



AMERICAN CONNECTION

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Susan Burnstine talks to **Jamey Stillings** about his artistic and environmental interests

Not many photographers can balance lives between the commercial and fine art realms and succeed simultaneously. But Jamey Stillings is one of the rare few that has not only achieved but sustained notable success in both worlds.

For most of Stillings' career he rarely shared personal projects with the fine art world. But his life took a dramatic turn in 2009 when he released his project *The Bridge at Hoover Dam*. The multi award winning project received vast international exposure and resulted in his first monograph,

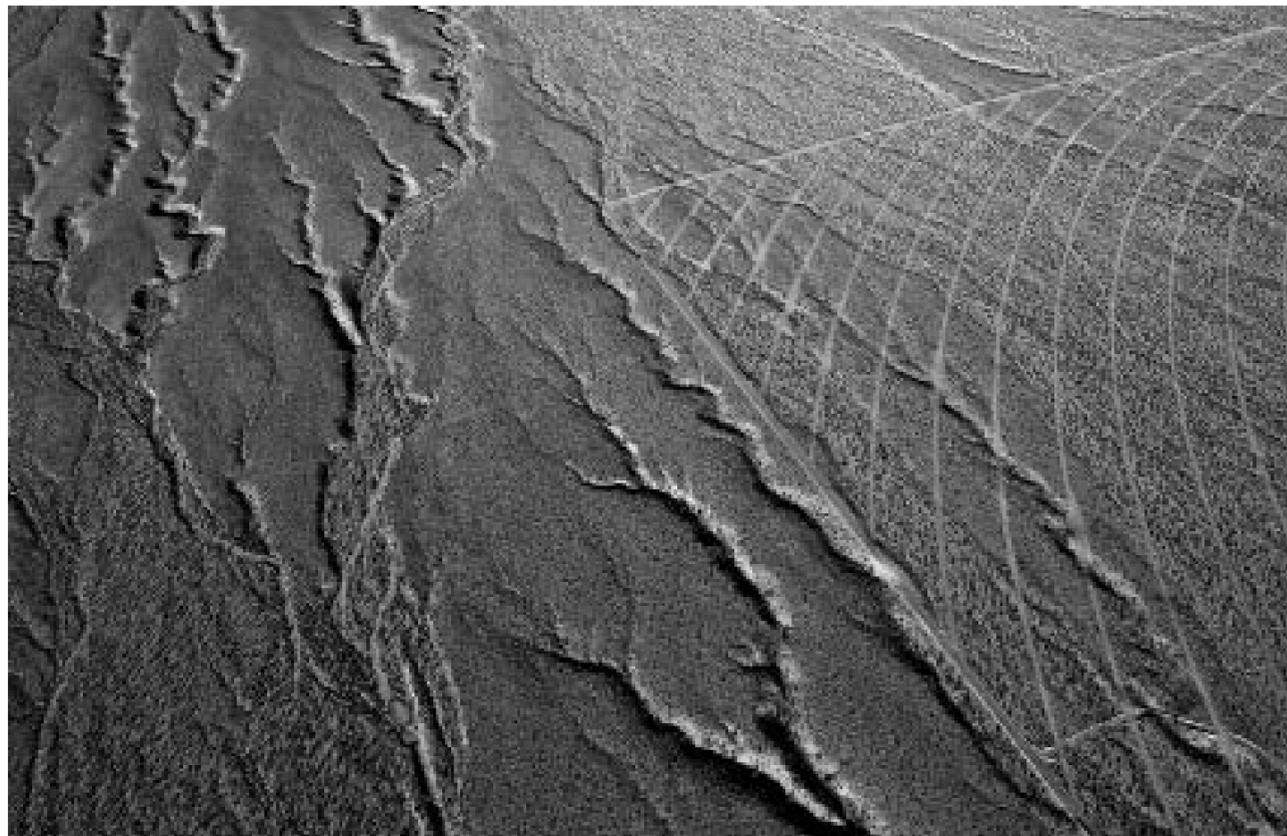
published by Nazraeli Press in 2011.

Stillings' current project, *The Evolution of Ivanpah Solar*, became a natural progression that developed from his previous project. He explains, 'In seeking a new project, I wished to integrate my environmental and aesthetic interests. Large-scale renewable energy projects piqued my interest because they combine infrastructure development with challenging environmental decisions. Visually, the development of these projects is akin to making land art on a grand scale. From the air, they often hold intrigue similar to ancient projects

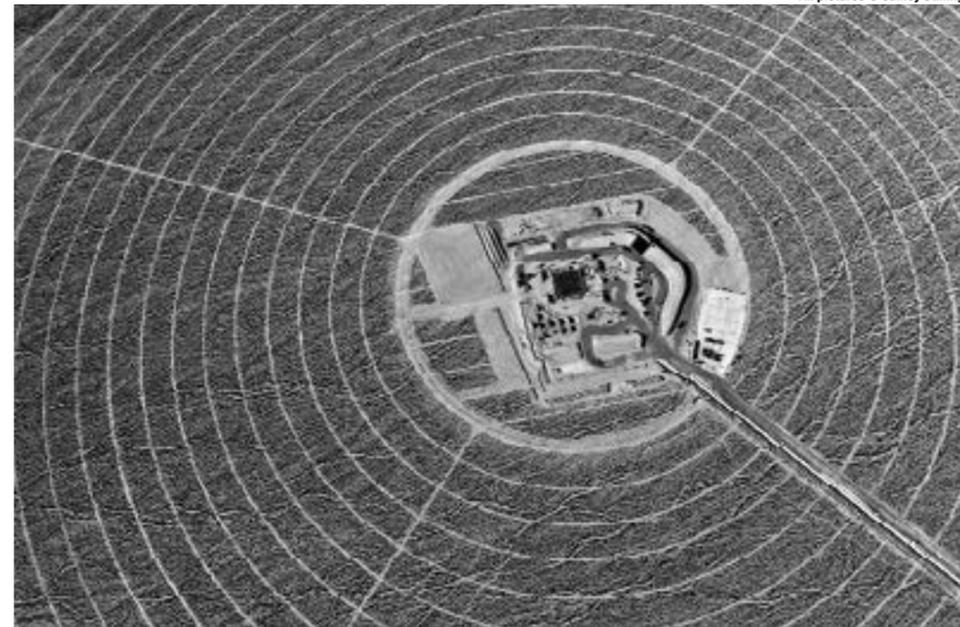
like the Nazca Lines in Peru.'

Stillings elected to photograph the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System in 2010 before construction commenced on what will become the world's largest concentrated solar thermal plant with its completion in late 2013.

He explains, 'Ivanpah Solar is being built on 3,500 acres (14 square kilometers) along the gradual alluvial slope of a dry lake basin. The area retains much of its natural feel and character with desert vegetation and wildlife, while human impact has a long history. Interstate Highway 15 runs through the basin



All pictures © Jamey Stillings



from Las Vegas toward Los Angeles.'

He adds, 'When complete, the three towers and 340,000 mirrors of Ivanpah Solar will create 392 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 140,000 U.S. homes.'

There are a number of challenges that have faced this remarkable \$2.2 billion project. Perhaps the biggest has been that the site is within the natural habitat of the desert tortoise, which is a threatened species under US law. So far, more than \$56m has been allocated to protect and relocate a few hundred tortoises.

Most of the work for this series was shot with a Canon 5D MkII and MkIII bodies and a series of Zeiss lenses from 18 to 100mm. Since the release of the 36Mp Nikon D800E, he has started to use that system in combination with Zeiss lenses. Additionally, he uses a

Kenyon KS-6 gyrostabilizer as all of the aerial work has been shot from small helicopters.

As aerial photography poses endless technical challenges, Stillings typically shoots at first or last light, since oblique light reveals texture and nuance that is otherwise lost. He says, 'At the start, I must compromise on lens aperture, shutter speed and high ISO settings to begin photographing. As the sun comes up, I move as rapidly as possible to prime aperture settings of f/5.6 or f/8, shutter speeds of at least 1/1000 second and ISO ratings below 1000.'

He adds, 'I strive to reveal the ongoing interaction between the project's geometric construction and the adjacent organic landscape, building a body of photographs that play both in the realm of the abstract and the grand desert landscape.'

Initially, all the images were shot in Raw. It took 15 months before he decided to print the images in black & white. He recalls, 'As I began to interpret these images in print form, the monochrome option emerged for its compelling simplicity and drama.'

Stillings will complete his current series when Ivanpah Solar is finished at the end of 2013, but he has a long-term plan to broaden his visual exploration of renewable energy development in the US with an eventual goal of making this an international project within the next few years.

When considering the driving forces behind his work, Stillings says, 'My environmental concerns work symbiotically with my creative interests, which is what gives this body of work special energy.'

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EXHIBITIONS USA

AKRON

Santa Barbara Museum of Art
Danny Lyon:
This World Is Not My Home
Until 2 June

sbma.net

BOSTON

Museum of Fine Arts
Bruce Davidson:
East 100th Street
Until 8 September

mfa.org

NEW ORLEANS

Ogden Museum of Southern Arts
Deborah Luster:
Tooth for an Eye
Until 7 April

ogdenmuseum.org

NEW YORK CITY

Metropolitan Museum of Art
William Eggleston:
At War with the Obvious
Until 27 May

metmuseum.org

PALM BEACH

Norton Museum of Art
Annie Leibovitz
Until 9 June

norton.org