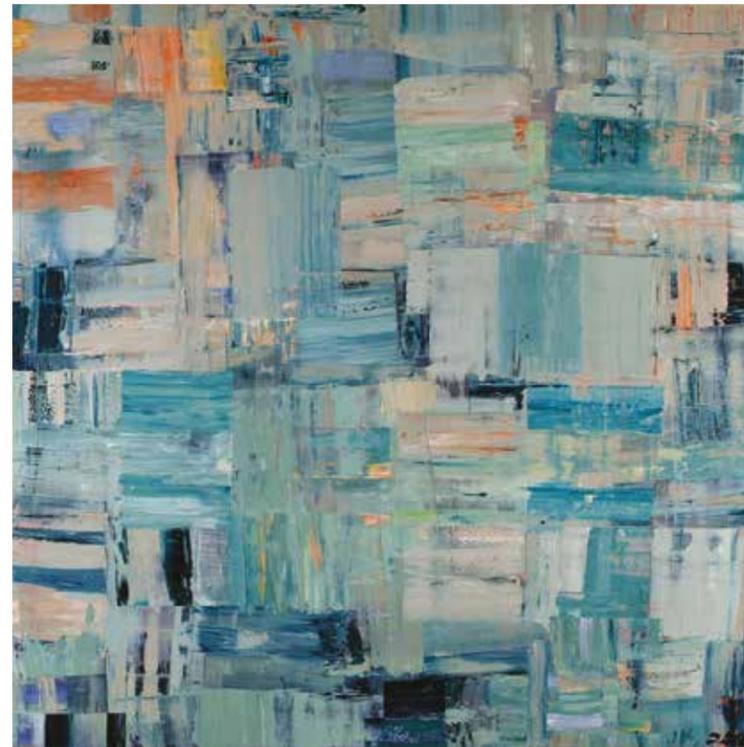
Williams' images of eroded landscapes and deserted industrial buildings speak to the parts of our world that have been left behind—in nature, in archeology, and in the man-made world of obsolete power plants. Through the photographer's eye, these quirky, unexpected, often anthropomorphic and surprisingly beautiful images introduce us to the unique perspective of the artist.

When I first saw Jason Williams' photography, I realized that he is not a typical landscape photographer. He spends a great deal of time documenting lost civilizations and timeless vistas in the American Southwest, an area flooded with professional photographers from all over the world. While there is a familiarity in his landscape images that connects to his peers, as I dug deeper into his archives, I found a much more exclusive genre of Art photography and was curious about the connective tissue binding all of his work.



» FIG. 2 | Jason Williams, *Beached*, 2022

I chose the author J. Cade Keith to tell the story of Jason Williams as he had traveled with the photographer in Bear's Ears National Monument, a beautiful, sacred place in southern Utah. Keith was also intrigued by this seemingly amateur photographer who had actually been shooting privately for forty years with the dedication and persistence of a true artist. J. Cade Keith is a working contemporary American visual artist from Colorado represented in many public, private, and museum collections around the country and abroad. He has curated and published essays linking complex ideas with literary and visual lyricism. I knew that he could brilliantly deconstruct and reassemble the work of Jason Williams and present it to the public in a quirky and unexpected way. Shockingly pleasurable, sometimes humorous, and often deceptively serene, the images document the ghastly reality of 21st-century transition from dirty industrial energy production to a cleaner future.



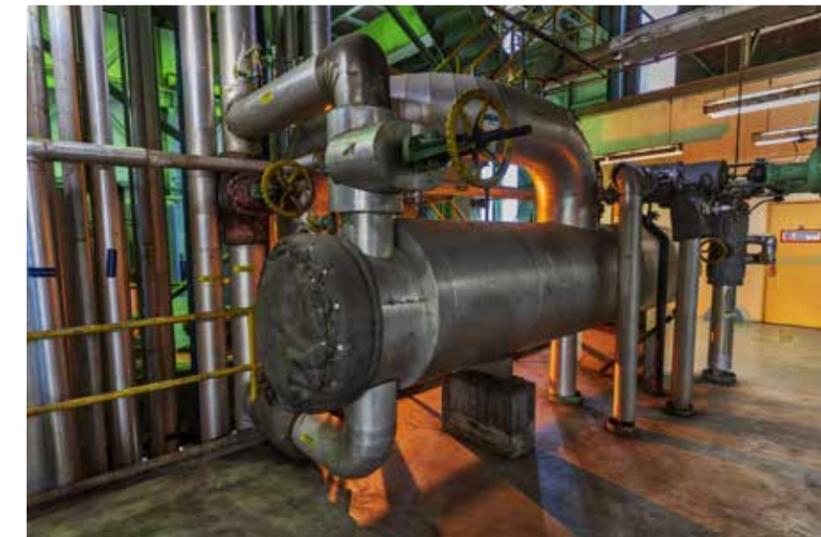
» FIG. 4 J. Cade Keith, *Elsbeth*, oil on linen 66.o" x 66.o"
San Jose Museum of...

As a contemporary art gallerist and passionate follower of individual artists, I am constantly exploring the arc of the creatives' life work. With Jason, I immediately noticed some startling idiosyncrasies and unusual techniques that define his style over time and throughout all subject matter. First and foremost, he ignores the rules of composition and standard practices of professional photographers. His buildings and towers lean. His horizons are crooked. Under the rules of normal physics, his people should topple over. Smoke stacks belch filthy pollutants and nozzles devour mounds of black coal. Hoses and untethered wires snake across the ground. Toxic liquids pump through the intestines of the voracious beast.



» FIG. 4 Portrait of the Artist Jeffrey Keith, 2008. Denver, Colorado.
Photographer: Richard Peterson

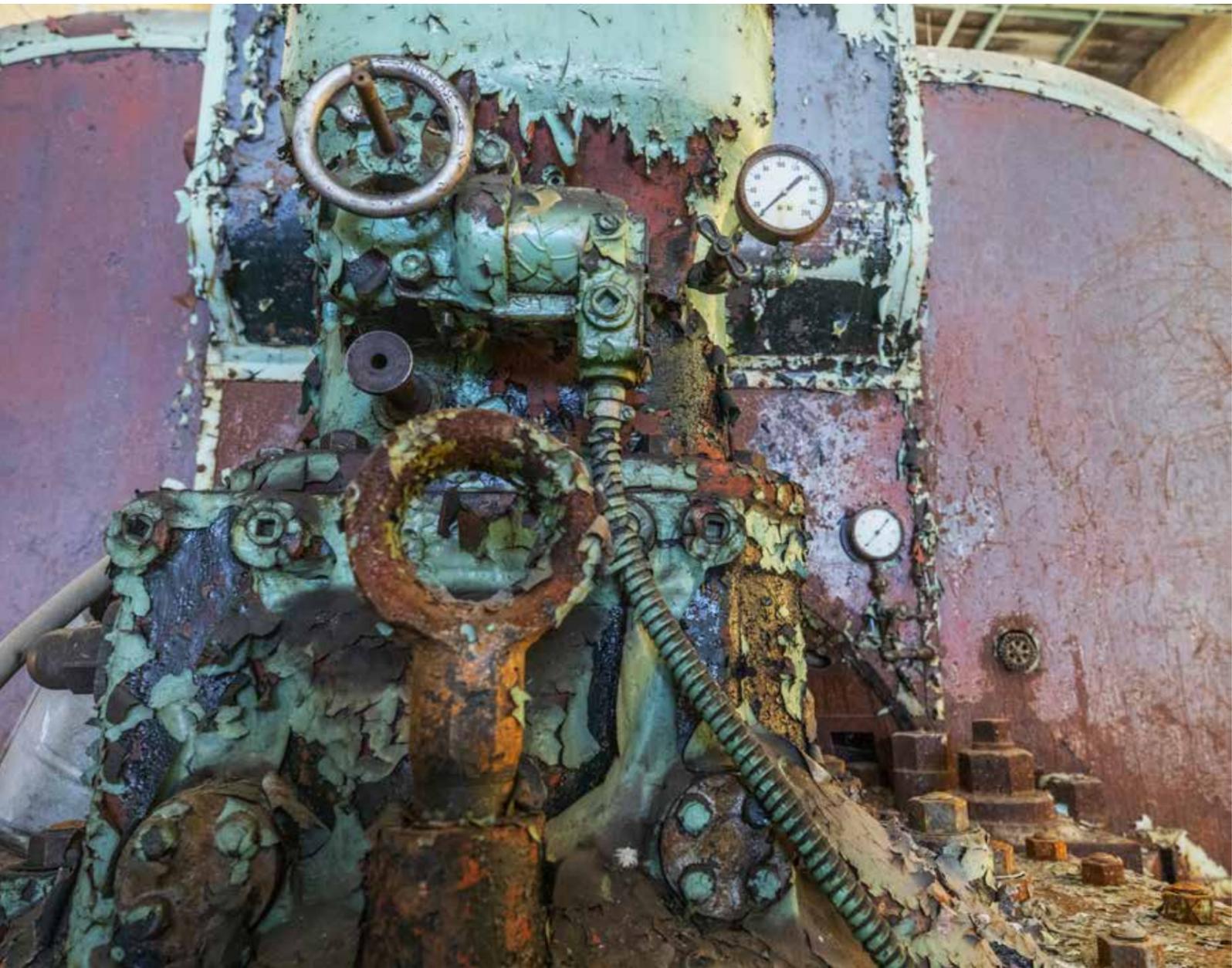
I see creatures! In the grim power plant close-ups, I see surprising anthropomorphism that adds a playful touch of whimsy to his work. In *Cicada*, his shrouded piece of equipment resembles an insect clinging to a wall.



» FIG. 3 Jason Williams, *Cicada*, 2012



» FIG. 4 Jason Williams, *Rustipede*, 2012



» FIG. 1 Jason Williams, *Oxidator*, 2021

Thinking in the manner of a museum curator and art historian, I also made the connection between Williams and photographers in the late nineties who were exploring lonely abandoned warehouses, ships, factories, and vehicles. In my San Francisco gallery in 2006, and coinciding with the 60th Anniversary of the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) Photography Department, I curated a show of young photographers from the Institute's esteemed BFA and MFA programs. These artists fearlessly examined our relationship to cultural and physical landscapes in a fresh and disturbing way. Forcing the viewer to examine issues of identity, heritage, culture, and memory, the exhibition's young photographers depicted decaying interiors, American neighborhoods, and stark nature scenes with a curious detachment. The power of the show created space for the intimacy of shared feelings of grief for our lost past and joy for our connection to a vast universe.



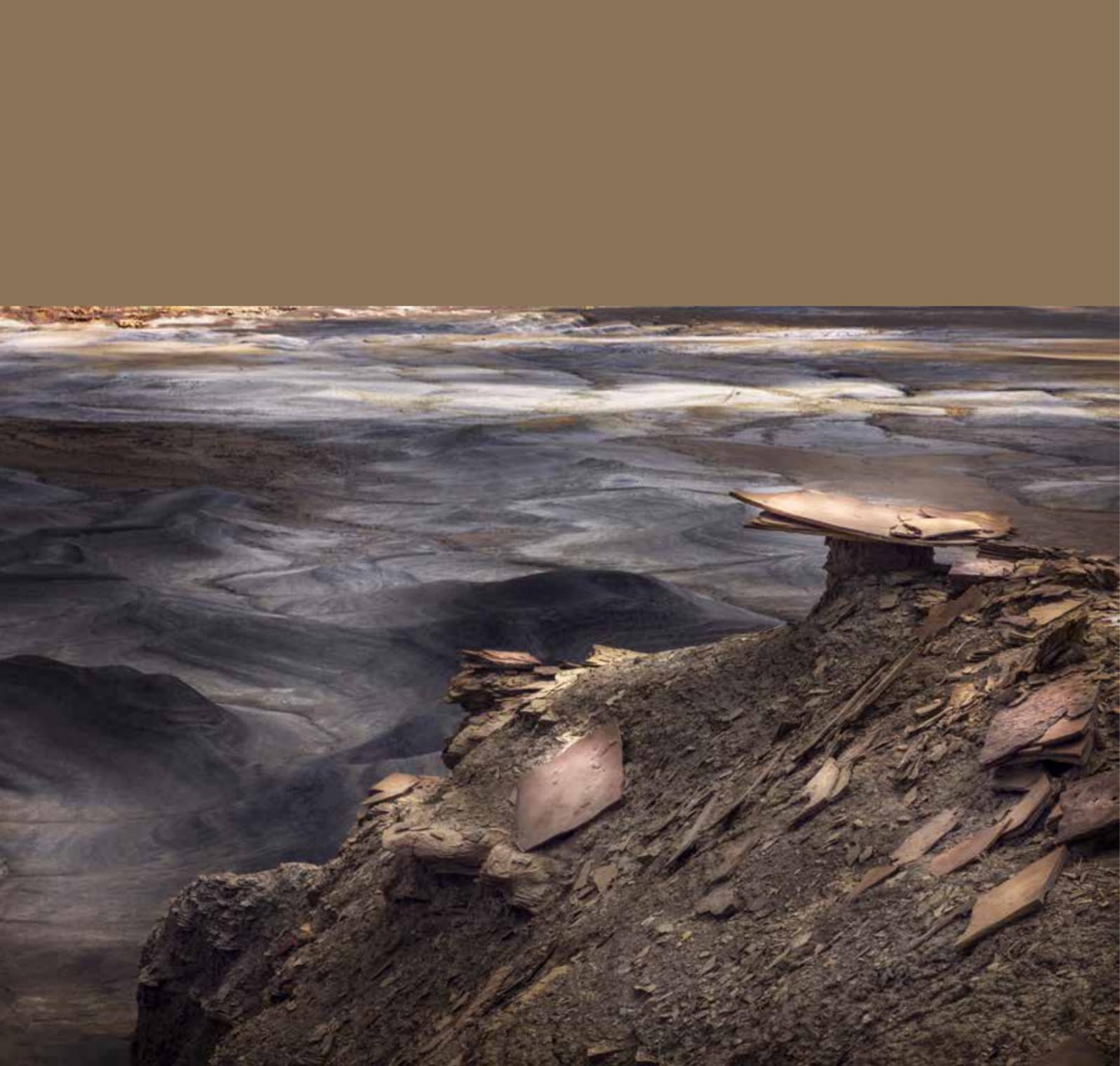
» FIG. 6 Nadim Sabella, *Piano Hero*, 2006

Jason Williams may have been outside of the museum and art gallery world as an amateur photographer over decades, but he is very much a peer and part of the collective of progressive and innovative photographers working in this genre today. His work adds a unique voice to the symphony of contemporary photography.

Linda Fairchild
Linda Fairchild Contemporary Art



» FIG. 7 Ryan Kellman, *Water on Floor*, 2006



» PLATE 1 Jason Williams, *Badlands near Caineville, Utah*, 2019

LEFT BEHIND

// J. CADE KEITH >

Jason Williams and his partner in crime Jay Fischer meet me at the Grand Gulch Ranger Station located in the southern reaches of Bears Ears National Monument, six hours drive south-southeast from Sandy, Utah, where Jason lives, and seven-and-a-half hours west from Denver for me. From there we caravan another forty-five minutes to our Muley Point campsite two thousand feet above Mexican Hat, just twenty miles north of the Arizona border, overlooking the San Juan River and Goosenecks State Park on the northeastern edge of the Valley of the Gods.

Bears Ears, home to unique landscapes and thousands of Native American archaeological and cultural sites, has been long considered one of the most endangered historical spots in the U.S. owing to vandalism and looting and the threat of being damaged by drilling, mining, and development. Designated a national monument in 2016 by President Barack Obama, the future of the 210,000 acre park has been tied up in litigation stemming from the sustained attack of the Trump administration, which illegally opened up a million acres to mining interests and oil and gas drilling. As expected, President Joe Biden has ordered a review of the boundaries for Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

We arrive around six, unpack the vehicles and pick out spots for our individual tents—not too close to each other on account of the snoring in the middle of the night. Most of the ground on top of the mesas is solid rock, no place to drive a tent stake. This can become a problem if the weather turns and the wind comes up. Too easy to become a human tumbleweed. The evening menu is straightforward—franks and beans. In fact, every dinner for three nights in a row is franks and beans. No campfires this year. It's been too dry. It seems like the whole west coast is in flames—California, parts of Utah and much of Colorado too.