

UNSEEN

Artist Statement. Simone Douglas.

[Photography] shows us that there really is a world, that it wants to be seen by us, and that it exceeds our capacity to know it. —Kaja Silverman

Blind is a series of transient landscapes made in response to a flooded desert, an upended sky. The sun never rises nor sets. The series encapsulates a long-standing arc of research into landscape and the sublime, photography, light, and ways of knowing (colonial and Indigenous epistemologies) that foreshadows my current site specific work, *Ice Boat*.

Photography is commonly spoken about as light returned that reveals the world. *Blind* returns the gaze to the sun itself—we see the void in that excess of light. In these images, the sun is a source of light too bright to photographically register. Paradoxically, the sun allows us to see, but it cannot be looked at. Enacting the gap between looking and seeing, these photos test the limits of the human eye.

Blind was exposed to convey the beating light of the Australian desert. In these images, the sun is a source of light too bright to photographically register. It investigates what happens to vision when we are no longer attempting to see—that moment of light when we can no longer discern what is before our eyes, yet we still gaze into it. With nothing to see—yet still looking—vision operates excessively, at the margins of recognition and visibility.

These works also reference the historical moment in which 18th-century scientists would stare into the sun, believing it to be a conduit of knowledge. Their experiments with vision during the early development of photography coincided with the European colonization of Australia. As such, *Blind* is a metaphorical enactment of the European explorers' encounters with, and inability to really see, the Australian landscape.

To make *Blind*, I utilized darkroom processes, the final prints being formed from negatives and light staining in the darkroom with specific focus and de-focusing techniques being central to the final outcome. A reversal of the cinematic technique "day for night" was also a critical component of the work. These processes pushed the landscapes into ever-lightening blue hues, almost to the point of disappearance. As a sequence the work might be understood as a durational photographic still.

In this outdoor exhibition, the images have been using a digital C process pushing pushed the limits of the digital to further reflect on the nature of vision and its epistemological implications. They inhabit both the 'sight' of analogue and digital. The analogue light focus departing from the inherent stillness and crispness of digital technology and hyper-sight, reflecting on photography's particular relationship to time.

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Ice Boat

Installed directly in the desert, the ice boat melts over the course of a month. It tilts toward the heat of the sun, following its arc across the sky. As it melts, it re-forms into a “sea” of water, regenerating the land and, ultimately, leaving in its wake a footprint of brilliant flowers. This monumental project represents a significant expansion of the two-dimensional mainstay of my practice over the past decade, but the work remains rooted in the history of photography and its relationship to landscape and light.

It is an expanded definition of photography in as much as it holds and refracts light, enacting a dialogue between sun and ice—the sun “exposing” Ice Boat (and the land upon which it rests in the same way that light reacts with silver nitrate by transforming it at a molecular level. Having a kinship with the process of photography, Ice Boat metaphorically makes visible that which is not visible in the photograph itself. A brief shadow on the land, Ice Boat nevertheless leaves a residual imprint, first in the form of a shadow and subsequently in the melt-water that will trigger a bloom (activated by sunlight). Engaging histories of photography, colonial exploration, and Indigenous land, also attends to climate and environmental responsibility.

At the same time that it engages with the history of colonialism, *Ice Boat* is a metaphor for climate change and an evocation of the glacier that once shaped this landscape. In deference to the intertwining of indigenous sovereignty and environment, this project enacts a sustainable-energy strategy born out of consultation with the community.

Atlas

At this stage in history, the Australian landscape shimmers in the collective as a mirage-like environment phasing in and out as sign.- Ross Gibson

The **Atlas** series was made in tandem with **Ice Boat**. These images are of the heat-baked land near the site of Ice Boat itself. Here clay pans are extensive and the horizon is flat and low. The crepuscular surfaces naturally forming in the salt lakes of inland Australia become markers of a dehydrated land. These saline surfaces are the residue of an inland sea that receded some 10 million years ago. When the rains come, the water fills the land as far as you can see. The desert becomes a sea again. Life returns