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Ancient and Sacred Sites in South Florida: A Photographic
Investigation

Thomas Daniel Burnikel

BARRY UNIVERSITY

ANCIENT AND SACRED SITES IN SOUTH FLORIDA:
A PHOTOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION

by

Thomas Daniel Burnikel

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of Fine Arts,
Barry University
in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

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by

Thomas Daniel Burnikel

Approved:

Scott Weber

Associate Professor of Photography

Hugh Murphy

Associate Professor of Theatre

Dan Ewing, Ph.D

Professor of Art History

Silvia Lizama

Chair, Department of Fine Arts

Date

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Abstract

This thesis contains information on the exhibition, “Ancient and Sacred Sites in South Florida: A Photographic Investigation,” displayed at the Barry University Andy Gato Gallery in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Photography. The show consisted of thirty photographic prints.

The thesis begins with my Autobiography. The influence of seven visual artists is then discussed, including examples of work by these artists, pictured alongside examples of my own artwork. The artists discussed are: Nadar, Carleton Watkins, Alfred Stieglitz, Georgia O’Keeffe, Clyde Butcher, Michael Kenna and Laurence Gartel.

The Processes and Technical Information section includes a diagram of the gallery showing the layout of works in the exhibit and includes information about the technical aspects of the images.

Personal Aesthetics/Philosophy includes a general introduction to the essential concept behind the body of work, and an Artist’s Statement summarizing the basic ideas and intention of the exhibition.

Autobiography

From an early age, I grew up watching my father paint, sculpt and draw. Art was always around the house and we took many trips to museums and galleries as a family. My mother was an elementary school teacher and constantly encouraged my growing affection for art. Art class was always my favorite subject in school; although other subjects came easily, they did not keep my attention the way art classes did. Free time was usually spent making drawings of cars, trucks, airplanes and boats.

After two years of basic studies in college, I decided to dedicate my life to something that I could feel passionate about: art. While taking the basic art foundation courses, photography seemed to come most naturally. The ability to capture my surroundings instantly on film and then print the images in the darkroom was magical. Initially, I wanted to continue my studies in photography and attend graduate school. However, one of my photography professors recommended that I go out in the real world and get experience in working as a professional photographer, as there is so much to learn that cannot be taught in school.

After graduating Florida State University in 1988 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Studio Art, I moved to New York City and worked in a darkroom handling the work of some of the biggest names in photography: Francesco Scavullo, Bruce Weber, Richard Avedon, and so on. After a year in the darkroom, I missed the experience of shooting and working on location, so I

moved back to Florida. Working for Munoz Studio in Fort Lauderdale, I ultimately became a wedding photographer. This was a major turning point, as I had no commercial photography training up to this point.

Shooting an event such as a wedding was extremely intimidating and challenging, but I quickly overcame my fears and became adept at shooting weddings, people and events. Weddings combine many different photography skills – portraiture, action, photojournalism, interior and exterior photography – all in one fast-paced and emotionally charged event. During this time, I also worked in a camera store where I learned about camera equipment and lighting. After a year with Munoz Studio, I opened my own photography business and began to learn the art of doing business.

Competition was fierce for any photo-related work in the early 1990s, but I had an intense desire to be a full-time photographer, in business for myself. As my reputation, contacts and portfolio continued to grow, so did the quality and the budgets of the projects I was hired to photograph. Shooting high budget weddings and big corporate events not only provided a good living, but was also very enjoyable, despite the long hours and high pressure. My photography was taking me to the finest locations in Florida and introducing me to many successful and famous people.

Eventually, I began to miss creating art that involved more conceptual or personal subjects, and the freedom to experiment with technique and style. Even though commercial photography involves opportunities to be innovative and

artistic, the needs of the client are always paramount and must be met. At that point, I had shot over 1,000 weddings, hundreds of events and many other assignments. Some of these assignments included architectural, yacht, and marine, food and band photography. This was also a time of personal and spiritual growth in my own life. As a result, I made the decision to pursue my Master's degree in photography, which was something I had yearned to do since my undergraduate days.

Working and studying at the college level affords satisfaction and growth as an artist. It has always been my desire to teach photography at the college level. Having trained and taught many people as a commercial photographer (some of whom have gone on to establish reputations and businesses of their own), I feel I am very well qualified to teach photography at the college level with either a fine art and commercial emphasis, or a combination of the two. Growing up the son of an artist and a teacher has shaped who I am in many ways.

Influences

My life has been influenced from early childhood to the present by individuals and groups of people too numerous to list here. My earliest influences were my parents, who shaped who I am today by setting examples, encouraging ideas and providing a solid family life. Watching my father paint and sculpt was a truly magical experience as a young boy. Art was and is what I enjoy most in life.

Spiritual influences, especially in the last ten years of my life, have opened my eyes and mind to new experiences that have shaped my recent work. Religious art has always been one of my favorite subjects. Returning to graduate school at Barry University, I decided to photograph all of the current Adrian Dominican sisters who were actively involved with the school. Photography was my medium to learn more about these women, whose lineage founded and continues to guide Barry University.

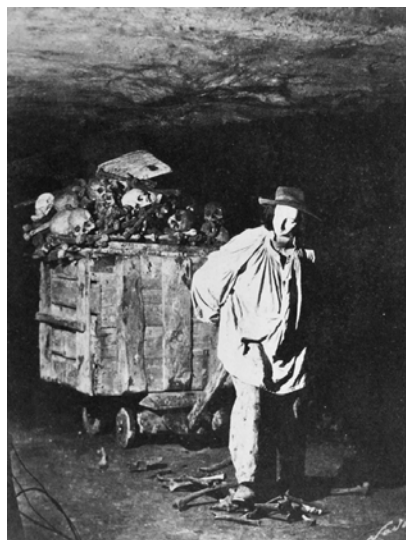
Various forms of yoga – hatha, kundalini, nada and raj both raised my awareness and heightened my senses, providing rich ideas and adding to my personal conviction of who I am and what I do as an artist. Music is always my best friend and companion when I'm working. From classic rock, to Sikh and Hindu mantras, and Native American flute and drum rhythms, music is a source of inspiration, comfort and pleasure.

In addition to my family and other personal and social/spiritual influences, many visual artists have directly influenced my concepts, style and technique.

My earliest influences were Michelangelo and Velazquez. In my early twenties I became fascinated by the work of Ansel Adams, Vincent Van Gogh, Man Ray, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol and the environmental sculptures of Robert Smithson, to name just a few. The artists who most directly influenced my thesis work are the following, addressed individually in historical order.

Nadar

Nadar (born: Gaspar Felix Tournachon, 1820-1910) was one of the early pioneers of photography. In 1853, he began to photograph celebrities and other contemporary artists who came to his studio. Nadar had begun his career in illustration. He was one of the first to create photographs with the use of electronic illumination, documenting the sewers and catacombs of underground Paris. Additionally, he is also credited with creating the first aerial photographs, which he made from a balloon over Paris.



Nadar. *Catacombs of Paris*, 1861-62.
Albumen print 8-7/8 x 7-1/8 inches



Honore' Daumier. *Nadar Elevant la Photographie a la Hauteur de l'Art*, 1862. Lithograph 4-1/4 x 3--1/8 inches

I have great appreciation for Nadar's photographs. The combination of simple and elegant poses, uncomplicated lighting, and beautiful craftsmanship were some of the best examples of portraiture in his time. I also appreciate Nadar's conviction and dedication to constant experimentation. Nadar wrote in 1856:

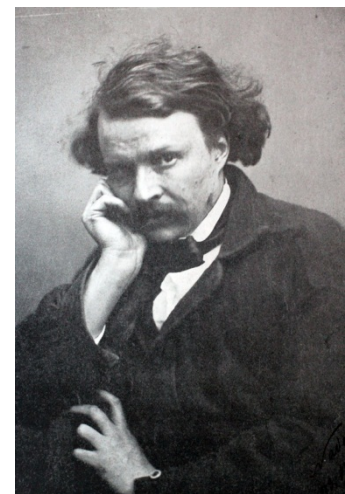


Nadar. *Sarah Bernhardt*, 1865. Albumen print 9-1/2 x 7-1/4 inches

“Photography is a marvelous discovery, a science that has attracted the greatest intellects, an art form that excites the most astute minds – and one that can be practiced by any imbecile... Photographic theory can be taught in an hour, the basic technique in a day. But what cannot be taught is the feeling for light...”

As a commercial photographer myself, I feel a personal connection with his life, as he was not only an artist, but also a successful businessman and an innovator who constantly pushed forward. My photography and art often involve experimentation in both shooting techniques and in post-processing, whether in the darkroom, on the computer, or in the use of non-traditional materials in combination with photographic materials.

I have also had to take to the sky on many occasions to get aerial shots of my subjects. While I have used airplanes, helicopters, tall buildings and even large ladders, I have yet to build a hot air balloon for my photography.

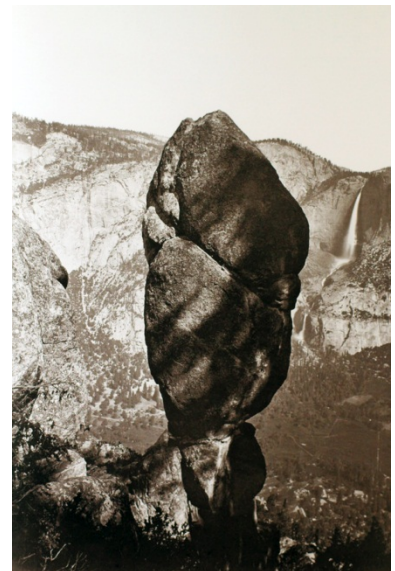


Nadar. *Self-Portrait*, 1856-58. Salted paper print 8-1/16 x 6-11/16 inches

Carleton Watkins

Carleton Watkins (1824-1916) was one of the earliest photographic chroniclers of the American West. Having emigrated from New York to San Francisco, Watkins became a portrait photographer by accident when asked to fill in for an absent camera operator. After two years of working as a commercial portrait photographer, Watkins began to travel throughout the West with his equipment loaded onto wagons, where he created photographs and developed his images on location. The extreme physical and technical challenges of processing large glass-plate negatives on location in such extreme conditions as the desert and mountains of the American West was a feat unto itself.

What made Watkins' work so special was his ability to capture the best angles and vantage points to truly appreciate a place from a photographic point of view. Watkins exposed the public to places that most people never had seen and would probably never have the opportunity to visit. The power of his photographs had a major influence on many people, and helped bring about the creation of the National Park system in the United States by communicating, through visual images, the places of unique beauty and solitude that exist in the remote and pristine wilderness of the United States.



Carleton Watkins. *Agassiz Rock and the Yosemite Falls*, 1871-81. Albumen print 22 x 18 inches

Tragically, most of his work was lost in the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and the ensuing fire. Watkins never recovered emotionally or financially from the loss and died virtually penniless, blind and confined to a mental institution. It was not until the 1960s that his work was rediscovered and he was recognized as one of the most important photographers of the American landscape.

The desire to explore both my immediate surroundings and travel to more remote destinations and photographically document exotic places is something I am also passionate about.



Carleton Watkins. *Indian Sweat House, Mendocino County, Cal.*, 1863.
Albumen print 18 x 22 inches

Alfred Stieglitz

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) is one of the most important figures in the history of photography, and is often referred to as the father of art photography. Besides being a photographer, Stieglitz was also a publisher, writer, musician, collector and impresario. Stieglitz did more than anyone in the 20th Century to

prove to the world that photography was as important and legitimate as painting and sculpture and all art forms are equal.

In the 1880s, Stieglitz attended college in Germany, and while enrolled in an engineering program, took a photography course as an elective. The power of the newly emerging medium of photography so impressed Stieglitz that he dropped out of engineering studies to devote all of his time to mastering the technical skills of photography.



Alfred Stieglitz. *The Steerage*, 1907.
Gravure print 7-3/4 x 6-1/4 inches



Alfred Stieglitz. *Equivalent*, 1929. Gelatin
silver print 4-11/16 x 3-9/16 inches



Alfred Stieglitz. *From the Shelton*, 1931.
Gelatin silver print 9-1/2 x 7-9/16 inches

Stieglitz quickly developed a keen eye and mastered darkroom techniques and chemistry. His prints were gaining recognition in Europe, but Stieglitz wanted to return to his home in the United States. Upon his return, he continued evolving as a photographic artist, and opened Gallery 291 in New York City, choosing to represent the most avant-garde artists he could find, such as photographer Paul Strand and painters Georgia O'Keeffe and John Marin. Prior to Stieglitz, photography had not been accepted as a true art form, but now photographers and painters were being shown together and photography was finally gaining recognition as an authentic, modern art form.

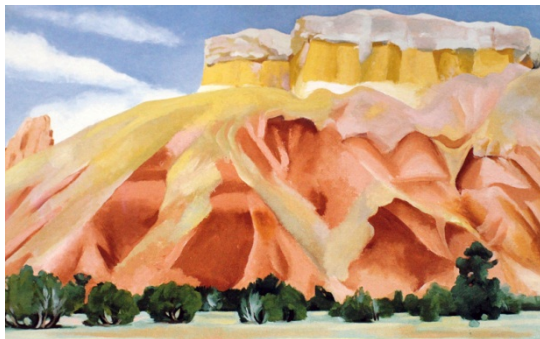
Georgia O'Keeffe

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) is arguably the most famous American female painter in history. Her work has influenced many visual artists' work, not only in painting, but in other media such as photography and design. O'Keeffe is not only famous for her paintings, she was something of a cult figure, with a highly publicized yet very private life, both while married to Alfred Stieglitz and while living alone in Ghost Ranch and Abiquiu, New Mexico. It was a chance meeting with Stieglitz that sparked her career and brought her into the limelight. After spending summers in New Mexico for over a decade, O'Keeffe made the decision to move there full time in 1933.

O'Keeffe's connection with and attraction to the landscape of the Southwest gave her work an almost spiritual quality. I had always appreciated O'Keeffe's work, but what really made an impact on the way I look at art

happened while I was working in a photo lab in New York City in 1991. One of the lab's clients was the Museum of Modern Art. I was duplicating slide film and making prints of some of O'Keeffe's paintings for an exhibition. I was deeply impressed by the magic of O'Keeffe's images, and by their brilliant color, composition and form. I mentioned my excitement and enthusiasm about working with the images to my supervisor at the lab and he replied that he actually enjoyed reproducing famous art in the photo lab more than viewing the original! This went against everything I had learned in my college art history classes, where the professors always insisted how much more impact viewing an original work of art had over viewing a slide or printed reproduction. For once I could feel confident that a properly executed duplication or reproduction can have as much impact on the viewer, if for different reasons. This might not be true for many artists' work, but O'Keeffe's paintings reproduced so magnificently that I could see this dimension, having just seen several of the original paintings at museums in the city and working on the reproductions in the lab.

O'Keeffe's paintings strengthened my love for my local landscape and inspired me to create *Ancient and Sacred Sites*.



Georgia O'Keeffe. *Part of the Cliffs*, 1937. Oil on canvas 20 x 36 inches



Georgia O'Keeffe. *The Shelton with Sunspots*, 1926. Oil on canvas 48-1/2 x 30-1/4 inches

Clyde Butcher

The work of Clyde Butcher (born 1942) has been a major influence on “Ancient and Sacred Sites in South Florida: A Photographic Investigation”. No one has captured better the look and feel of many of Florida’s most majestic and beautiful locations. Often referred to as the “Ansel Adams of the Everglades”, Butcher’s work is intended to raise awareness and allow people to see locations they would never have been able to see outside his photographs.

Butcher owes much to the work of artists like Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and Carleton Watkins, as do most black-and-white landscape photographers. I have been fortunate enough to meet and speak with Butcher about his work, his technique and his personal philosophy. Butcher is a very gregarious person with deep convictions, and a mission and dedication to help save our environment through his photography, writing and lectures. Butcher likes to tell people, “The only way to experience the Everglades, is to get out of the car, off the boardwalk and into the water!” This is so true not only as a visitor, but as a photographer as well. There is a new experience and perspective achieved by getting into the swamp. The water is crystal clear and teeming with life. It is a different world that should be experienced and appreciated by as many people as possible. As artists, it is our job to help make people aware of the valuable, delicate and threatened lands here in Florida and the planet. Photographs have a power to achieve what words alone cannot.

One of Butcher's trademarks is shooting only black-and-white film since he feels that black-and-white better lends itself to the look and feel of the landscape. This is why I choose to work only in B&W in producing the images for Ancient and Sacred Sites.



Clyde Butcher. *Myakka River*, 2000.
Gelatin silver print 30 x 26 inches



Clyde Butcher. *Big Cypress Gallery #14*, 2000. Gelatin silver print 30 x 26 inches

Michael Kenna

The photography of Michael Kenna (born 1953) is both sublime and powerful. This contemporary master of modern black-and-white landscape photography has been another powerful influence on my technique and style. His photographs merge the ancient world with the modern, and his images are typically long exposures, photographed at night or under low light, creating quiet, dramatic images with moody lighting. Kenna has photographed sites of ancient worship and ritual, as well as modern industrial locations such as nuclear power plants.



Michael Kenna. *Beach Path, Hastings, Sussex, England*, 1984. Gelatin silver print 8 x 8 inches



Michael Kenna. *Ratcliffe Power Station, Study 12*, 1986. Gelatin silver print 8 x 8 inches

From city to countryside, Kenna's black and white photographs consistently speak a language of dark beauty and ethereal light. There is a feeling of sacredness in his photographs. The relationship of location to lighting, composition and print quality evoke feelings of power, other worldliness and sacred beauty in a style consistent in all of Kenna's images. Several years ago, while studying Kenna's work, I came upon several images the artist shot near my home in Pompano Beach which triggered a new appreciation of my local landscape. Kenna has created a powerful, personal style that is transcendent, quiet, almost other world vision which has greatly influenced my approach to photographing the landscape.

Kenna's photographs, (whether shots of ancient ruins, industrial sites or empty places) all speak a common visual language of sublime power and mystery. The sites I photographed for this series ranged from



Michael Kenna. *Pompano, Florida* 1992. Gelatin silver print 8 x 8 inches

isolated country to heavily populated urban centers. I sought to imbue my photographs with the quiet power found in Kenna's photographs by shooting at nightfall in appropriate locations. Ancient civilizations relied heavily on the sun, sky, moon and stars. Night skies allow us to see the stars and give a different, more ethereal look to landscape photographs.

Laurence Gartel

In the spring of 2001, I attended a workshop at the Palm Beach Photographic Center taught by Gartel (born 1956). Gartel's direct and often humorous style of teaching and his attention grabbing digital artwork have been a major influence on my work. Gartel has been referred to as the "father of digital art", creating his first all digitally constructed artwork in 1982. Computers and digital technology were in their infancy at the time and few artists were involved with creating electronic art as early digital technology was limited by size, cost and capability. As digital technology and information rapidly became more sophisticated and available, the widespread use of electronically created art forms began to emerge. The swift emergence of technology further blurred definitions and rules in media such as photography, graphic design and video, much like what was happening at the turn of the previous century with Stieglitz and the then new medium of photography.

As technology continued to emerge in the digital age, Gartel's images became more complex and developed additional layers of information. Gartel

began to incorporate traditional artist's materials such as oils and acrylic paints in many of his images, further blurring the definitions of visual art forms such as photography, mixed media, graphic design and collage. High profile assignments from clients such as Coca-Cola, Absolut Vodka and Fortune Magazine added to Gartel's cachet as both a fine and commercial artist, and Gartel has continued to experiment with style, subject and new media such as sound and video production.

Gartel's influence on my work involves keeping an open approach to creating photographs with any new technology, or traditional tools, if effective.



Laurence Gartel. *Untitled Shoes 2*, 1982.
Cibachrome 16 x 20 inches



Laurence Gartel. *7 Up*, 1992. Giclee print
36 x 24 inches

Processes/Technical Information

My thesis exhibition consisted of thirty photographs printed on metallic photographic paper. The photographs are black and white metallic C-Prints with some images printed in a sepia tone. Twenty-seven of the images are 16" x 24" and three are 20" x 40", all in mats and framed. The images were arranged by location in groups or as individual images of the location.

"Ancient and Sacred Sites in South Florida" was a combination and culmination of many of the technical skills I learned, both as a student and in my years as a full-time commercial photographer. From the concept of paying homage and giving respect to the many forgotten or little known local sites, to researching and traveling to the locations, and through countless tests in the darkroom, computer and workshop/studio, the creation of this body of work involved much time and experimentation to arrive at its present appearance.

The concept for the body of work actually began while I was on a spiritual retreat in Ghost Ranch, New Mexico. While pondering how respected, protected and revered the ancient and sacred sites are in the west, I realized that there are many sacred sites in South Florida that do not receive the recognition they deserve. I began my investigation and research at an Indian mound in my neighborhood in Pompano Beach. Research did not offer much information, as written records of South Florida do not begin until 1535, when the first Spanish missionaries and explorers arrived. The tribal inhabitants of Florida were

decimated by sickness and disease and there are no direct descendants of any of the native people from this part of Florida left to tell their story and history.

I quickly realized that there would be many opportunities for personal interpretation and my imagination began to soar with thoughts of what the environment and life were like before recorded history here in South Florida. My entire focus was on the Indian mound in my neighborhood. The mound is in a small city park with planted trees, grass and several interpretive signs detailing a brief history of the mound and the people who lived there. An asphalt walkway leads to the top of the small hill where the actual mound is located. Pompano Indian Mound Park is bordered by residential streets, a water treatment tank and a multi-level hotel parking garage, and is a challenging location in which to evoke feelings of sacredness.

My goal was to document the sites as they look in present time, so I tried hundreds and hundreds of different techniques with different cameras, lenses, camera angles, film, digital, darkroom, computer and mixed-media. My search for the perfect style to represent this site was taking me in almost every direction imaginable. While some of the images were quite successful, many were not.

Eventually, I photographed other locations and began to take pleasure in researching both some well-known and several obscure sites. This research fueled my desire to locate and photograph some of these historical and often exotic places. Most of these places were spread out over the lower third of Florida.

Personal Aesthetics/Philosophy

“Ancient and Sacred Sites in South Florida: A Photographic Investigation” represented not only special places in my locality, but is the expression of my personal philosophy. It visually describes my personal aesthetics achieved in 24 years of living through the lens of my camera. Personal aesthetics describe an individual manner of taste, attraction and relation to visual art and environment. While personal aesthetics are different from person to person, there are technical aesthetics that are adhered to in commercial and fine art photography. Some common examples of foundation aesthetics in photography are lighting, composition and print quality. Having spent over two decades as a commercial photographer, I have come to take pride in my professional ability to capture subject, lighting and composition on a wide range of professional photography equipment.

On a conceptual level, “Ancient and Sacred Sites in South Florida: A Photographic Investigation” represents who I am and where I have been. It is my personal contribution to spreading information about the history of where I call home. I wanted to feel a deeper connection to the land I currently live on. “Ancient and Sacred Sites in South Florida” is not only the culmination of my life as a commercial photographer, but carries the influence of spiritual events and markers of time throughout my life.

The Pompano mound was a place of curiosity as a boy, but as I grew older, the mound held more mystical intrigue. I fantasized about life here hundreds and thousands of years ago.

What were rituals and worship like? How challenging subsistence and survival must have been, even though the pristine waters were teeming with sea life. What types of plants, animals and fish no longer call Florida home or have become extinct?

These types of questions remind me of Paul Gauguin's famous painting, "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" Gauguin was captivated by the dream of living a more primitive and simple existence. He spent the last years of his life in Polynesia, living among the indigenous people. I can relate to Gauguin's fantasy/ideal vision of life without the modern trappings. Creating this series has been a journey in both the physical and imaginative sense. Allowing my research and camera to lead me to places I would probably never have seen, and sent me on a true journey into South Florida's past and present.

Thesis Show

Individual Plates



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Pompano Mound #1*, 2008. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

Where it all began: The Pompano Indian Mound Park, in my neighborhood. This was one of my first photographs to capture the mound and explore its potential visually, as a place of ancient significance in current, modern times. Tequesta Indians occupied the mound more than 1,000 years ago. It was a place of ritual, ceremony and of everyday life.

Sites of importance to ancient cultures were often chosen for their superior geographical locations. Upon research, I learned that the site of the Pompano Mound was an ancient inlet to the Atlantic Ocean connected to Lake Okeechobee

(80 miles to the north) by a river. The history of the area and its people became embedded in my imagination, as I could only imagine what the area looked like a hundred, or even thousands of years earlier. My intention is to show the location in a realistic, yet powerful vision that is at once both accurate and sublime. Knowing that the look and feel of the ancient time had forever passed, I wanted to give the location in its present time a sense of sacredness and dignity. This required viewing the location from every conceivable angle and shooting hundreds of digital photographs, editing and adjusting the final selections on the computer. While almost all of the images for this body of work were photographed in color, I decided to remove the color information to create black and white (or sometimes sepia) images, that gained a quietness and stillness that helped to convey the sacred feeling for which I was aiming.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Pompano Mound #2*, 2008. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

Pompano Mound #2 was photographed at night, using electronic flash combined with the existing lighting from the street in a long exposure.

Photographing the landscape at night creates a more mysterious feel to a location, and the addition of several electronic strobes (flashes) enabled me to paint in areas of highlight and detail. This technique of long exposure and flash combination is one that I have used on many commercial shoots, mainly for architectural assignments.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Pompano Mound at Night*, 2008. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

This photograph was shot at night from the top of the building next to the mound. The ability to look down over the site gives an entirely new angle and feeling, quite different from the views shot at ground level.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Pompano Mound #3*, 2008. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

Pompano Mound #3 was literally photographed on the ground. There is an asphalt walkway leading to the top of the mound where a brick marker commemorates the site. I used an extremely shallow depth of field focusing on the asphalt and blurring the foreground and background. I pushed my camera equipment to its technical limits to create images of quiet power and energy. It was important to my mission that the site be documented as it is, creating a feeling of sublime power and sacredness.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Pompano Mound #4*, 2008. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

Pompano Mound #4 was created by intentionally shaking the camera during the exposure. All of my photographs of Pompano Indian Mound were shot

on a professional digital camera, as it gave me the ability to shoot hundreds of exposures without the expense of traditional photo materials such as film and time spent on testing what works in the darkroom. This shaking technique created an illusion of movement and vibration. It took many different shots to come up with one that conveyed the feeling I was going after.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Deeplake #1*, 2009. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

Deeplake is the deepest natural lake in South Florida. Located in the Fakahatchee Strand area of the Big Cypress Preserve in the Everglades, the lake is difficult to visit due to the rugged limestone terrain and thick canopy of trees and vegetation that surround it, even though it lies only 200 yards off a rural road.

The lake is also inside a Panther Protection area and home to numerous alligators and snakes, which makes it an adventurous place to visit.

Upon its discovery in the 1800s by Spanish explorers, an entire camp of Indians living on the shores of the lake were massacred and the dead bodies tossed into the 98 foot deep lake. The lake is rumored to have been used by the guards of a nearby prison (now closed) to dispose of problem inmates, and has a very dark past that still emits an eerie feel. No matter what the history and legend of the site, it is a very eerie and intimidating place with a dark history.

Photographers such as Carleton Watkins and Clyde Butcher have gone great distances and considerable lengths to photograph places that many will never see – Deeplake is a rarely seen (or heard of) site that I feel privileged to have visited and photographed.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel, *Warm Mineral Springs with Bather*, 2009. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

Located in Charlotte County, Warm Mineral Springs certainly should be considered one of Florida's most important historic sites. Not only is this the location of the fabled "Fountain of Youth" sought by the Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon in the early 1500s, but the spring is also of major archeological importance. Bones from a saber-toothed tiger and a woolly mammoth, as well as a human skull with intact brain matter dating from over 10,000 years ago, have been excavated from the caves at the bottom of the 231-foot deep spring.

Warm Mineral Springs has the highest concentration of minerals of any spring on the North American continent (third highest concentration on the planet), making it a place of healing, rejuvenation and spiritual quests for thousands of years. The spring is currently a privately owned bathing and healing center, and is typically crowded with bathers from all over the world, seeking health and relaxation in its restorative waters.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Lake Okeechobee #1*, 2008. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

Lake Okeechobee is the largest freshwater lake in the State of Florida and the second largest in the United States. The name Okeechobee translates to “big water” in the Hichti Native American language. The lake has long been considered sacred to Florida’s indigenous people. In June of 2007, a drought uncovered remains of human bones, pottery and other artifacts. This discovery lent further credence to the belief that an ancient and sophisticated civilization thrived in the southern half of Florida, thousands of years before the time of Christ. While Lake Okeechobee is famous worldwide for its freshwater fishing, it is rarely visited or familiar to most residents and tourists in Florida. Thunderstorms are a common sight around the lake and create magnificent sky and cloud formations. These storms help to maintain abundant water levels in the lake which, in turn, supplies drinking water to most of South Florida. In ancient times the lake was a source of life as it provided not only food and water, it was a place of ceremony, worship and water burial for the native people.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Lake Okeechobee #8*, 2009. Metallic C-print 20 x 40 inches

This image was created with shells collected on Lake Okeechobee's shore. Starting with an 11" x 14" print, shells and sand were placed on the photo and then photographed digitally and reworked in the computer. When I began this series at the Pompano Mound, many attempts at mixing media and manipulating the photograph, negative and print were made, but none of these tests were successful at creating images that reflected a sacred feeling. This image of Lake Okeechobee does achieve the quiet look and feeling of deep stillness that represents such a sacred site.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Lake Okeechobee #4*, 2008. Metallic C-print 20 x 40 inches

This photograph is an accurate depiction of what the lake looks like at the shoreline. Countless fossilized shells and a gentle surface on the water accurately depict Lake Okeechobee.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Miami Circle Fall Equinox*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

The Miami Circle is one of the most important archeological discoveries of the 21st century in North America. In 1998, while excavating an old apartment/hotel in downtown, workers accidentally uncovered a 38-foot diameter limestone circle and evidence of human occupation. Archeologists were brought in to assess the historical and geological significance of the site and a major dispute ensued between the land developer (who wanted to move forward on his projected 50 story condominium) and the archeologists, historians, Native Americans (the Seminole Tribe of Florida in particular) and activists who demanded that the site be properly researched and preserved. The fight gained worldwide attention. Eventually the State of Florida stepped in and purchased the land for 50 million dollars, therefore ensuring its preservation and eventually creating a public park and national landmark at the site. The circle is thought to have been the political center of the Tequesta Indians, who occupied the southeast coast of Florida.

My first visit to photograph the circle on September 22nd, 2009 was during the Fall Equinox. The site was in a state of transition, between its archeological excavation and the construction of the public park. I chose to shoot the Miami Circle on 35mm black and white infrared film to create a mysterious and glowing image in what was a simple vacant lot in the center of an urban landscape. The negative was then manipulated with watercolor paint and the image printed in the darkroom to create a mysterious, glowing ambience and mood.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Miami Circle South*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Miami Circle North*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

I returned to the Miami Circle to photograph the site at night. The city has a highly energized vibration after dark. To accentuate the buzzing feel of the city, the tripod was shaken during the long exposures and strobe flashes were used to emphasize and light the dark ground where the circle was in shadow from the surrounding buildings.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Ortona*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

The Ortona Mound, located near present day Turkey Creek, while of great historical significance, is relatively unheard of to most residents (and visitors) of South Florida. The mound is part of a large group of mounds, dating back at least two thousand years ago. It is believed to have been a trading center that connected the Gulf of Mexico to Lake Okeechobee and on

to the Atlantic Ocean through a series of hand dug canals. These canals are the longest man-made canals discovered in North America, and evidence of several of them still exists.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Boca Raton Inlet*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

The Boca Raton Inlet was one of many sites inhabited by the Tequesta Indians between 500 and or 1500 BCE. The Tequestas depended on the Atlantic Ocean as well as the numerous rivers and waterways for food, trade and transportation. Having dreamed about this location while sleeping one evening, I was drawn to the site the following day to investigate and photograph the inlet. The clear water and dramatic sky appealed to my senses and the dream became a photographic reality, and an important site in the series.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Big Cypress with Fog*, 2009. Metallic C-print 20 x 40 inches

The Big Cypress Natural Preserve is located in the tip of southwest Florida and has served as home to Native Americans since ancient times. The Preserve is also home to myriad flora and fauna, as well as nine endangered species. The Big Cypress is a place of immense beauty and solitude. This photograph captured the mist of an early morning fog with a setting full moon.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Pineland #1*, 2009. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

Pineland Mound is located in the Calusa Heritage Trail and Research Center west of the city of Fort Myers on Florida's southwest coast. The University of Florida helped to restore several mounds on the site to appear as close as possible to what the mounds looked like in their times of habitation by the Calusas. Most of the South Florida mounds were made up of shells and organic matter known as middens. This is the only place I have seen in South Florida where the Indian mounds actually resemble what they looked like. The mounds at Pineland have been meticulously restored to recreate their original look and construction. Other mounds, such as the Pompano Mound, have been covered in St. Augustine sod (the most common grass used in the home landscaping in Florida).

I photographed Pineland with a super-wide, rectilinear 14mm lens on my camera so I could get an extreme close-up of the actual shells and still include the shape and a portion of the mound.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *King's Mound at Pineland*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

The King's Mound is the largest and most impressive mound in the Calusa Heritage Trail at Pineland. While it has been restored to resemble the actual look of the mound, there are modern cement and wooden ramps, stairs and walkways to facilitate visitors. I found this staircase at the top of the mound to have an ethereal presence and wanted to record and document it in a photograph. Even though its purpose is utilitarian, I felt it evoked an air of royal symbolism, befitting that of a king and his royalty as well as being an otherworldly reference to the lost civilization of the great Calusa Indian Tribe.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Staircase on King's Mound*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Turner River Mound with Birds*, 2009. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

The Turner River Mound located in Southwest Florida is a complex of prehistoric shell sites, works and mounds. The largest mound covers over 30 acres along the mouth of the Turner River in the Ten Thousand Islands. This large mound is difficult to recognize as it is completely covered with plants and trees and is only accessible by boat. Upon seeing the mound for the first time, I was disappointed with the mound's almost completely indiscernible features. Even the local fishing guide and boat captain who brought me to the mound had to keep checking their GPS coordinates to make sure we were in the right location. The first and most obvious sighting was a flock of exotic birds wading along the shoreline. This photograph was made with a 300mm telephoto lens on my Canon DSLR camera.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Turner River Mound Detail*, 2009. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

This photograph was taken on the Turner River Mound and shows the dense and overgrown condition on the actual mound. The original builders and inhabitants of the mound created a thriving community and at one time had structures and buildings on this site, which currently show very little evidence of their presence. Nature has almost completely reclaimed this site.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Turner River Mound Aerial*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

Having located and photographed the Turner River Mound by boat, I felt the need to create an aerial view of the site. Photographing a landscape, building or structure from the air gives a completely different (and often important) view than if seen from the ground. Even though the mound itself is indistinguishable from the rest of the land in the photograph, I feel it was an essential step to documenting the site. This photograph was shot from a small fixed wing airplane with a DSLR camera and 28-70 mm zoom lens.

The Ten Thousand Islands are located just south of the Turner River and the Big Cypress National Preserve on the southwest peninsula of Florida. Despite their name, there are only a couple of hundred islands, with Marco Island being perhaps the best known. There are numerous Indian mounds and former Indian settlements throughout the island chain, but most are very difficult to access and like the Turner River Mound, have left little or no trace of their existence.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Ten Thousand Islands Aerial*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Fort Center Burial Mound*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches

Fort Center, located just west of Lake Okeechobee, is a complex of mounds, earthworks and canals that have recently been re-evaluated as a major site of historical and archeological importance. Fort Center is the oldest site east of the Mississippi where there is evidence that corn growing took place. It is speculated the first inhabitants arrived in 1000 BCE and thrived until 1150 CE when most of the mound builders in the Lake Okeechobee Basin deserted their sites for some unknown reason. The name Fort Center comes from a Seminole War fort constructed on the banks of the river. Fisheating Creek is the only naturally flowing tributary into Lake Okeechobee. The Fort Center area was recently purchased by the State of Florida to create a wildlife management area

and public park. Because it is not close to any population centers or tourist attractions, the area is almost completely unknown to most residents and visitors.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Fisheating Creek at Fort Center*, 2009. Metallic C-print 24 x 16 inches



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Protector of the Mound at Fort Center*, 2009. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

This Sabal Palmetto tree was at the entrance to the path leading to the largest mound at Fort Center. The Sabal Palmetto was known as a food source for the indigenous people and is also the state tree of Florida. The 60 foot long tree seen here had been pushed down by a strong storm and had an otherworldly, snakelike presence as if it was guarding the mound.



Thomas Daniel Burnikel. *Everglades with Stars and Airplanes*, 2009. Metallic C-print 16 x 24 inches

This photograph was made at a site in the Everglades, which the Native Americans have occupied for centuries. I wanted to show the stars in motion as the study of the skies was of great importance to the early inhabitants of South Florida. Native Americans relied on the sun, moon and stars for knowledge and survival. As digital cameras are not the best choice for long exposure, this image was created on a medium format film camera. The light in the foreground was provided by the headlights of my car. It took a thirty-minute exposure at F11 to get the stars to leave the semicircular lines in the sky. The dotted lines are from airplanes.

Artist's Statement/Conclusion

“Ancient and Sacred Sites” is a photographic documentation and personal investigation into some of South Florida’s earliest and though little known places of habitation and ritual. What started as fascination with the Indian Mound Park in my local neighborhood of Pompano Beach, has led me on a quest to research, photograph and seek out more of these typically forgotten and truly magnificent places of beauty and forgotten powers.

The photographs were created to convey my personal vision of each location’s energy. To accomplish this, I employed a variety of photographic techniques and often used intuitive and sometimes unorthodox methods. Since so little is known about these sites and their early inhabitants I was able to use my own interpretation for each part of the artistic, technical and spiritual process that led to the final image.

Images were captured on a variety of digital and film cameras using an assortment of lenses and camera techniques suitable for each location. Each location had to be approached differently as many are quite remote and others are in the middle of urban areas. Varying degrees of manipulation from camera to computer, and even darkroom and mixed-media manipulations were employed with all of the images eventually being printed in black and white or warm toned sepia on a metallic photographic paper.

Photography has played a major role in preserving some of this country’s most beautiful and important areas of land. As an artist it is my desire to share my

visions of these special places that might not ever be seen or known of so that we, as a people continue to seek answers to questions of future. There is much to be learned from these sites not only historically and archeologically. These locations are places of great significance that should be known to all and treated with respectful reverence and used as learning tools. They should also be known and appreciated for their sheer beauty.

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