

AMERICAN CONNECTION

Taking the leap from colour to black & white gave **Michael E Gordon** the chance to create his own unique style of nature photography, which carries with it a powerful message concerning the environment. Susan Burnstine reports.

For over 20 years, Michael E Gordon has combined his love for exploring the natural world with his love for image making, and has simultaneously become a devoted activist and naturalist. His work can strike a deep chord for nature lovers as it intimately examines the great beauty, mystery and fragility inhabiting the most desolate desert spaces of California and Utah.

Gordon resides with his family in Lakewood, California, is a life-long mountaineer and wilderness rambler, and feels fortunate to have been born in such a diverse state. 'I determined early in my photographic and creative life that there was no need to consider my work elsewhere: everything that I am most interested in, fascinated by, and have spent a lifetime studying, is right here,' he says.

Sierra Club-style coffee table books directly inspired Gordon's earliest interests in photography. 'I grew up during the 1970s and 80s when Americans realised that we had poisoned our air and water and were dishonoring



the land and its wildlife. Unfortunately, we still are,' he says. 'I was greatly influenced by Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, Philip

Hyde, Galen Rowell, Robert Glenn Ketchum, and others who used not just their photographs but also actively spoke about,

Above Manzanita study A dead manzanita (*Arctostaphylos*) woven through boulders and grasses. Joshua Tree National Park, California. **Left Gravitational waves** Light, shadow, and Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) tracks on Eureka Dunes, Death Valley National Park.

wrote letters to Congress, and lobbied to save habitats, species, and wild lands. I believe in leaving it better than we found it, so it's been important to me that my photographs find their way to the conservation community and work for the greater good.'

About 20 years ago, Gordon began photographing the Mojave and Colorado (Sonoran) deserts regularly. 'I had grown tired of my own formulaic colour work and the f/64 style that I had been working in. I sought new subjects, a different aesthetic, and a niche that I could call my



Above Rare earth Sunrise unfolds across the eroded and sculpted Caineville Badlands and Factory Butte. The Henry Mountains are seen in the distance.

Right Calligraphy The mysterious moving rocks and tracks on the Racetrack Playa of Death Valley National Park, California.

own,' he says. 'Apart from Burton Frasher's 1930-1940s black & white postcard photographs of California deserts, I wasn't aware of any other historical or contemporary photographers who had heeded the coyote calls of the desert in a way that I had wanted to express.'

In time, Gordon found his calling in black & white. 'By stripping away the colour, black & white better emphasises the things that most draw me: light, line, form, pattern, abstraction. None of these elements require colour; good composition is still the strongest way of seeing (and creating).'

In 2008, Gordon landed his first professional photo assignment for the Wilderness Society and subsequently became associated with National Parks Conservation Association.

The images he created (mostly shot in colour) have subsequently been used in countless publications and campaigns. He has since worked on campaigns to protect water sources in the Mojave desert, to help advance National Monument designations, and to help stop inappropriately-sited industrial-scale solar energy projects on pristine California desert.

Additionally, he's delivered formal talks at numerous public meetings and has sat before members of Congress and Senate in Washington DC.

Currently, Gordon continues to work as a full-time photographer and tour guide/educator for his company Death Valley Photo Tours.

■ michael-gordon.com
■ deathvalleyphototours.com



USA

AKRON

Akron Art Museum

Until 27 October

Joe Vitone: Family Records

■ akronartmuseum.org

BROOKLYN

Brooklyn Museum

Until 8 December

Garry Winogrand: Color

■ brooklynmuseum.org

DAVENPORT

Figge Art Museum

Until 29 September

Vik Muniz: Hand Remade

■ figgeartmuseum.org

OAKLAND

Oakland Museum of California

Until 1 September

Pushing West: The Photography of Andrew J Russell

■ museumca.org

PHOENIX

Lisa Sette Gallery

Until 31 August

At the Doors of Perception:

Philip Augustin, Brian James

Culbertson, Binh Danh, Gilbert

Garcin, Marie Navarre

■ lisasettegallery.org

PORTLAND

Blue Sky Gallery

Until 1 September

Anton Gautama: Home Sweet Home,

Christos Palios: Conversations

■ blueskygallery.org

SAN DIEGO

Museum of Photographic Arts

Until 19 January 2020

Talking with a Friend:

Portraits by Bern Schwartz

■ mopa.org

TUCSON

Etherton Gallery

Until 14 September

Jack Dykinga: The Grand Canyon

■ ethertongallery.com