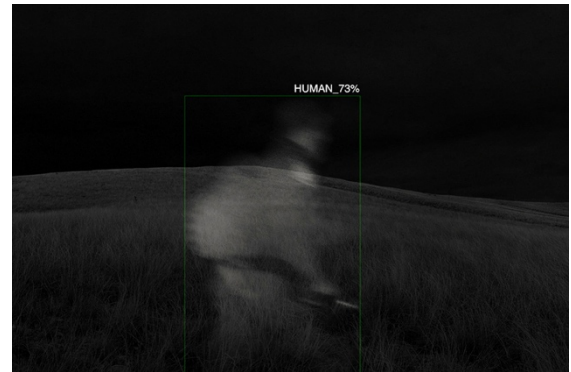


INTO THE UNCANNY VALLEY

July 14 – August 26, 2023

Kaya & Blank + Cody Cobb + Alex Turner

Marshall Gallery is pleased to present a group exhibition featuring new works involving concepts around machine learning, the socio-politics of geography, artificial aesthetics, and urbanization. The artists explore these topics through nocturnal photographic and video-based practices to create or document enigmatic and potentially deceiving landscapes.



An opening reception with the artists will be held on Friday, July 14th from 6-9 pm with a talk at 7:00 pm ([RSVP Required](#)). The conversation will be moderated by Kate Palmer Albers, writer and educator in the history and theory of photography, whose most recent publication is *The Night Albums: Visibility and the Ephemeral Photograph* from UC Press. The artists will also be present on the afternoon of Saturday, July 15th for a public opening as part of Bergamot Station's Summer Celebration from 12:00 – 7:00 pm.

Into the Uncanny Valley features four artists who came of age during the digital revolution and whose work responds to novel and often fabricated realities. The “uncanny valley” is a psychological response turned zeitgeist meme that is often heard in conversations around artificial intelligence and generally references the unsettling and narrowing void between what is human and what is *almost human* exemplified by the creepiness of humanoid robots, wax figures, and hyperreal animation. As augmented realities and deep fakes become increasingly advanced and prevalent, they are beginning to challenge social order and established hierarchies, while also destabilizing our own internal judgment. It feels as though we are collectively being pulled into this space at an alarming speed. The ubiquity of these technologies has the potential to make it all but impossible to discern “truth” in photography, ironically a medium that has traditionally been synonymous with visual objectivity.

Los Angeles-based **Kaya & Blank** (Turkish-German duo, each b. 1990) are showing for the first time with the gallery. Utilizing photography, video and installation, their work focuses on elements of economic infrastructures and how we shape the world through technology and energy. In their projection piece from *Crude Aesthetics*, zoomorphic oil pumpjacks groan and heave in static yet elegant compositions across Los

Marshall

Angeles, the country's most dense concentration of urban oil production. The work illuminates how closely we cohabitate with the machines and the oddly beautiful, dystopic landscapes they supply in wide-angle views of vast refineries along the California coast. The theatrical presentation of the video is illuminated by dimly lit aluminum plate heliographs made using oil from the La Brea tar pits giving a unique photo-sculptural rendering of the locations and materials examined in the adjacent projection. Photographs from *Second Nature* document the thousands of cellular service towers poorly disguised as palm trees and giant pines that are rampant in the American Southwest. The towers are framed with an architectural, taxonomic clarity allowing the viewer to directly confront their absurdity, further decontextualized through light-polluted long exposures under the glowing grayish-orange and purple skies of LA's urban sprawl. As writer Amy Clarke notes, these monuments of the digital age exemplify a "societal preference for 'fake' aesthetics over 'ugly' reality"¹. The series was recently released as a monograph from publisher Kehrer Verlag.

For weeks at a time, Las Vegas-based photographer **Cody Cobb** (American, b. 1984) wanders the American West alone to immerse himself in seemingly untouched wilderness. This isolation allows for more sensitive observations of both the external landscape as well as the internal experience of solitude. Cobb's landscape photographs have evolved steadily over the past decade from minimal yet savvy, Martian views of distant Western locales in *Eons* to the haunting, ultraviolet night views of *Spectral* and the ambiguous, textured monochromatic formations in his most recent work, *Effigy*. The exhibition features prints from the latter two projects where organic matter glows neon in seemingly impossible lighting conditions among wind-chiseled rock formations. Through subtle arrangements of light and geometry, the illusion of structure in nature appears as an almost mystical, sometimes surrealist visage.

In his multi-layered process for creating the works from *Blind River*, Los Angeles-based artist **Alex Turner** (American, b. 1984) combines recordings from motion-triggered game cameras, original landscape photographs, and proprietary AI software to create a fascinating yet complicated look at the Arizona borderlands and the social concerns of predictive technologies. Stark charcoal hills and rocky outcrops are populated only by ghostly figures and phantoms of grainy light. In several works, glowing green squares identify the subject with a certain percentage of confidence bearing immediate ethical implications. Also apparent are the difficulties and risks of creating work in this vast, contested space of jaguars, coyotes, and cartel traffic overlapping in his system's field of view. The project questions what moral concerns could be expected from these new technologies; "Is there room for empathy in a system that promotes objectivity?"

For further information or visuals, please contact the gallery: info@marshallgallery.art

This exhibition, the included artworks, and corresponding press release were conceived, curated, produced, and written by humans. Image at top: Alex Turner, *1 Human (Border Patrol) with A.I. Recognition San Rafael Valley AZ, 2019* (detail).

¹ Amy Clarke, "Faking Authenticity with Fools Gold Architecture".