

Fresh Tracks
by
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Fresh Tracks is inspired by my life and my upbringing as a hunter. I am creating this body of work for the same reasons I hunt: for the connection to my environment and my food, because I have a vested interest in the conservation of wildlife and wild places, and to participate in the raw, unforgiving truth of life. Humans and nature are not separate. We've separated ourselves. Hunting allows me to understand and acknowledge my role in the ecosystem. I am connected to land, animal, and sustenance.

Fresh Tracks

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by

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Figure 1 — September 22nd, 1996

FIRST ENCOUNTERS

As the buck approached, my dad's adrenaline rose; he was shaking. I could hear his breath quicken. The buck stopped, deep breath, exhale, hold; a single shot rang through Big Chino Valley. I heard the whap as the bullet made contact with the animal. The shot was low, below the shoulder; the antelope ran. I could feel the panic my father was experiencing. The pronghorn startled us just as much as we startled him. He jumped to his feet and before I could alert my dad, Pops swung his rifle and shot, putting the bullet directly in the animal's chest. The buck ran 50 yards, crossing in front of us, dropped, let out an excruciating, guttural cry and expired.

I was 9 years old and I felt that.

I still feel that.

I feel compelled to question what I've done, to compare the merit of its life with the merits of my own. It's not so much a feeling of guilt. There's no moment when I want the buffalo to stand back up and walk away, no moment when I wish that the bullet would retreat back into the barrel. It's more complicated than guilt. Seeing the dead buffalo, I feel an amalgamation of many things: thankfulness for the meat, an appreciation for the animal's beauty, a regard for the history of its species, and, yes, a touch of guilt. Any one of those feelings would be a passing sensation, but together they make me feel emotionally swollen. The swelling is tender, a little bit painful. This is the curse of the human predator.

—Steven Rinella

Like hunting, I found photography at a young age. I was in 8th grade art class making pinhole cameras out of oatmeal canisters; I was hooked as I watched my image appear in the developer. During my undergraduate career at Arizona State University, I gained a better understanding of how the medium can be used to communicate ideas and concepts. There I was surrounded by landscape photographers who instilled in me a purist mentality. I learned about Ansel Adams and Edward Weston; about Edward Steichen, Paul Strand, and the *New Topographics* photographic movement and subsequently held those photographers as the pinnacle of photography. I was, and still am, enamored with their technical prowess. Despite not being much more than surface level beauty, Adams' work struck a chord with me. His ability to romanticize the landscape, enabled me to realize my own romantic history of hunting in wild places.

HISTORY: OLD DEAD WHITE GUYS AND THE WEST

From Timothy O’Sullivan in the 19th century to contemporary artist Matthew Brandt, landscape photography predominantly existed within two schools of thought: untouched, pristine nature versus the man-altered landscape. Both ideas are valid, both serve the environmentalist agenda, and both are endlessly overstated.

In the mid 19th century, while serving as the official photographer for three U.S government survey expeditions, Timothy O’Sullivan produced some of the earliest and most influential photographs of the American West. The survey photographers “sought out the vantage points that might make it possible to recreate for easterners a sense of the immensity and



Figure 2 — Timothy O'Sullivan "Characteristic ruin, of the Pueblo San Juan, New Mexico, on the north bank of the San Juan River, about 15 miles west of the mouth of Cañon Largo" 1874 — Library of Congress

primordial silence of the region” (Rosenblum, 144). The proliferation of stereographs brought the landscape into the homes of American families, which in turn brought

Americans out west.

Rosenblum writes, “As the

frontier moved westward and industrialization began to change the character of the landscape, Americans increasingly turned to the photograph as a means of both celebrating technology and of expressing reverence for the landscape being threatened by its advance” (144).

The 1975 exhibition, *New Topographics*, presented landscape photography in a radically different way. “The pictures, most simply, depicted the transformation of landscape into real estate, focusing on the stark, soulless tract-homes that sprung up like mushrooms in the central

west” (Solnit, 93). It was a break from the illusion of the pristine landscape and showed the raw, uncut version of man’s relationship with the world. *New Topographics* photographer Robert Adams “may have shared with Ansel Adams a concern for the beauty of the land from the Missouri River westward, but for his photographs he selected vantage points and effects of light that show how its grandeur was diminished by roads, lumber camps, and housing developments” (Rosenblum, 529).

The *New Topographics* photographs have had a quietly profound impact on my work. Again, ever the fan of technically sound images, I’ve always found the 1975 exhibition to be striking. The exhibition was pivotal to contemporary photography and forty years later it continues to be a benchmark that inspires landscape photographers.

I have always interpreted the man-altered landscape as negative. Images such as Robert Adams’ *Burning Oil Sludge North of Denver* show our adverse impact on the environment. I prefer to take a positive approach so I make work that rides the line between the man-altered and “pristine” landscape. Evidence of man is surely present in my images. It’s subtle; it’s seen in the charred bark of a pine taken in a controlled burn, on the forest service roads that cut in and out of the national forests, and in the boot prints that I leave behind. I believe that humans are alike part of nature and my research explores that relationship



Figure 3 — Robert Adams, *Burning oil sludge, north of Denver, Colorado* — *The Place We Live Vol. 1*

EARLY HUNTERS AND CONSERVATION

Hunting runs deep throughout the course of human history. We know through archeological discoveries that before prehistoric man began farming, he hunted. Many ancient cultures lived in small nomadic tribes that followed the herds to maintain a sustainable way of life while other communities settled in areas with an over abundance of game. Regardless, the lives of these people depended on the natural resources available to them. That dependence formed a deep connection to the environment. Hunting shaped the social and religious structure of these early cultures.

Peter Armitage writes that the religion of the Innu is a practical one and is learned through years of practice, hunting and handling animals, showing respect for them, and even dreaming about them (Armitage, 4). They believe that animal masters control game and that those masters allow game to give themselves up to the hunter.

It is the animal masters who are responsible for giving game to the hunter and his family, the animals they control cannot be hunted without their agreement. In return, the hunter must follow certain rules, in effect, showing respect to the animal masters in various ways. Thus, the Innu believe that: a hunter does not kill an animal against its will, but with its consent. Hunters and hunted are alike part of nature. As long as (...) [they] follow the customs of their people, as handed down from their forefathers, and they do not offend the animals and their spiritual masters, they will continue to live in peace with each other and with nature (Henriksen, 1977: 8) (Armitage, 14).

The job of the animal masters is to protect the herd, to permit animals to fall victim to hunters, and to foresee the proper treatment of the dead. "They pretend that the souls of these animals come to see how bodies are treated and go and tell the living beasts and those that are dead, so that if ill treated the beasts of the same kind will no longer allow themselves to be taken in this world or the next" (Speck, 76). Good treatment of the animal remains was paramount in sustaining future hunting success. Reverence for wildlife was born through the need to survive.

Things are different in North America today. We don't need to hunt for survival; hunting is used as a means of population management and conservation. In the early 19th century, America was teeming with wildlife. The American Buffalo population alone was estimated between 30 to 75 million. "The moving multitude...darkened the whole plains," wrote Lewis and Clark who encountered a herd in 1806 (American Buffalo). With westward expansion came the depletion of this vast natural resource. In 1830, buffalo hunting was a major industry with hunters killing up to 250 head a day for meat and hides. By 1883, less than 300 wild buffalo remained. In 1894, with the help of Theodore Roosevelt and the Boone and Crockett Club, congress outlawed buffalo hunting in Yellowstone National Park. An avid big game hunter, Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887. The club's mission is to protect America's wild animals and their habitat, to inform the public of the ethical side of hunting, and to promote the idea of fair chase hunting—the ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful pursuit of any free-ranging, wild, big game animal.

Between development, deforestation, and the culling of predators to protect livestock, we've reduced habitat allowing wildlife populations to grow too large for available resources. Populations need to be managed or they will experience death rates far greater than those caused by hunting. This was illustrated in the early 20th century on Arizona's Kaibab Plateau. In 1906, hunting was prohibited on the Kaibab and the federal government began an extensive predator control program. Between 1907 and 1923, an average of 40 mountain lions, 176 coyotes, 7 bobcats, and 1 wolf were killed each year. In response to those measures, the mule deer herd erupted from roughly 3,000 to 4,000 head in 1906 to an estimated 100,000 head in 1924. The herd was too large and greatly depleted their summer and winter ranges. This led to a dispute between the State of Arizona and the federal government. The government's position

was to reduce the herd to prevent further damage while Arizona refused to open hunting on the plateau. This case was heard by the Supreme Court who ruled in favor of the federal government stating that the herd had exceeded the range's carrying capacity. By 1931, fewer than 20,000 animals were left (Dan Binkley). Conservationist Aldo Leopold described this occurrence in his book *A Sand County Almanac*:

I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer. And perhaps with better cause, for while a buck pulled down by wolves can be replaced in two or three years, a range pulled down by too many deer may fail of replacement in as many decades.

The cowman who cleans his range of wolves does not realize that he is taking over the wolf's job of trimming the herd to fit the range. He has not learned to think like a mountain (Leopold, 138-140).

The North American Wildlife Conservation Model is the best system yet devised. The model has two basic principals: our fish and wildlife belong to ALL Americans; and that they need to be maintained for long term sustainability. Following this model ensures a balanced approach to population and habitat management. Each state is responsible for its wildlife; this requires regulation and a sustainable source of funding. In the late 19th century states began to require hunters to purchase licenses to hunt big game, the proceeds from sales were to go directly into the state wildlife agencies. Concern for small game and water fowl began growing in the early 20th century and by 1934 Franklin D. Roosevelt passed the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act. This required hunters 16 years of age or older to purchase a Federal Duck Stamp in order to hunt. The stamp originally cost \$1. Today, hunters pay \$25, of which 98% goes into the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. This fund is used to purchase or lease wetlands and wildlife habitat for inclusion in the national wildlife refuge system. According to the 2015 *U.S Fish and Wildlife Service National Hunting License Report*, 14,843,895 hunters from all 50 states spent \$821,021,854.43 on hunting licenses, stamps, tags and fees.

In 1937, congress passed the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson acts which put an excise tax on the sale of all sporting arms, ammunition and fishing equipment. The Pittman-Robertson Act has generated over \$8 billion since its inception, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation. The act funds projects such as the restoration and management of wildlife habitat, public access for hunting, shooting, and other outdoor recreation, hunter education programs, and research projects focused on critical habitat management practices. The population growth of white-tailed deer, elk, turkey, and antelope can also be attributed to funds from the Pittman-Robertson Act. Finally, hunters and anglers have also launched non-profit organizations such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, National Wild Turkey Federation, and Ducks Unlimited that have played a huge role in wildlife conservation

MAKING MY OWN TRACKS

For many years I thought it was strange to be an artist and a hunter. It seemed that the two were opposites, however, over the course of my research I've found that they are more connected than they appear. A photograph typically isn't taken with the intention to conceal or to be hidden; rather a photograph is meant to be shared. Photography is a visual form of communication. The photographic image is powerful, it can promote new ideas and be a vehicle for change. Like hunting, photography has contributed

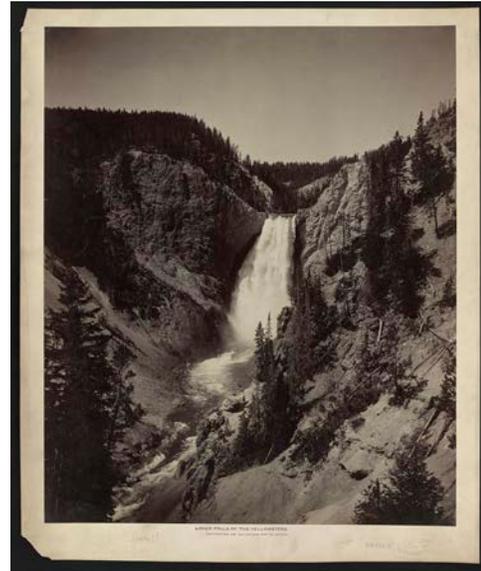


Figure 4 — William Henry Jackson, "Lower Falls of Yellowstone" 1892 — Library of Congress

immensely to the conservation of America's landscape. The American survey images, in addition to being made for the public, were also "presented in albums and as lantern slides to members of congress and other influential people to drum up support for funding civilian scientific expeditions and creating national parklands" (Rosenblum, 135). To convince the United States Congress of the "distinct Grandeur of the scenery", survey photographer William Henry Jackson printed albums of his *Yellowstone Scenic Wonders* in support of Ferdinand V. Hayden's campaign for a Yellowstone National Park. Additionally, Ansel Adams' photographs were used by the Sierra Club in their successful lobbying of Congress to designate King's Canyon as a national park.

My life and my upbringing in the landscape have inspired me to make work about the hunting experience. This body of work shows the positives of hunting, the familial bonds, the

connection to nature that it provides, and comments on the social and historical impact of hunting.

In general, hunters are lumped into one of two stereotypes: the beer chugging redneck or the affluent white male hunting African game. Hunters are thought to lack concern for the environment. While those stereotypes do exist,



Figure 5 — Joe, 2016



Figure 6 — Four Hours Into Her First Hunt, 2016

I, like many hunters, learned from my father. He started taking me with him when I was somewhere between being potty trained and starting kindergarten. Thinking back on that now, I realize how incredible it was that my dad would take a toddler hunting. My

the reality is that most hunters are in line with conservationists Aldo Leopold, Thoreau, and Theodore Roosevelt. By telling my story I am shifting the culturally preconceived perception of hunters.



Figure 7 — Four Hours, No Sign of Deer, 2016

father's teaching method: to let me explore, question, and play; and damn did I learn a lot. I learned how to hunt and fish, how to tie a Palomar knot, and how to navigate down a steep ridge.

Major life lessons and deeper, complicated concepts were instilled in me at such a young age. When he would kneel down and show me coyote or fox scat and we would dissect it, I studied about predator/prey relationships. When he would shoot a dove or quail, I was taught about that animal. I learned about male/female relationships and reproduction. I experienced and understood life and the finality death. I was exposed to biology, anatomy, ecology, and most importantly conservation and land ethics.



Figure 8 — Briar Patch, 2016

I left my home. I moved across the country to eastern North Carolina to pursue my MFA in photography, to make this body of work. It's taken the better part of three years to learn how to hunt and how to photograph the hunt in this vastly different landscape. I've floundered, both in hunting for animals and hunting for photographs. I have made

plenty of mistakes and failed attempts at resolving this body of work. Due to those failures I've spent a considerable amount of time outside figuring "it" out. Here's what I've gathered:

I haven't killed any animals

The fact that I have not yet killed an animal while creating this body of work has allowed



Figure 9 — A Congregation of Deer at the Local Watering Hole, 2016

me to focus on what hunting is truly about; the experience. Rather than showing what happens after the trigger is pulled I've been able to depict the moments leading up to that event, the early mornings sitting in a blind, a casual conversation with my father, or teaching my wife how to read turkey sign.

I am learning how to navigate new landscapes

The landscape dictates the way in which one hunts. In Arizona and most of the west, the terrain calls for “spot and stalk” hunting. To put it simply, a hunter finds a high vantage point overlooking an



Figure 11 — Shed Antler, 2016

area that boasts good habitat and, by looking through a pair of binoculars or a spotting scope, the hunter then searches for animals. If an animal is spotted, the hunter attempts to move within range to make an ethical shot. If an animal is not spotted, after a few hours the hunter may move to another position. It is not uncommon to hike 10 plus miles in search of game.

In the southeast, the terrain makes spot and stalk extremely difficult as it is hard to see and remain quiet while moving through dense wooded areas. In this situation a hunter must find an area that boasts good habitat—or an area where the animals move through often—and set up an ambush (usually in the form of a tree stand or ground blind.) This style of hunting requires a different kind of patience, one where you can sit in one spot, searching a small area, for hours upon hours. It is not uncommon to spend an entire day in one blind or stand.



Figure 10 — Sunrise Sans Turkey, 2016

area that boasts good habitat and, by looking through a pair of binoculars or a spotting scope, the hunter then searches for animals. If an animal is spotted, the hunter attempts to move within range to make an ethical shot. If an animal is not



Figure 12 — Stretching My Legs, 2016

These differences allowed me to focus my camera on the hunting experience; on watching light cascade through the trees as the sun rises; on the frustration and boredom of sitting in a tree all day. Hunting in the southeast has given me the opportunity to reflect on and appreciate those moments.

I am learning about different animals



Figure 13 — That Slight Nervous Feeling When Coming Across a Fresh Bear Track, 2016

I spent over twenty years hunting Mule Deer, Couse Deer (a whitetail deer subspecies), Elk, and Javelina in Arizona. Which means I've spent over twenty years studying those animals in that landscape. I'm just beginning to learn about the animals and their

patterns here in the east, but I've had my camera with me the entire time, documenting this process.

I am learning new photographic processes

In learning alternative processes such as copperplate photogravure, I have become a better image maker. I have a better understanding of how to use my tools to get the images I want; and how those processes impact the content of my photographs.

I am learning to be a teacher

Often times hunters are referred to as stewards of the land. Part of that stewardship is teaching the next generation about conservation, ethics, and the role the hunter



Figure 14 — Teaching Kelsey How To Read Turkey Sign, 2016

plays in our ecosystem. A side effect of creating this body of work has been the opportunity to

inform people about hunting. It's not common for an artist to be an outdoorsman and I often find myself explaining these things to people who may have an indifferent or unfavorable perception of hunting. Because of this, I have become hyper-aware of how my images may be perceived.

Hyper-sensitivity to how an image is experienced by others is also at the root of my teaching experience. Teaching requires me to refine my skills and understand the techniques I use to adequately explain them to my students. I am a steward of visual language, which involves imparting an understanding of design & composition, ways of seeing, and the role the artist plays in our world. In turn, my understanding of photography, art, and hunting has grown immensely.

I am starting to really understand my "process"

My photographic process and hunting go hand in hand. While hunting, the stakes are higher, my senses are tuned in to the environment, every sound, smell, or change in wind direction forces a reaction. My level of intensity is through the roof and I put myself in situations that I normally wouldn't if I were just on a stroll through the woods. I hunt for animals and



Figure 15 — *Four Hours, No Sign of Turkey*, 2016

photographs. Being in the hunter frame of mind, I find myself photographing things that I might not normally notice. This allows me to photograph without overthinking. I try to make images intuitively and save the thinking for later, when I'm editing and sequencing. After shooting, I

group all potential photographs together and look for relationships. I'm most interested in how images are informed by others.

I understand why I use both black and white and color

I use black and white film and high contrast to isolate form and make sometimes subtle tracks stand out. Black and white photographs are also sensitive to personal history; they create a sense of nostalgia used in my work to harken back to my past experiences. The use of color film presents a realistic, natural, and, often times romantic depiction of the hunting experience.



Figure 16 — *Making Tracks on Tracks*, 2016

I understand my choices in the tools I use

I use multiple cameras and film formats to achieve my aesthetic. I shoot with a rangefinder to create a topographic, sometimes abstracted image. I use a single lens reflex to manipulate and utilize a shallow depth of field. I make large format photographs for the detail that 4x5 film provides and to show “the bigger picture”. I understand the nuances of photographic equipment and hunting technique and I balance these tools with chance and happy findings to achieve my aesthetic.

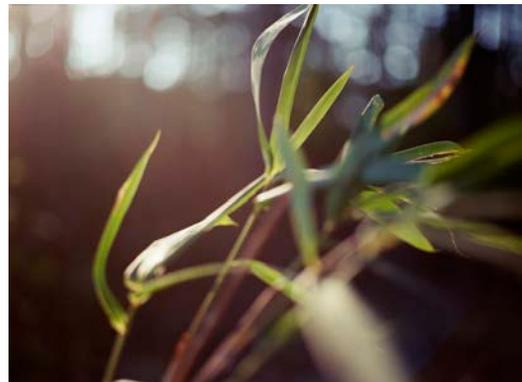


Figure 17 — *Distraction*, 2016

My name is Joe Mannino and I am a light chaser (the first step is acceptance)

I photograph predominantly during golden hour — the time of the day when the sun has just risen or right before it sets. During this time the light is warmer and softer than it is when the sun is higher. This translates to photographs with better contrast and tonal variability. I use these qualities of light to romanticize the landscape, showing my viewer that “even though we didn’t get anything, it was still a great hunt” (Dad—at the end of almost every hunt).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Hunting is full of paradoxes. We hunters care for the animals that we strive to kill; we feel the full weight of taking a life. Yet we celebrate and take photos, smiling next to our kill. That photo is what society sees first, not the years of failure, training, and practice. Not



Figure 18 — David Chancellor, *Huntress With Buck*, South Africa — www.davidchancellor.com

the experience of watching a life come to an end. Not the swollen feeling of sadness mixed with extreme gratitude for all that the animal has provided.

In his series *Hunters* David Chancellor focuses his camera on the “trophy” photo. Chancellor depicts a hunting story that wreaks of elitism, gratuitous spending, and even colonialism. He fails to describe how the hunting industry is responsible for millions of dollars used for conservation. How in many cases, hunting in Africa has helped strengthen local communities, and how it has curbed poaching on several conservancies and preserves. David Chancellor’s work is a perfect example of just how subjective the photograph can be.

Contemporary artists such as, Jesse Burke, Brian Lesteberg, and Erika Larsen depict hunting from an outsider’s perspective. I see them as not being about the experience but merely a document of an activity. While Margaret Lejeune’s work empowers the woman hunter, it still doesn’t describe the full hunting experience. My research portrays hunting as I know it. As an activity that has provided me with much more than food for my table.

Fresh Tracks is inspired by my life and my upbringing as a hunter. I am creating this body of work for the same reasons I hunt: for the connection to my environment and my food, because I have a vested interest in the conservation of wildlife and wild places, and to participate

in the raw, unforgiving truth of life. Humans and nature are not separate. We've separated ourselves. Hunting allows me to understand and acknowledge my role in the ecosystem. I am connected to land, animal, and sustenance.

I straddle the lines between schools of thought; I love wildlife yet I kill animals, I don't subscribe to either of the two ideas about landscape photography. I can find these occurrences throughout almost all aspects of my life. The fact is that I don't see those lines, they do not exist, they are arbitrary constructs of society. In nature, they don't exist. In nature life eats life.

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