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## Luminous Photographs of the Ocean and Beach by Contemporary Photographer Richard Misrach at National Gallery of Art, Washington, May 25–September 1, 2008



Richard Misrach (born 1949)

*Untitled 1132-04*, 2004

chromogenic print

Collection of the Artist. Courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco; Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York and Marc Selwyn Fine Arts, Los Angeles

Washington, DC— Monumental color photographs explore the sublime beauty and inherent danger of the sea and its surroundings in the exhibition **Richard Misrach: On the Beach**, on view in the photography galleries at the National Gallery of Art from May 25 to September 1, 2008. Drawn from one of Misrach's most recent series *On the Beach*, are 19 dramatic photographs—some as large as six feet high by ten feet wide. Major American photographer Misrach (b. 1949) is known for provocative work that

addresses contemporary society's troubled relationship to nature, especially in the American West.

While some of these photographs have been exhibited over the past few years, the national tour of the exhibition is the first time that so many works from this series can be seen together. The exhibition premiered at the Art Institute of Chicago last fall and will travel to the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington, Seattle (October 11, 2008, to January 18, 2009), and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (May 23 to August 16, 2009).

"This exhibition celebrates the power of Richard Misrach's landscapes. Having turned his camera from the desert to the beach, Misrach once again reveals his gift for expressing complex, important ideas in images of rare beauty," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

### **Exhibition Support and Organization and Curators**

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Trellis Fund.

***Richard Misrach: On the Beach*** was initiated by the Art Institute of Chicago, where it was organized by Elizabeth Siegel, associate curator of photography. Sarah Greenough, senior curator of photographs, National Gallery of Art, coordinated the exhibition in Washington.

### **The Exhibition**

The exhibition at the National Gallery of Art consists of 19 color photographs displayed in five photography galleries. Made between 2002 and 2005, the untitled chromogenic prints are vast in both scale and viewpoint. Despite the compelling beauty of the scene, a sense of disquietude is pervasive. Misrach began making vibrant color photographs of swimmers and sunbathers on the beach in Hawaii in the days immediately following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Employing a soaring vantage point, Misrach depicted the tiny swimmers and sunbathers, often alone or in pairs, engulfed by the dazzling immensity of the sea or an endless stretch of beach. He employed a floating viewpoint that eliminated all reference

to the horizon or sky.

What quietly emerges from these lush, stunning images of people immersed in an idyllic environment is the subtle hint of potential danger. Listless sunbathers seem to be beached or partially buried in the sand. When photographed in groups, frolickers on the shore appear as if they were fleeing some unknown danger. By seeming to pit man against nature, these photographs underscore the delicacy and precariousness of man.

The intimation of danger in paradise is integral to the meaning of the photographs. The series—made over a five-year period—speaks to the sense of physical and psychological vulnerability that has pervaded American consciousness since 9/11. The sense of foreboding is also implicit in the title of the series, *On the Beach*, inspired by Nevil Shute's 1957 novel of the same name in which the sole survivors of an atomic holocaust—stranded on an island in the Pacific—await the approaching nuclear clouds.

### **The Photographer**

"I've come to believe that beauty can be a very powerful conveyor of difficult ideas," said American photographer **Richard Misrach**. Born in 1949 in Los Angeles, he was inspired by the political activism of his student days in Berkeley in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as by the work of landscape photographers of the West, especially Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. For the past 30 years, Misrach has created a complex body of work, including *Desert Cantos*, a series informed by the powerful mixture of his love of the Western landscape, and his passionate commitment to its preservation. His work also reveals his engagement with contemporary social, political, and cultural issues.

Of his *On the Beach* photographs, Misrach wrote: "I was drawn to the fragility and grace of the human figure in the landscape. My thinking about this work was influenced by the events of 9/11, particularly by the images of individuals and couples falling from the World Trade Towers, as well as by the 1950s Cold War novel and film *On the Beach*. Paradise has become an uneasy dwelling place; the sublime sea frames our vulnerability, the precious nature of life itself."

### **Publication**

*On the Beach* is a lavishly produced, 80-page monograph published by Aperture, New York (2007). At 20 by 16 inches, it is the largest book ever published by Aperture, and the first major publication of new work by Misrach in many years. The book is available from the National Gallery of Art by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350 (\$85 hardcover).

### **Related Activities**

On Sunday June 8 at 2 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium, photographer Richard Misrach will present the lecture "Richard Misrach: On the Beach."

On July 24, 25, and 26, and August 7, 8, and 9, at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., the Family Workshop series will offer "Beach Views." Participants will explore photographs from the exhibition, and then learn how to make Polaroid transfer prints. Led by museum educator Rachel Goldberg, this two-hour workshop is designed for children, ages 8 to 12, and an adult companion to work together. Advance registration is required; online registration begins on June 23 at [www.nga.gov/programs/family/](http://www.nga.gov/programs/family/) (<http://www.nga.gov/programs/family/>).

All programs will be free and open to the public unless noted otherwise. For more information, call (202) 737-4215.

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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