

Malleable Reality

Douglas Mandry's focus is on manipulating and distorting the materiality of the photographic medium in order to examine our representations of, and relation with, the natural world.

In his most eye-catching series, "Promised Land," Mandry puts his photographs through a process of "analog retouching"—first producing prints and then "reworking" the resulting images by hand: puncturing, rubbing, dispersing, adding light, smoke and texture. His aim with these radical yet artful transfigurations is to interrogate our "reckless yet romanticized relationship with the natural world." Somewhere, sometimes, humanity can be loving and appreciative of the earth's beauty; in the next moment, we are destructive beyond the point of no return.

His other major series is the cyanotype set "Five Minutes to the Sun." The series revisits our standard, Western notions of "exotic landscape photography" by forcing us to confront the reality of tropical regions. By using cyanotypes, Mandry makes reference to the scientific illustrations through which the West has long come to understand the wild tropics. But Mandry plays with the medium by exposing each frame for exactly 5 minutes. This development process, of which Mandry has little control, leads to the creation of "wrong" images—sometimes over or under-exposed and thus dark and foreboding or completely blown out. The final prints take on an "ersatz of tropical feeling – [an] echo of the saturated posters of tropical imagery."