Emmet Gowin has been taking aerial photographs of the landscape in the United States, Mexico, Czechoslovakia, Asia, and the Middle East for over twenty years. At first glance, the alluring abstracted forms and nuanced shades of his richly hand-toned photographs are visually stunning. Only on closer attention is their dangerous reality revealed. (right: Erosion, Highway Route 6 and Rail Cut, Looking North from Green River, Utah, 1988, toned gelatin silver print, 24.1 x 24.8 cm [9 x 9 inches] [image] 11 x 14 inches [sheet]. Collection of the artist. Courtesy Pace/McGill Gallery)

Organized by the Yale University Art Gallery, Emmet Gowin: Changing the Earth, Aerial Photographs is the first major touring exhibition of Gowin's work in over ten years and consists of 90 images, much of it taken after 1986. The Henry presentation of Changing the Earth will also include images recording Gowin's early relationship with the Northwest landscape.

Long recognized as one of America's leading photographers, Gowin took his first aerial photographs in 1980, when commissioned by the Seattle Arts Commission to document the devastation caused by the massive eruption of Mount St. Helens. From an airplane, he recorded the volcanic aftermath using a motorized Hasselblad camera (the model developed to record NASA space flights). Selections from this series are included in the Henry Art Gallery's presentation of this exhibition, on loan to the Henry from the City of Seattle Mayor's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs. These pivotal works galvanized his relationship with the Northwest. As a result of this project, Gowin became interested in documenting human activities that change the natural environment.

The artist returned to Washington State in 1986, where a flight over the Hanford Nuclear Reservation revealed "a pattern of relationships and a dark history of place and events" that altered his perception of the age in which he lives. His first photograph of this abandoned nuclear reactor site is a key image in the exhibition.

Following this experience, Gowin extended his aerial explorations of the American West to include military test sites, mining operations, golf courses, off-road vehicle courses, and toxic waste treatment facilities, bearing witness to the endemic destruction of our biosphere. He recorded the tension between natural splendors and the visible scars and adverse consequences of our technological advances.

"The one thing I learned from my experience is that it's not some stranger doing this [destruction of the physical environment]," notes Emmet Gowin. "When I look at the American landscape, I also feel with great sadness that we did this to ourselves."

Born in 1941, Emmet Gowin is a Professor of Art at Princeton University. He is the recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships (1977, 1979), a Guggenheim Foundation Artist Fellowship (1974), and a Pew Fellowship in the Arts (1993). Gowin's photographs are included in the permanent collections of numerous museums, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art the Art Institute of Chicago the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art. (right: Pivot Agriculture, South of Moses Lake, Washington 1991, toned gelatin silver print, 27.9 x 35.6 cm [11 x 14 inches]. Collection of the artist. Courtesy Pace/McGill Gallery.)
Presentation of *Emmet Gowin: Changing the Earth* is organized for the Henry Art Gallery by Associate Curator Robin Held. Support for this exhibition has been provided by Paul and Debbi Brainerd, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati and donors to the Contemporary Art Fund. In-kind support provided by the Grand Hyatt Seattle.

**Exhibition Catalogue**

Accompanying the exhibition is a catalogue published by Yale University Press, featuring 92 black-and-white photographs. The catalogue includes essays by Jock Reynolds, exhibition curator and The Henry J. Heinz II Director of the Yale University Art Gallery and Terry Tempest Williams, a noted nature writer and environmental activist. The book also features an interview with Gowin by Philip Brookman, Senior Curator of Photography and Media Arts and Corcoran exhibition curator.

Editor's note: *RL* readers may also enjoy these earlier articles:

- [Emmet Gowin: Changing the Earth: Introduction by Jock Reynolds](#) (5/11/04)
- [The Land Through a Lens: Highlights from the Smithsonian American Art Museum](#) (3/5/04)
- [Emmet Gowin: Changing the Earth](#) (12/23/03)
- [The Model Wife](#) (11/24/00)

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