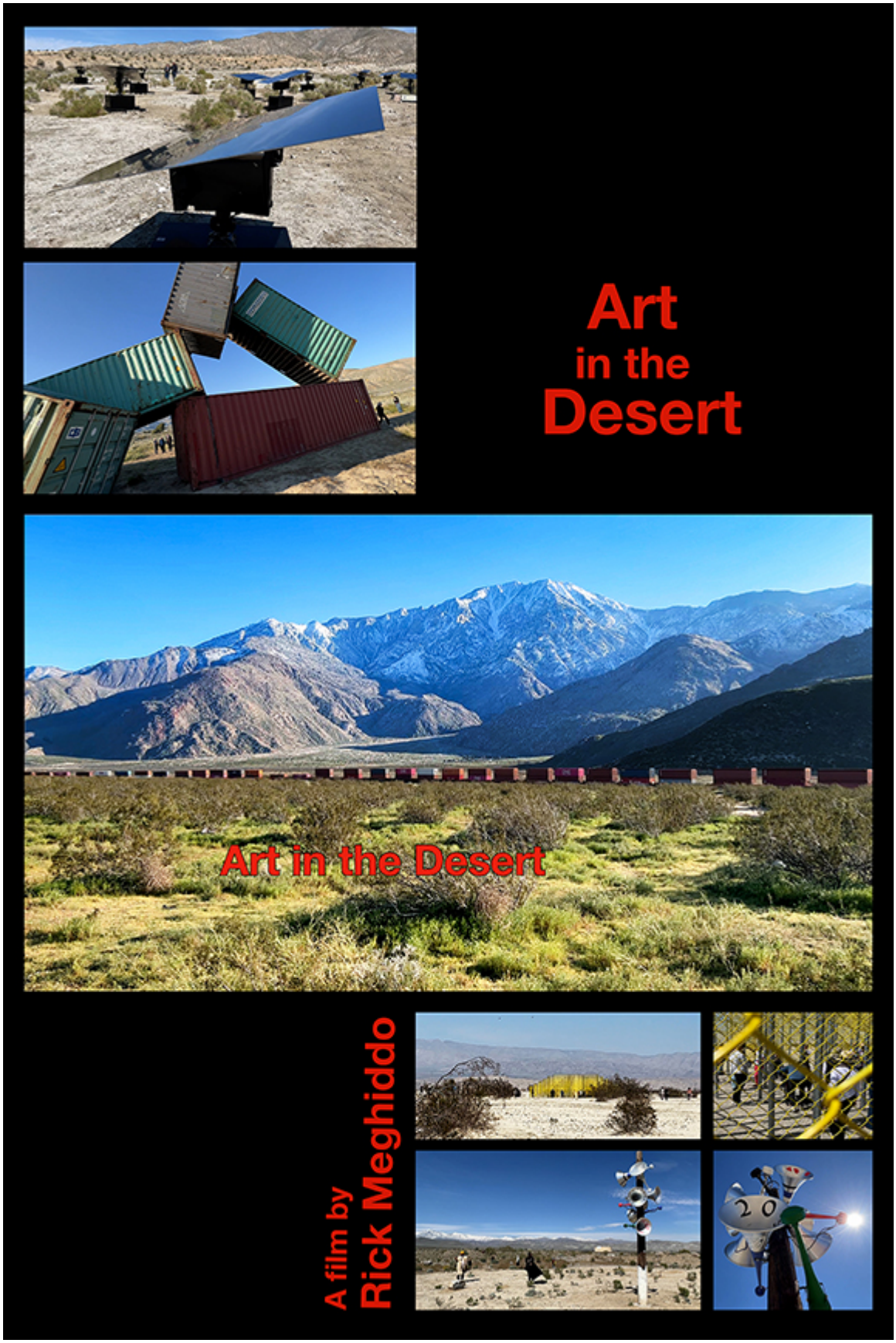
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Desert X Howl

Rick Meghiddo · Friday, March 31st, 2023

The relevance of the 2023 Desert X Biennale goes beyond the exhibition of site-specific artworks by emerging artists; their input is spread across an arc of over twenty miles. This action raises our territorial consciousness of art relating to the environment.



Land Art artists such as Robert Smithson, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, and Arakawa & Gins, have related to the natural and the built environment with large-scale interventions. In Desert X an entire area is a stage for individual artists, each approaching the surrounding environment differently.

Susan Davis founded Desert X six years ago and is its director. This fourth edition was co-curated by **Neville Wakefield** and **Diana Campbell**, who presented twelve artists from Europe, North America, and South Asia. No one imposed a theme on them.



No. 1225 Chain-link, by Rana Begum



Liquid a Place, by Torkwase Dyson



Searching for the Sky while Mantaining Equilibrium, by Mario Garcia Torres



Sleeping Figure, by Matt Johnson



Immersion, by Gerald Clarke



Hylozoic/Desires, by Himali Singh Soin and David Soin Tappeser



The Smallest Sea with the Largest Heart, by Lauren Bon



Amar a Dios en Tierra de Indios, by Paloma Contreras Lomas



Pioneer, by Tschabalala Self



Chimera, by Hector Zamora



Billboards, photos of late Tyre D. Nichols killed by Memphis' police.



Tiny House, by Marina Tabassum

Rana Begum's (No.1225 Chain-link) is a London-based artist from Bangladesh. She created a chain link maze-like series of concentric rings inspired by the surrounding mountains. This work is engaging; it is a metaphor for chain links' positive and negative uses. The yellow color emphasizes the positive.

Torkwase Dyson (liquid a Place) created a monumental sculpture that is a poetic meditation connecting the memory of water in the body and the memory of the water in the desert. Her abstract work contrasts built and natural scale.

Mario Garcia Torres (Searching for the Sky while maintaining Equilibrium) gets his inspiration from bulls' movements and rodeo riders trying to maintain balance. The setting of these mechanical sculptures brings art-related technology to the desert.

Matt Johnson's odalisque-inspired (Sleeping Beauty) assembling of shipping containers framed by a railway and a freeway represents a criticism of movement-globalization of goods. Its architectural scale produces a strong statement.

Gerald Clark transforms a traditional Cahuilla basket {Immersion) into a giant game board, using didactical cards of his creation. According to the game rules, somebody can only reach the center by answering correctly questions relating to the traditions and histories of the Cahuilla Indians.

Himali Singh Soin and David Soin Tappeser (Hylozoic/Desires – Namak Nazar) is a sound sculpture in the form of a salt-encrusted telephone pole equipped with loudspeakers, resembling a flowering cactus. The speakers broadcast the voice of Himali Singh Soin's poetic declamation.

Lauren Bon, the creator of the Metabolic Studios in Los Angeles, is an artist who works with architecture, performance, photography, sound, and farming, to create urban, public, and land art projects to galvanize social and political transformation. Here she creates an object (The Smallest Sea with the Largest Heart) that represents a Blue Whale's heart.

Paloma Contreras Lomas (Amar a Dios en Tierra de Indios, Es Oficio Maternal) addresses topics such as patriarchy, violence, class segregation, colonial guilt and middle-class identity with a humor. An absurd array of tangled limbs of two mysterious characters wearing long hats sprawl out of the car and onto the site's pristine, manicured grounds.

Tschabalala Self (Pioneer) sculpture focuses on the foremothers, the largely unidentified Native and African American women whose bodies and labor allowed for American expansionism and growth. It visually represents their birthright and place within the American landscape.

Héctor Zamora's (Chimera) is a performative action in collaboration with street vendors who are omnipresent in the Coachella Valley but often invisible in the landscape. The artist's work provides opportunities to use materials differently, in this case transforming street vendors into walking sculptures made of balloons.

Tyre D. Nichols died in January of 2023 after police beat him following a traffic stop in Memphis. The billbords is a tribute to his aspiring photography. This makes a strong statement in direct contrast with the commercial use of billboards and the impact of a freeway on the desert.

Marina Tabassum's Khudi Bari (Khudi Bari, Bengali for "Tiny House") is a Bangladeshi architect who created a prefabricated house that is easy to assemble and disassemble, ideal for building in areas that are likely to be flooded.

Desert X is an excellent example of the input of many artists, where the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Looking at its geographic scale stimulates our imagination for future invention.

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