
CUSTOT GALLERY

DUBAI



Nick Brandt, *Wasteland with Elephant*, 2015. Photo credit: Nick Brandt. Courtesy of Custot Gallery Dubai.

NICK BRANDT INHERIT THE DUST

8 DECEMBER 2016 - 28 FEBRUARY 2017

OPENING 8 DECEMBER 2016 IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ARTIST

PRESS KIT

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Nick Brandt, *Wasteland with Elephant*, 2015. Photo credit: Nick Brandt. Courtesy of Custot Gallery Dubai.

“Nick Brandt’s epic panoramas serve as a heartbreaking epitaph to a paradise lost.” — Sunday Times UK

Custot Gallery Dubai is pleased to announce the solo exhibition *Inherit the Dust*, the latest series of photographs by Nick Brandt showing from 8 December 2016 until 28 February 2017.

Three years after the conclusion of his trilogy, *On This Earth*, *A Shadow Falls* and *Across the Ravaged Land*, Nick Brandt revisits East Africa to photograph and alert us to the fragile ecosystem and increasing urbanization of the continent’s natural parks and sweeping landscapes. Best known for his intimate depictions of wild animals and their disappearing habitats, the artist captures the human impact in territories where animals used to roam.

The exhibition features a series of large-scale black and white panoramas that depict the perishing natural world in contrast with an explosive urban development. For this recent body of work, Nick Brandt has printed and enlarged his unreleased animal portraits to life-size, placing them in locations such as factories, underpasses and quarries. The resulting artworks feature haunting representations of the most majestic and endangered species – elephants, rhinoceroses, zebras, lions, apes – as they seem to wander through a wasteland of despair and destruction.

The juxtaposition between the natural and urban world is further emphasised through the artist’s use of monochrome, illustrating a poignant view of East Africa’s contemporary state and the vast growth that has affected its human and animal populations alike. Humans are equally ground down by this rapid development, Nick Brandt captures them going about their everyday life, surviving, oblivious to the landscape’s environmental degradation and the animal’s ghost-like images.

Each arresting and carefully framed photograph is a wake up call. Brandt boldly stresses the ecological and social dilemmas that extend beyond the people and wildlife of East Africa, sending a strong message “home” emphasising that these are not just local but global environmental concerns.

Biography

NICK BRANDT

Nick Brandt (b. 1964, London)

Born in England, Nick Brandt has devoted his photographic career to showing the disappearing natural world of East Africa, and its rapid destruction at the hands of man.

Starting in 2001, he photographed and published a trilogy of works, charting this progress from paradise to diminished reality. The consecutive titles of the books form one sentence: On This Earth, A Shadow Falls, Across the Ravaged Land.

In 2016, Brandt completed and published *Inherit the Dust*. In a series of epic panoramas, Brandt records the impact of man, in places where animals used to roam, but no longer do. In each location, Brandt erects a life-size panel of a previously unreleased animal portrait, setting the panels within a world of explosive urban development, factories, wasteland and quarries.

Nick Brandt's work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions in museums and galleries around the world, including in New York, London, Los Angeles, Paris, Stockholm and Berlin.

Now living in California, in 2010, Brandt co-founded Big Life Foundation, a non-profit organization devoted to protecting the wildlife and ecosystems of a large area of East Africa.

Inherit the Dust: The Concept & Behind the Scenes, by Nick Brandt



Nick Brandt, *Inherit the Dust Behind the Scenes* x 6. Photo credit: Nick Brandt. Courtesy of Custot Gallery Dubai.

THE CONCEPT

"I grew up in England, home of the elk and brown bear, of the wolverine and cave lion, of the woolly mammoth and woolly rhinoceros. Of course, this was before my time.

For each of us, wherever we live on the planet, animals such as these walked in the very place where we now sit. But of course, most of these animals are long gone.

Meanwhile in parts of present-day Africa, albeit fewer parts by the day, even more extraordinary animals DO still roam. But the destruction of these animals, of these places, is not happening in the past, but in our own immediate present.

If we follow our present path of development and destruction, in just a few years time, rural African children will be as uncomprehending that elephants and giraffes once roamed the land in front of their homes, as we are that woolly rhinos once lived where our nearest shopping mall now stands. Keep going at this pace, and the unique megafauna of Africa will be rapidly gone the way of the megafauna of America and Europe many centuries ago.

This was the genesis for this body of work, *Inherit The Dust*.

Genesis: we are living through the antithesis of genesis right now. It took billions of years to reach a place of such wondrous diversity, and then in just a few shockingly short years, an infinitesimal pinprick of time, to annihilate that.

However, most of us still think that the destruction in Africa is to do with poaching, feeding the insatiable demand for animal parts from the Far East. Actually, it's much more complex and monumental than that.

Mainly, it's about us. Significantly, it's about the terrifying number of us, and the impact of the very finite amount of space and resources for so many humans.

Most African people would probably say that Western societies trampled over their own natural world centuries ago in the interests of economic expansion, and that in Africa, now it is their long overdue turn to economically grow. Why should they be deprived of the comfortable lives that most people have in the West?

In many regards, a reasonable argument. But perhaps to state the obvious, protection of the environment and economic benefit can go hand in hand. In many areas of East Africa where these animals do still exist - poor but still teeming with natural wonders - ecotourism is often the only truly significant source of long term economic benefit. Take away the animals, and there is usually little left of economic value.

I conceived this project in early 2014. Unreleased portraits of animals that I had taken over prior years were printed life-size and glued to large panels. The panels were then placed in locations where animals such as these used to roam but, as a result of human impact, no longer do.

In all but a few of the final photographs, the animals within the panels are effectively invisible to the people going about their lives. The animals have been reduced to ghosts in these blasted landscapes.

animals who are the victims of environmental devastation, but also the humans now inhabiting these landscapes.

The damnation of animal life, the debasement of human life, the destructive conjugality between the two: It is not just the animals who are the victims of environmental devastation, but also the humans now inhabiting these landscapes.

It's a cliché, but we must act urgently. If we continue to do nothing, future generations will be inheriting the sad remnants of a once-vibrant living planet. They will be inheriting dust." (Nick Brandt, 2016)



Nick Brandt, *Underpass with Elephants*, 2015. Photo credit: Nick Brandt. Courtesy of Custot Gallery Dubai.

BEHIND THE SCENES

"The day finally came when I started showing the finished giant panoramic prints to people. And completely predictably, some people asked if I had just added in the panels in Photoshop.

Months of work spent on production of prints of life-size animals, giant panels constructed of elaborate aluminum frames, up to 23 men at a time carrying 30 foot long or high panels in 40 degree celsius heat and heaving them up and strapping them down and leveling them, and in theory I could have just stayed at home and done it all in Photoshop??

But shooting reality, in situ, with the physical life-size panels present, was always going to produce far superior results, due to the countless unexpected incidents that occur throughout any shoot.

A photograph like *UNDERPASS WITH ELEPHANTS*, 2015 (*Lean Back, Your Life is On Track*), has so many more unexpected layers as a result of the panel being there.

I wanted just one person, a child, to see the animals in the panel whilst all around, no-one else did. But I never imagined that this tiny boy on the right, a child of one of the many homeless people sleeping out on the land beneath this underpass, would wander into frame, fascinated by these giant elephants, and touch them with what appears to be a stick in his hand.

I never imagined the cruelly juxtaposed billboard beyond, featuring a well-to-do middle class African man leaning back in his garden chair, with the tag line beneath: *Lean Back, Your Life is On Track*.



Nick Brandt, *Quarry with Giraffe*, 2014. Photo credit: Nick Brandt. Courtesy of Custot Gallery Dubai.

I never imagined that the elephants would look so trapped between the two gargantuan concrete pillars, the matriarch appearing to be looking almost sympathetically at the humans also rendered homeless.

I never imagined that her trunk would appear to be practically resting on the ground in front of the panel, not confined to the panel itself.

I never imagined all the homeless children sniffing glue. It's hard to see clearly on a computer screen, but all those kids, some as young as 6 or 7 years old, were high on glue from the bottles hanging from their faces.



Nick Brandt, *Alleyway with chimpanzee*, 2014. Photo credit: Nick Brandt. Courtesy of Custot Gallery Dubai.

Over prior years of photographing portraits of animals in East Africa, each of those featured in the panels was originally unused or unreleased, justified or unjustified. But poring over ten years' worth (2003-2012) of contact sheets, I found in the case of many photos, now placed within the context of a very different setting, their original weakness was transformed into a strength.

For example, in *QUARRY WITH GIRAFFE*, 2014, I felt that with the original portrait of the giraffe looking over the plains, it was not quite powerful enough, because I had photographed him from behind. But here in the setting of the giant quarry, he appears to be looking out at his former home and seeing what has now become of it - a former paradise laid waste and stripped bare.

In *ALLEYWAY WITH CHIMPANZEE*, 2014, the panel of the chimp is set by a semi-stagnant stream of fetid sewage. I had rejected the original portrait because I had hoped for

more of a connection with the chimp. But here in the alleyway location, with his head bowed, he appears to be lamenting the loss of the world that he once knew, and the denuded world that is now there in its place.

As with all my previous work, this series was shot on black and white medium format film. Each panorama was constructed out of 6x7cm negatives stitched together in Photoshop, to create the final widescreen view. Practically speaking, to shoot this series on film instead of digital, was even more crazily impractical than usual.

However, in spite of the considerable extra expense, aggravation and major technical compromises, I covet the glorious surprises that are sometimes achieved by the magical interaction of light and film negative. Film just turns me on." (Nick Brandt, 2016)

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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Custot Gallery Dubai, founded by Stéphane Custot, opened in March 2016 in the heart of Alserkal Avenue, the city's hub for arts.

The gallery showcases modern and contemporary artists such as Josef Albers, Chu Teh-Chun, Ian Davenport, Jean Dubuffet, Nicolas de Staël, Barry Flanagan, Peter Halley, Robert Indiana, Jedd Novatt, Marc Quinn, Pablo Reinoso, James Rosenquist, Pierre Soulages, Frank Stella and Bernar Venet.

Custot Gallery Dubai represents the European and American artists Nick Brandt, Ian Davenport, Richard Höglund, Jedd Novatt, Marc Quinn, Pablo Reinoso, Bernar Venet, Fabienne Verdier and the Estates of Barry Flanagan and Robert Indiana.

CUSTOT GALLERY DUBAI

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