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Denver Art Museum presents *Fazal Sheikh: Thirst | Exposure | In Place* in spring 2024

Resulting from Sheikh's time in the desert Southwest from 2017 to early 2023, powerful images connect human relationships with the natural world

DENVER – February 13, 2024 – The Denver Art Museum (DAM) presents *Fazal Sheikh: Thirst | Exposure | In Place*, an exhibition created from three projects photographer Fazal Sheikh made on the Colorado Plateau from 2017 to early 2023. Sheikh's portraits and landscapes shed light on the far-reaching consequences of extractive industry and climate change. *Thirst | Exposure | In Place* will open March 10, 2024, and will be on view through October 20, 2024, in the museum's Photography galleries, located on level 6 of the Martin Building, and will be included with general admission. Sheikh will give a lecture about his



recent work in connection with his exhibition at the DAM on March 9, 11 a.m.–12 p.m.

Born in 1965 in New York City, Sheikh creates images of displaced communities and marginalized people that prompt awareness of the world beyond the museum. The photographs in *Thirst | Exposure | In Place* expose indelible marks on the Colorado

Plateau and American Southwest landscape that have been etched by both geological and human forces. Through this beautiful and sometimes frightening new work, Sheikh encourages viewers to witness the consequences of the past and imagine the shape of the future.

"Through expansive aerial shots and intimate portraits, Fazal Sheikh documents these regions and their people with solidarity and honesty," said Christoph Heinrich, Frederick and Jan Mayer Director of the Denver Art Museum. "The Colorado Plateau is a region deeply impacted by climate change and economic development. This exhibition offers a nuanced view into the past, present and future lives of its inhabitants."

Sheikh is best known for his deeply humane photographs of refugees and migrants displaced by war and famine. Focusing on the United States for the first time, Sheikh explores how Indigenous people and the lands they call home have been affected by industrial growth and government policy.



"The aerial photographs in this exhibition remind us of the great age and natural beauty of the Colorado Plateau," said Eric Paddock, Curator of Photography at the DAM and curator of this exhibition for Denver. "They create an awareness of deep human and geological time and raise questions about the future of the region. In that context, Sheikh's portraits and accompanying text affirm local communities' need to protect their sacred spaces and encourage wider recognition of that need."

The DAM exhibition presents Sheikh's recent work in three interrelated sections:

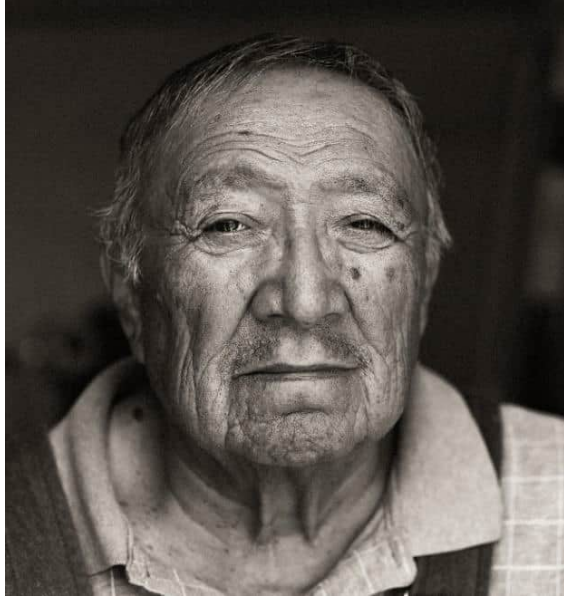
Thirst is a new series of aerial photographs that document the decline of the Great Salt Lake in northeast Utah, which is shrinking due to overconsumption and dwindling rain and snowfall. As the lake dries up, winds carry clouds of toxic sediment—by-products from mining, agriculture and urban development—from the lakebed, across the valley and beyond.

Exposure examines the impacts of uranium, coal, oil and natural-gas extraction on the American Southwest and on its Indigenous inhabitants. Sheikh partnered with Utah Diné Bikéyah—a coalition among the Hopi, Navajo, Uintah Ouray Ute, Ute Mountain Ute and Zuni tribes—and with Indigenous elders and scientists from Princeton University—to address hazardous waste and pollution left across the region by short-sighted development and poorly remediated industrial sites. The project reflects on the resilience of Indigenous people in the face of threats to their culture, spirituality and health.

In Place evokes the enduring landscapes of the Bears Ears region in Utah, bringing Sheikh's photographs together with contributions from scientists and Indigenous communities in and around Bears Ears in southeastern Utah. Visitors are surrounded by images made at a

close distance and from high in the air. Sixty-three large color photographs show the tremendous geological variety and the long cultural continuities of the Four Corners region.

Visitors will reflect upon the transformation—and often devastation—of these landscapes in the context of the past, present and future, while considering the juxtaposition of beauty and catastrophe, as well as intimate, human-scale stories and those spanning vast geological eras and changes.

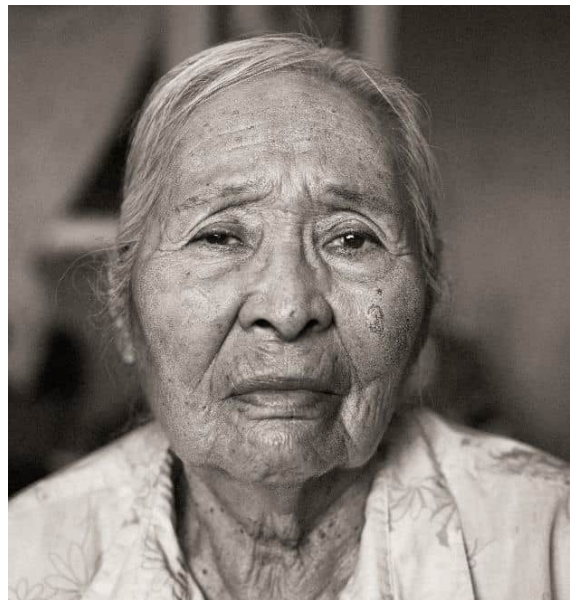


Jonah Yellowman, spiritual advisor for the Utah Diné Bikéyah intertribal coalition and one of its founding members, will present an offering that represents his Navajo (Diné) spirituality and a deep connection to the land. This offering will be present in the gallery during the run of the exhibition.

Sound recordings taken from seismometer readings by University of Utah geologist Jeffrey Ralston Moore will resonate throughout the gallery space. They represent the otherwise inaudible vibrations of rock formations on the Colorado Plateau.

Taken together, the photographs and collaborations in *Thirst | Exposure | In Place* lay bare the indelible marks etched on the landscape by geological and human forces. Sheikh asks us to witness the consequences of what has passed and imagine what is yet to come.

Sheikh will speak about his recent work in the Four Corners region and at the Great Salt Lake, in connection with his exhibition in a lecture event at the DAM on March 9, 11 a.m.–12 p.m. The lecture will take place in the Sharp Auditorium, in the lower level of the museum's Hamilton Building. Sheikh will discuss the origin of each series, his immersion in the landscapes and communities he photographed and his collaborations with writers, scientists and Indigenous community members that are woven throughout this work. This exhibition follows the Denver Art Museum's 2017 presentation of *Common Ground: Photographs by Fazal Sheikh, 1989-2013*.



Fazal Sheikh: Thirst | Exposure | In Place is organized by the Denver Art Museum. The exhibition is presented by Jane Watkins, with additional support from the donors to the Annual Fund Leadership Campaign and the residents who support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). Promotional support is provided by *5280 Magazine* and CBS Colorado.

The exhibition was curated in Denver by Curator of Photography, Eric Paddock, in collaboration with Kimberly Roberts, Denver Art Museum Curatorial Associate, and Lauren Thompson, Senior Interpretive Specialist.

Planning Your Visit

The most up-to-date information on planning a visit to the Denver Art Museum can be found online under the [Plan Your Visit](#) tab. Use this page to find details on ticket pricing, public transit options and access information. General admission for museum members is free every day. Youth aged 18 and under, regardless of residency, receive free general admission everyday thanks to the museum's Free for Kids program. Free for Kids also underwrites free admission for school and youth group visits.

About the Denver Art Museum

The Denver Art Museum is an educational, nonprofit resource that sparks creative thinking and expression through transformative experiences with art. Its mission is to enrich lives by sparking creative thinking and expression. Its holdings reflect the city and region—and provide invaluable ways for the community to learn about cultures from around the world. Metro residents support the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), a unique funding source serving hundreds of metro Denver arts, culture and scientific organizations. For museum information, visit www.denverartmuseum.org or call 720-865-5000.

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Image Credits:

Image 1: Fazal Sheikh, from the series *Thirst: Great Salt Lake*, November 2023. Pigmented inkjet print. © and courtesy Fazal Sheikh

Image 2: Fazal Sheikh, *Chapita Wells Oil and Gas Field, Uintah Range, Utah, 40°4'10"N/109°27'26"W*, from the series *Exposure*, 2017. Pigmented inkjet print. Yale University Art Gallery, purchased with a gift from Jane P. Watkins, M.P.H. 1979. Image courtesy and © Fazal Sheikh

Image 3: Fazal Sheikh, *Jonah Yellowman (Diné), Spiritual Advisor to Utah Diné Bikéyah, Cane Valley–Monument Valley, Navajo Nation*, from the series *Exposure*, 2022. Pigmented inkjet print. © and courtesy Fazal Sheikh

Image 4: Fazal Sheikh, *Lola Yellowman (Diné), Widow of Uranium Miner John Guy, Cane Valley–Monument Valley, Navajo Nation*, from the series *Exposure*, 2019. Pigmented inkjet print. Yale University Art Gallery, purchased with a gift from Jane P. Watkins, M.P.H. 1979. Image courtesy and © Fazal Sheikh