

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

## DENNIS HOPPER

THE ACTOR TALKS ABOUT  
HIS PHOTOGRAPHY AND  
THE PART IT HAS PLAYED  
IN HIS CAREER

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S P O T L I G H T

2007 PORTFOLIO CONTEST SELECTION

## JEFF T. ALU



**W**hile the visual evidence of his photographs would appear to confirm Jeff Alu as a surrealist, he's uncertain whether the imagery he so adroitly creates springs specifically from the unconscious.

"I'm not sure where my desire to make these kinds of images comes from," he admits. "I try not to think about it too much. I just go with the flow. I'm happy when I've captured a familiar subject from a different point of view and given it a new meaning of some kind. But what that meaning is, exactly, is not always clear to me."

Perhaps the mood is the message. The mood typically conjured in Alu's pictures is dark and enigmatic, expectant with a powerful sense that something significant has occurred, or is about to. A dry lake bed in the California desert, riven by a seemingly bottomless and endless crack, might be a vestige of

natural catastrophe or presage an imminent cataclysm. The duality is echoed in the scattered cones that seem to mark the rupture as offlimits, yet which could also function as guidelines for the intrepid explorer.

Or consider the oddly symmetrical ruins of an enigmatic structure that resembles nothing so much as a desert acropolis, a remnant of an ancient civilization. The eerie bright patches in an otherwise dark sky seem to suggest an otherworldly presence bidding its time for a takeover bid.

The enigmatic, unsettling atmosphere of such images is achieved through a unique visual strategy encompassing unusual perspectives, harsh contrast and selective blur. This often lends the pictures a dreamlike quality that makes them look more like tabletop dioramas than actual locations.

"I'm interested in finding surreal scenes that look like they could have been created with a

computer but are in fact real," Alu explains. "I also try to project human emotions and feelings onto inanimate objects. When I come across a rock in the middle of nowhere, I get the feeling that it somehow has something to communicate. I try to give that rock a kind of alternate life, to make it more than just a rock, if possible."

Alu, a professional 3D artist and animator, was born in Anaheim, California in 1966. His mother, an abstract painter, taught him to view the ordinary from a not-so-ordinary perspective. He took up photography in junior high, but he was more interested in music and majored in composition.

In 2000, Alu began using a digital camera to document his hikes in the desert, rekindling his love of black and white. His work now takes in urban settings, as well, but he seems most comfortable in desert locations. "I think it has to do with the difficulty of finding subjects in the desert. I like having to

work for what I find, which makes the act of taking photographs more like an adventure."

Despite his use of the digital medium, Alu's pictures retain an organic quality not dissimilar to those made with traditional materials and methods. He keeps his Photoshop work basic, first converting color images to black and white, then using the contrast and focus tools to isolate his subjects within larger metaphorical contexts.

Hence his image of the Salton Sea in which the water, hemmed in by a foreground fence, distant treeline and lowering sky, seems to be retreating before an encroaching existential darkness. Alu simultaneously evokes an intriguing duality, making the end-of-the-world atmosphere of the photograph strangely tranquil and inviting.

"I'm glad when my work elicits such varied reactions as 'turbulent,' 'calming,' 'apocalyptic' or 'inspirational,'" he says, "because it means I've taken viewers, momentarily at least, out of their everyday reality."

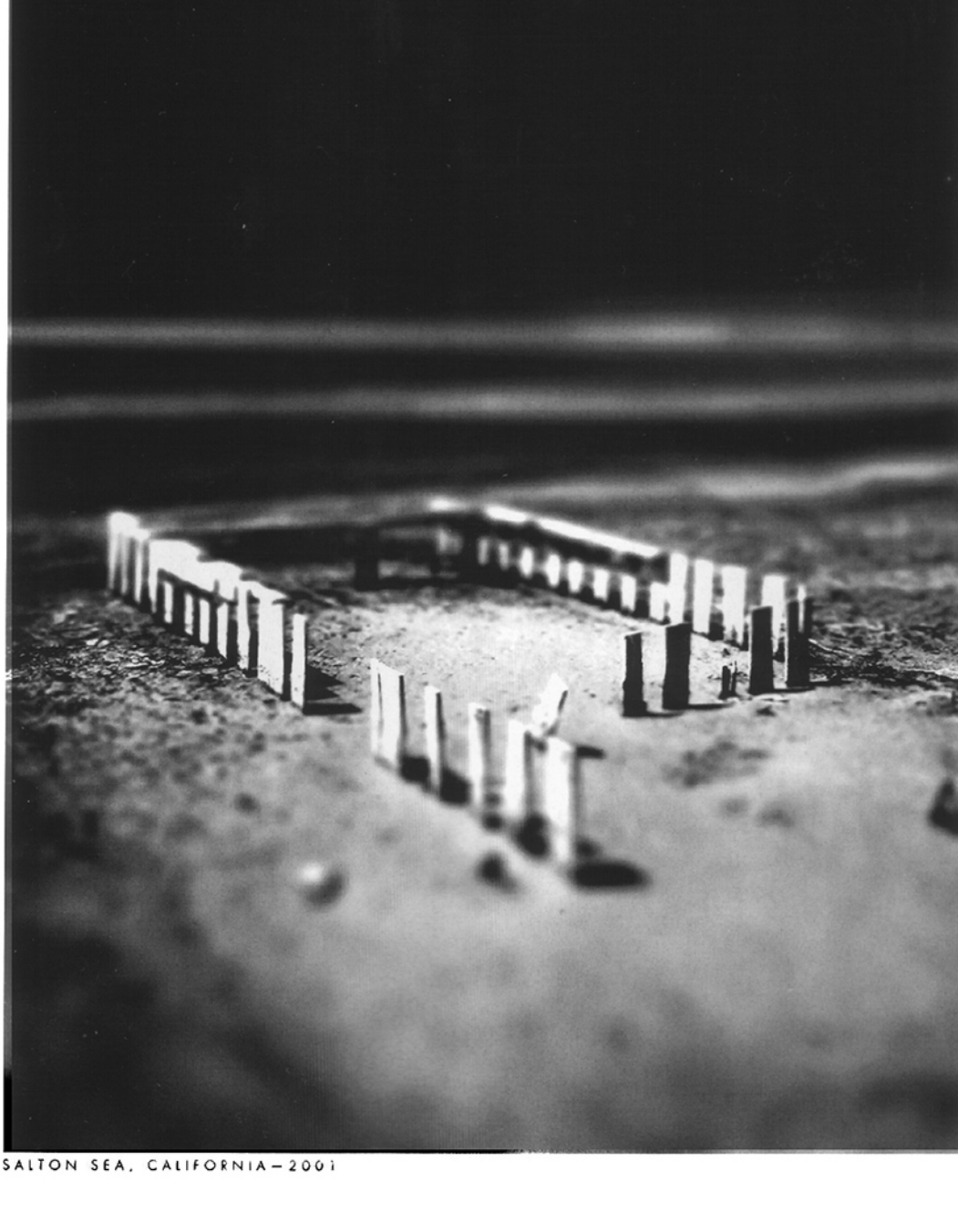
—Dean Brierly

**■ PRINT INFORMATION**  
All are fine art inkjet prints on professional archival grade paper. Each print is signed by the photographer. Sizes range from 8x10 to 20x30 inches, and prices start at \$400.

**■ CONTACT INFORMATION**  
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SELF-PORTRAIT—2007

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SALTON SEA, CALIFORNIA—2001

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EL MIRAGE DRY LAKE, CALIFORNIA—2000

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SALTON SEA, CALIFORNIA—2003



SALTON SEA, CALIFORNIA—2006

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