

Why does photographer Donn Delson shoot from a helicopter? Perspective

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By Deborah VankinStaff Writer Sept. 25, 2019 12:20 PM PT

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A work called “Watercolor” is actually the Dead Sea in Israel, photographed from a helicopter.

(Donn Delson)

You could say that Donn Delson approaches his art with a bird’s-eye view. The self-taught photographer surveys the land from 500 to 10,000 feet above ground, legs dangling from a doors-off helicopter, wind rushing in his face. He finds striking color combinations, geometric patterns and interpretations of physical forms, all while shooting with a Fujifilm GFX 100, one of the highest-resolution cameras available.

The resulting large-scale photographs taken above Los Angeles, London, Amsterdam, Tokyo and elsewhere are striking, painterly works, often lush, abstract configurations. His more representational images humorously play with viewers’ perceptions, flipping expectations on their head.

Adeserted water park near Baton Rouge, La. — all swirls and splotches and dollops of glossy, saturate color from Delson’s perspective in the sky — is titled “Painter’s Palette.” “Space Invader,” which appears to be a version of the 1980s video game, is actually rows of chaise lounges and umbrellas in Miami Beach. The symmetrical color blocks in “Xylophones” are storage containers at the Port of Los Angeles in San Pedro.





Donn Delson's "Painter's Palette," is a water park near Baton Rouge, La.

(Donn Delson)

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Donn Delson's "Xylophones," shows storage containers at the Port of Los Angeles in San Pedro.

(Donn Delson)



Donn Delson's "Space Invader," depicts chaise lounges and umbrellas in Miami Beach.

(Donn Delson)

"Things look different when viewed from a different perspective, things we see as commonplace, and make decisions about," Delson says. "What the aerial photography does, is let people see things from a unique perspective — and those perspectives are an important part of human dialogue."

Twenty-one of Delson's works, all shot in Israel, premiere in the exhibition "Holy Land" at the Hillel at UCLA on Thursday. The Old City in Jerusalem is seen from 4,000 feet at dusk; Masada is shown from about 2,000 feet at sunrise. "Tree of Life" depicts the Dead Sea from about 4,000 feet; the gullies and cracks and twists in the parched desert landscape resemble a tree, buffeted by the wind.

"They were all taken from the Golan in the north to the Negev Desert in the south — but it's not a travelogue," Delson stresses. "It's an artistic interpretation of what I saw from the air that I thought was beautiful and inspirational."



Donn Delson's "Tree of Life."

(Donn Delson)

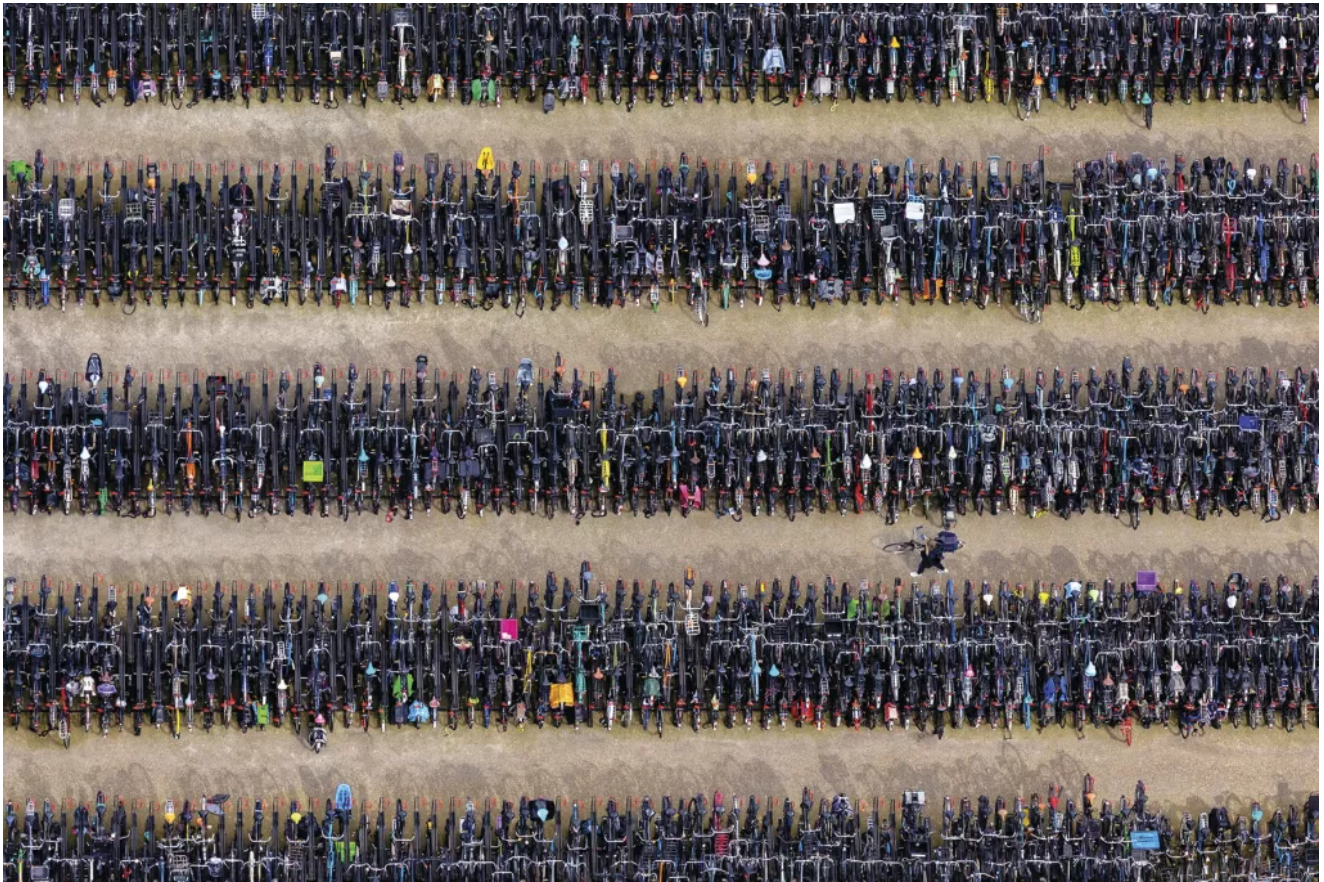
All the show's works, which loom as large as 8 feet wide by 5 feet tall, are printed on reflective metallic paper affixed to transparent acrylic board, so that the unframed images have additional depth and appear to float — almost as if the viewer were hovering in the aircraft alongside Delson.

"I want the viewer to immerse themselves in the experience," says Delson, a retired movie marketing executive and entrepreneur. "And the only way to do that is make a big enough image so that they can step into it."



Donn Delson's "Tight Rope."

(Donn Delson)



Donn Delson's "Red Lock District."

(Donn Delson)

'Holy Land'

Where: The Hillel at UCLA, Westwood

When: 10 a.m. -4 p.m. Mondays-Fridays, by appointment on Sundays, through Dec. 22

Admission: Free

Info: uclahillel.org/fallart2019
