

## The Living Dune

Jockey's Ridge, located in Nags Head, is the most popular state park in the North Carolina system. Considered a "living dune", it has changed in shape over thousands of years and continues to move incrementally southward to this day. While on average it typically only moves about 6 feet per year, in recent years, due to increased wind erosion from hurricanes and stronger storms, it has begun to shift upwards of 30 feet annually. This shift has begun to threaten the homes of residents nearby, prompting a large-scale project designed to relocate 3.8 million cubic feet of sand from the south end of the dune to the north. In contemplating this undertaking, Helena Mitasova (the Associate Director of Geovisualization at the Center for Geospatial Analytics at NC State University) questions: "do we preserve the feature or the process?"

This dilemma highlights the often fraught relationship between human behavior and the "natural" environment. Either choice made represents an interference on the part of people. However, it also calls into question the very idea of what a natural environment is, or even what it should be. To (attempt) to return the dune to a former state of being is to intercede in a natural process, while also casting it in an inaccurately fixed and monolithic light.

Our initial interest in Jockey's Ridge sprung from the idea that a landscape can be presented as one thing, but exist as something else entirely. This tension between the natural and the mediated was our photographic foundation. While many artists making work about the Anthropocene depict environmental destruction, endless development, or threatened wildlife, we are more curious about what *is not immediately visible*. We contend that the Anthropocene cannot necessarily be visualized, and that only a constellation of visual poetics can hint at a world that is no longer natural (if it ever was). And while places like Jockey's Ridge may look *wild* or *natural*, in reality they are manicured, preserved and manipulated for a complex of recreational, economic and cultural reasons. In essence, they are hybrid spaces.

Following suit, the camera operates as the perfect metaphor for this kind of hybridity. On the one hand, it possesses the ability to record impartially; on the other, that impartiality is always corrupted by the subjectivity and perspective of the photographer. We are always projecting ourselves into (or onto?) our photographs, similarly to how we physically imprint ourselves onto the landscape. The camera's role as a recorder of place, particularly in the tradition of landscape photography, is perpetually haunted by its inherent propensity to alter what falls in front of it.

In photographing Jockey's Ridge, we've sought to heighten the camera's predisposition toward distortion, as a means of addressing the kind of intervention present (albeit invisibly) at the site. Whether that manifests through artificial or colored light, spatial confusion, abstraction, performative gestures that we enact, or the literal or metaphorical depiction of others, the resulting images foreground photographic decisions that ultimately implicate a human presence in this fragile landscape. Taken together, the photographs that make up this show constitute a very different portrait of this pseudo-natural environment - one that is at once surreal, unfamiliar, but ultimately still beautiful.

There is a theatricality to this place. It operates as a stage for visual metaphors about our presence in, and relationship to, nature. While our footprints operate as physical traces of that presence, our photographs operate more as symbolic residues. This work is an attempt to make visible that which remains hidden.

- Ben Alper & Peter Hoffman

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### **Catalog of Works**

- All prints are considered exhibition only prints and thus are not part of an official edition.
- All prints are archival inkjet (ultrachrome) prints on Canson Photographique Baryta Paper, unless listed as PhotoTex.
- For inquiries regarding specific pieces, please contact the respective artists.
- Ben Alper - [bdalper@gmail.com](mailto:bdalper@gmail.com)
- Peter Hoffman - [studio@peterghoffman.com](mailto:studio@peterghoffman.com)

**Works by Ben Alper**

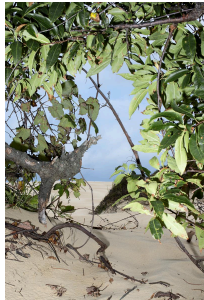
*Untitled* 2017

Series of 5 13.33" x 20" Prints



*Untitled: 2017*

16x24"



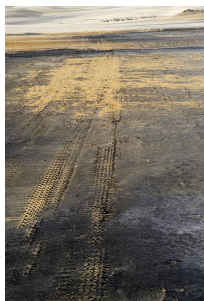
*Untitled: 2020*

28x42"



*Untitled: 2020*

16x24



Untitled: 2017  
28x42"



Untitled: 2017  
12"x18"



**Works by Peter Hoffman**  
*Photograph 1711120066: 2017-2020*  
22"x33"



*Photograph 1711120010: 2017-2020*  
22"x33"



*Photograph 1709180846: 2017-2020*  
60"x40"



*Photograph 1711130036: 2017-2020*  
16"x24"



*Photograph 1711120239: 2017-2020*  
10"x15"



*Sand Clods: 2017-2020*  
3 16"x24" prints



*Digging:* 2017-2020  
2 12"x18" prints



*We Can't Do This Alone:* 2017-2020  
82"x120"

## 64 Image Grid on PhotoTex Adhesive



## Collaborative Works

*Horizons: 2020*

Approx 190"x32"

Phototex Adhesive

(A collaborative piece in the form of an image conversation. One photographer chooses a single image, the other photographer responds with an image of their own)



*Untitled, Etc.* (on the ground, on the walls)

Various sizes on Photo Tex Adhesive: 2017-2020

By Ben Alper and Peter Hoffman

Please contact the artists for more details.

### **About the Artists**

**Ben Alper** was born in Westerly, Rhode Island in 1983, but spent the majority of his childhood in Western Massachusetts. He earned a BFA in Photography in 2009 from the Massachusetts College of Art & Design and an MFA in Studio Art in 2014 from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

His work has been exhibited and published throughout the United States and internationally, including exhibitions at the Nasher Museum in Durham, NC, Glass Box in Seattle, Transmitter Gallery in Brooklyn, S1 Gallery in Portland, OR, Higher Pictures in New York, Schneider Gallery in Chicago, the Luminary Center for the Arts in St. Louis, Osnova Gallery in Moscow and Camera in Cluj, Romania. It has been published in Time Magazine, the British Journal of Photography, the California Sunday Magazine, Yet Magazine, Conveyor Magazine, Dear, Dave and PDN.

Since 2015, Ben has published five artist books. *Drift, A Series of Occurrences, Compound Fractures* and *Hands On* were all released under his imprint Flat Space Books, while the collaborative project *a new nothing* was published by **There There Now**.

Additionally, he is the co-founder and co-facilitator of **A New Nothing**, an online project space dedicated to hosting visual conversations between artists. In the almost four years of its existence, the site has aggregated more than 100 discrete exchanges between artists from around the world.

Ben currently lives and works in Chapel Hill, NC, where he divides his time between running a digital printing business, infrequently teaching, generating new work and spending as much time as possible with his wife and dog.

[www.benalper.com](http://www.benalper.com)

[@benalper](#)

**Peter Hoffman's** work draws on formal training in documentary photography and studio art to engage with diverse practices in image making. Besides his assignment and personal photography, he also teaches part time at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. He holds M.F.A. in Studio Art from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as well as an M.A. concentrating in documentary photography from Ohio University's School of Visual Communication.

Peter has completed two artist's books - *Again and Again* (2014) and *Glass Corner* (2018) that are held in various special collections such as the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University, Joan Flasch Artists Book Collection – School of the Art Institute, Chicago and The Sloane Art Library – The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. His work has been shown at the Catherine Edelman Gallery (Chicago), The Ackland Art Museum (Chapel Hill), Lump (Raleigh), Spectre Arts (Durham) and other institutions across the country.

His work has also been featured by *National Geographic*, *Time*, *CNN*, *Phaidon*, *Fast Company*, *Vice Creator's Project*, *Juxtapoz* and others. He has been named an ADC Young Gun and a Prix Pictet nominee.

Additionally, he has worked on assignments for *The New York Times*, *The Wall St. Journal*, *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *The Guardian*, *NPR* and *the Financial Times*.

Originally from the Chicago area, Peter lives and works in Durham with his wife Liz.

[www.peterghoffman.com](http://www.peterghoffman.com)

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