
MICHAEL HARDY PHOTO 07.01.19 10:00 AM

YOU'VE NEVER SEEN SKATE PARKS LIKE THIS BEFORE



1 / 11 Photographer Amir Zaki grew up skating in Beaumont, California, but when he turned his camera on the skate parks of Southern California his interest was more in the parks than the skating.

AMIR ZAKI

WHEN YOU THINK of skateboard photography, you probably picture a skater flying through the air while performing some recondite feat of physical wizardry. In [Amir Zaki's](#) photographs, though, skaters themselves are nowhere to be seen. Zaki grew up skating in Beaumont, California, and has the greatest respect for practitioners of the sport. But when he turned his own camera on the skate parks of his home region, his interest was more in the parks than the skating.

"There's a whole history of skateboard photography, but everything is focused on the performer," Zaki explains. "There are lots of photographers who do that, and they're very good at it. But I wanted to do something different."

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To photograph empty skate parks, Zaki arrived around dawn, when the light was perfect for his visual aesthetic. "Skaters don't wake up early," he notes with a laugh. After selecting a spot, usually deep inside the bowl of the park, he mounted his DSLR camera on a GigaPan motorized tripod head that allowed him to take dozens of high-resolution images that he later stitched together in postproduction. The final images, several gigabytes each in size, can be printed as large as 60 by 75 inches without sacrificing detail. Shooting the skate parks from a single angle would have required a wide-angle fisheye lens, which Zaki abhors.

The final images are revelatory works of landscape photography in which seemingly lifeless concrete wastelands are transformed into thrilling canyons and calderas, plateaus and peaks. (Zaki, who devoted a previous series to [lifeguard towers](#), has spent his career finding beauty in the apparently mundane.) The photographs evoke the work of Land Art pioneers such as Michael Heizer, whose monumental *City* project in the Nevada desert, from certain angles, [looks a lot like the world's largest skate park](#).

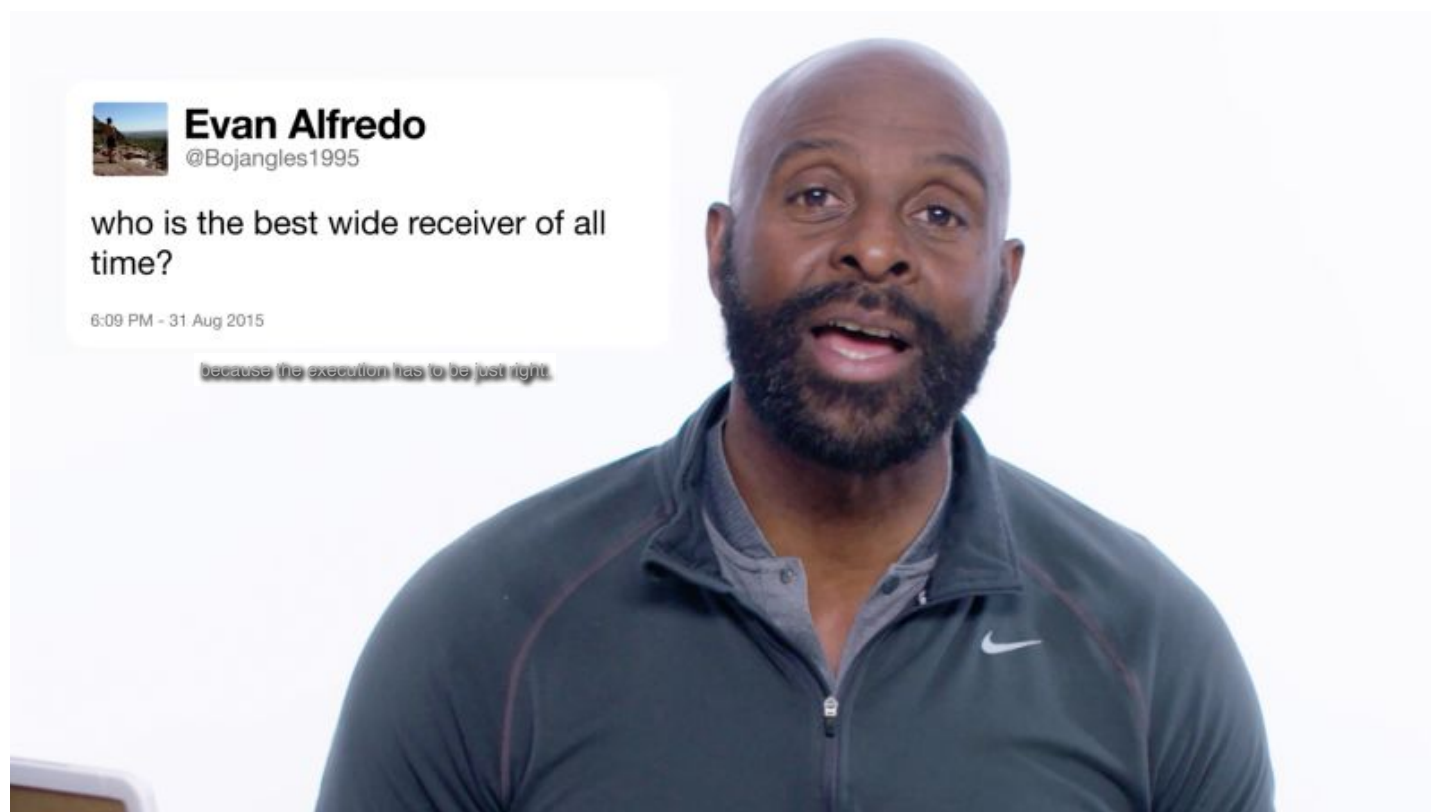
Zaki calls his series *Empty Vessels*, a title that reflects both his interest in Eastern philosophy and his struggle to classify skate parks within the built environment. "I think of them as anti-architecture," he says. "They're not structures, exactly. Basically, they are potential spaces. Their entire formation is based on an activity that will happen within them. Every curb, every hip, every element is designed for potential action."

Zetter will be published in September by Merrell to coincide with a solo exhibition at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, California. Zaki's work can be purchased from the [Edward Cella Gallery](#) in Los Angeles and the [James Harris Gallery](#) in Seattle.

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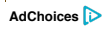
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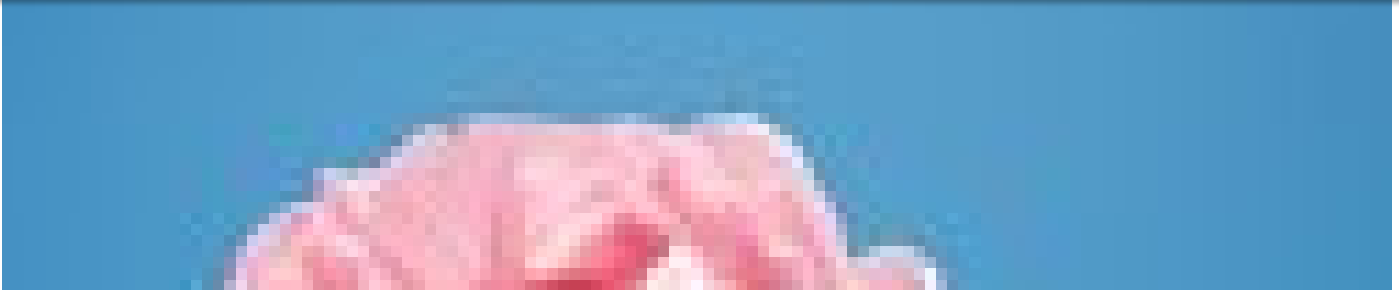


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