

Golden Hour

California Photography from the
Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Losing California



Edward Weston, *Wrecked Car, Crescent Beach*, 1939

Amir Z

In his approach to modern photography, Edward Weston is among the most innovative and influential photographers—quintessentially American, and specifically Californian. His early work included soft-focused, pictorialist portraits of friends and models in his Tropico studio (see his 1923 portrait of fellow bohemian Stanwood Badger in this exhibition) and culminated in a formal, modernist, and often abstract approach to nudes, objects, and landscapes from his base on the Central Coast.

By the late 1930s, Weston was responding to the art world's interest in surrealism and Dada, utilizing their tools of unexpected juxtapositions of incompatible objects in dreamlike images. Captured in Northern California while traveling on a Guggenheim Fellow grant (Weston was the first photographer to receive this award), *Wrecked Car, Crescent Beach* emphasizes the accidental, the surreal: a wrecked car disconcertedly on the shoreline, not by the roadside, as confirmed by the driftwood tree stump in the background. Furthering a sense of abstraction is Weston's use of a median gray tonal field overall; each zone in the image just one remove of gray from another, rendering a spatially indeterminate place, a place of abstracted, dystopian reality.

Coastline Cliffside 16 is from Amir Zaki's body of work "Time Moves Still," for which he used a Gigapan camera to make large panoramic images of the California coastline. Originally engineered by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), in partnership with Carnegie Mellon University and



Google, to make images of Mars via NASA rovers, this digital system captures, and stitches together, hundreds of singular images. The Gigapan often makes its own decisions about focus and depth of field, creating pictures that are eerily exact, yet different from the human eye's interpretation of the subject. Thus, due in part to our inability to determine what is real and what is digitally constructed, the resultant images are often unsettling in their clarity.

In "Time Moves Still," a referent to the temporality of technological and ecological movements, Zaki captures instances in which human intervention marks the landscape. In this image, crisscrossing stairs and ladders tenuously punctuate a hillside, remaining in place through creative erosion prevention. The attempt to claim ownership of this perilous cliff and deny others access to the coast is at the heart of Zaki's narrative. In photographic terms, his work can be aligned with that of nineteenth-century survey photographers of California and the West as seen in the minutely detailed imagery of Carleton Watkins (1829–1916) and William Henry Jackson (1843–1942; see Jackson's *Oak Grove Near Pasadena, California* in this exhibition).