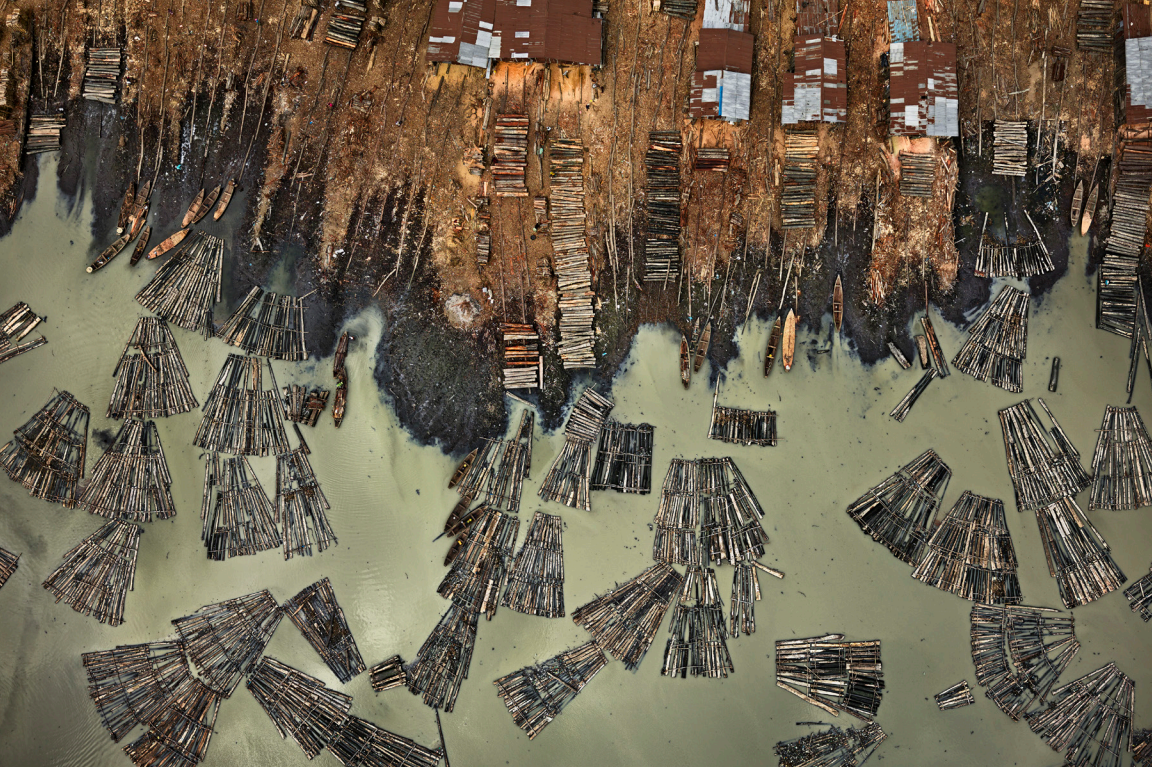


NEW BRITAIN MUSEUM
OF AMERICAN ART



EDWARD
BURTYNSKY
EARTH OBSERVED

NOVEMBER 18, 2022 – APRIL 16, 2023



Detail of: Edward Burtynsky, *Saw Mills #1, Lagos, Nigeria*, 2016. 48 x 64 inches (framed). Private Collection

EDWARD BURTYNSKY: EARTH OBSERVED

NOVEMBER 18, 2022 - APRIL 16, 2023

Stitzer Family Gallery and Robert & Dorothy Vance Atrium

Edward Burtynsky's astonishing photographs depict, in large scale, our human impact on the planet—an endeavor that has led him across North America and around the world, and that has resulted in some of the most iconic, beautiful, and unsettling images of our times. In lustrous surfaces and meticulous detail, Burtynsky reveals to us places that are outside of our normal experience, but that we partake of on a daily basis through material consumption. For over 40 years, his images of the global industrial landscape have captured surreal, abstract, and even painterly aspects of natural and human systems on Earth—of quarries, mines, logging, dams, oil reserves, water, rail cuts, and global manufacturing.

Regarded as one of the world's most accomplished contemporary photographers today, Burtynsky received his first camera at the age of 11 and sought to photograph nature. As a student, he looked to 19th- and 20th-century photographers, including Carlton Watkins (1829-1916), Edward Weston (1886-1958), August Sander (1876-1964), and Ansel Adams (1902-1984), who explored and documented the North American landscape in all its sublime grandeur. Like his predecessors, Burtynsky has remarked that, early on, he “began by photographing the “pristine” landscape, but I felt I was born a hundred years too late to be searching for the sublime in nature. ... I wanted to...be true to my generation, to the world I

lived in. I decided that what was relevant for our times were pictures that showed how we have changed the landscape in significant ways in the pursuit of progress.” Throughout Burtynsky’s career, he has used his camera to bear witness to the effects of human industry, inviting viewers to look, to discover, and to think. “For me,” he remarks, “these images function as reflecting pools of our times.”

The first major exhibition of the artist’s work in Connecticut and one of the largest in the Northeast ever, *Edward Burtynsky: Earth Observed* examines the artist’s career-long documentation of human impact on nature and comprises examples from nearly every series of Burtynsky’s output from the 1980s to today, including *Mines, Quarries, Shipbreaking, China, Oil, Water, and Anthropocene*. The exhibition will explore the legacy of landscape art, photography, and environmentalism in and beyond America.

Works in *Edward Burtynsky: Earth Observed* are drawn from the collections of the New Britain Museum of American Art, Baltimore Museum of Art, Hood Museum of Art, Middlebury College Museum of Art, Howard Greenberg Gallery, and private lenders.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Edward Burtynsky was born in 1955 of Ukrainian heritage in Ontario, Canada, and received his BAA in Photography/ Media Studies from Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) in 1982. Burtynsky has exhibited internationally, and his photographs are included in the collections of over 60 major museums around the world. He is the recipient of numerous accolades; most recently he was awarded a Royal Photographic Society Honorary Fellowship (2020) and was honored with the Outstanding Contribution to Photography Award (2022) by the World Photography Organization. He currently holds eight honorary doctorate degrees. Beyond his own photography, Burtynsky has also collaborated with director Jennifer Baichwal and Nicholas de Pencier on three documentary films that confront some of the most glaring environmental issues facing humanity, *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006), *Watermark* (2013), and *ANTHROPOCENE: The Human Epoch* (2018), which will be screened during the course of the exhibition.

Edward Burtynsky, *Manufacturing #17, Deda Chicken Processing Plant, Dehui City*, 2005, Chromogenic print, 40 x 60 inches, Edition 6/9, NBMAA, Nancy and Tom O’Neil, Baltimore, MD, in memory of the Honorable John Normandy Reynolds and his wife, Ann McMenamin Reynolds, 2021.29.3



MINERAL EXTRACTION: MINES AND TAILINGS

Edward Burtynsky was born and raised in St. Catharines, an industrial town on the United States-Canada border near Niagara Falls, where he gained early exposure to forces of industrialization and globalization. His father worked on a welding line for General Motors, and at age seven, Burtynsky joined a family tour of the forging plant—his first exposure to molten metal and stamping presses, which were at once mesmerizing and terrifying. After high school he took up jobs in manufacturing, assembly lines, and car factories—experiences that would shape the direction of his photographic work.

Burtynsky's early artistic influences came in other forms, too, and were encouraged by his father, an avid landscape painter. He received his first 35mm camera at the age of 11 and a decade later, the aspiring photographer enrolled at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute in Toronto. There, he became inspired by the great American expeditionary landscape photographers of the 19th and 20th centuries, who documented the American West in its early stages of colonization. Burtynsky felt a similar impulse to explore and photograph the landscape, but one more reflective of his time. A professor, Robert Gooblar, assigned his class to, “go out and make a set of images that speak to the idea of the evidence of man.” For Burtynsky, the assignment proved catalytic. In 1983, following his graduation from Ryerson, Burtynsky received a government grant to travel across North America to document evidence of human activity on the land—a project that has now occupied him for 40 years and taken him across the globe.

Burtynsky's earliest images of human industry depict sites of mineral extraction, including mines, railcuts, and quarries. This gallery features Burtynsky's *Mines and Tailings* series, begun in 1983 and devoted to the environmental aftermath of metal mining and smelting—the process of extracting metal from ore through the use of extreme heat. His initial explorations took him through mines in Sudbury, Ontario, located a few hours' drive from his birthplace, while subsequent images depict sites farther afield. Paired together, these two photographs of mines in Ontario and Australia, made 22 years and half a world apart, reflect Burtynsky's origins and the distant lengths he has gone to document our imprint on the Earth.

MINERAL EXTRACTION: RAILCUTS AND QUARRIES

Burtynsky's early explorations of mines led him to other sites of mineral extraction, including railcuts and quarries. “What I liked about the mining series,” he described, “was that you could really see the impact of that industry—that void was one of the few places you could witness the scale of contemporary intervention in the landscape. I started to wonder about where else that sort of thing was occurring.”

In 1985, Burtynsky, then 30 years old, began making large-format images of railway cuts in his native Canada. Depicting rock walls that had been blasted to make way for the trans-national railroad tracks, the images evoke scars across the landscape or even abstract paintings. Within a few years, Burtynsky's interest drew him to more expansive sites of rock extraction: “I thought of our cities, which are made from stone that is kept intact... I wondered if I might be able to find the reverse of a skyscraper somewhere, an inverted pyramid where the stone blocks were removed. Quarries, therefore became the first series where I started purely with an idea.”

Lured by reports of spectacular granite and marble quarries in Vermont—among the deepest in the world—Burtynsky made his first trip to the state in 1991, followed by five additional trips to active and abandoned quarries in Barre, Rutland, Proctor, Danby, and Rochester. The experience was revelatory: “I had found an organic architecture created by our pursuit of raw materials.” Burtynsky's Vermont quarry series launched his career and, in 1993, prompted him to expand his sights to Carrara, Italy—the site of one of the oldest and most famous marble quarries worldwide—resulting in his first photographs beyond the shores of North America.

MANUFACTURING: OIL, TIREFILES, AND SHIPBREAKING

In the late 1990s, Burtynsky's interest in mineral extraction—the materials we *take* from the Earth—evolved toward a fascination with manufacturing and what we *make* from those materials. His images began to reflect a concern with oil—the natural resource that fuels modern life and transportation—and the afterlife of its use. “When I first started photographing industry it was out of a sense of awe at what we as a species were up

to. Our achievements became a source of infinite possibilities. But time goes on, and that flush of wonder began to turn. The car that I drove cross-country began to represent not only freedom, but also something much more conflicted. I began to think about oil itself: as both the source of energy that makes everything possible, and as a source of dread, for its ongoing endangerment of our habitat.” That sense of awe and dread, as well as personal accountability, led to his 1999 series of *Tirepiles* depicting artificial mountains comprising millions of used, discarded, and nearly indestructible automobile tires.

A year later, Burtynsky’s focus shifted from the afterlives of automobiles to those of sea vessels being retired from use. “What went off in my mind was, wouldn’t it be interesting to see where these massive vessels would be taken apart? It would be a study of humanity and the skill it takes to dismantle these things. I looked upon shipbreaking as the ultimate in recycling, in this case of the largest vessels ever made. It turned out that most of the dismantling was happening in India and Bangladesh, so that’s where I went.” In 2000, Burtynsky travelled to Bangladesh, to record the dismantling and salvage operations of industrial sea vessels—a practice commonly known as “shipbreaking,” much of which is done by hand. Burtynsky’s images of wreckage, obsolescence, and recycling evoke modern ruins and monuments to our industrial past, present, and future.

MANUFACTURING: CHINA

The world’s most populous country with 1.4 billion inhabitants, China is also the world’s largest manufacturer and exporter and represents around one-fifth of the world economy. The term “made in China” was first coined in the early 1940s, and today, China is referred to as “the world’s factory.” After a decades-long infrastructural boom, the country now has the world’s largest bullet train network, the most supertall skyscrapers in the world, and the largest energy generation capacity in the world. Between 1994 and 2012, China completed the Three Gorges Dam—the world’s largest and most powerful hydroelectric dam—a feat that required the displacement of 1.13 million residents and submerged over 13 major cities, 140 towns, 1,300 villages, as well as 1,600 factories and mines beneath its vast reservoir.

Burtynsky describes that for several years, “I

focused my thoughts on and created work about China. I began thinking about this formidable country as a subject for my photography around the time when the official go-ahead was announced to begin construction of the Three Gorges Dam project. The voyages and resulting images I made these years were as much about my personal need to understand the ecological events unfolding on our planet as they were about the powerful force China is now bringing to bear upon how the world does its business.”

Produced between 2002 and 2007, Burtynsky’s *China* series depicts the country’s burgeoning shipbuilding industry; old and new manufacturing landscapes in Southern and Eastern China; large-scale urban transformation; and the ground-breaking construction of China’s vast Three Gorges Dam. Using diplomatic channels, Burtynsky gained rare access to these sites, offering a privileged glimpse of the vast social and economic transformation underway. Arresting and unsettling, the images depict places that are outside of our normal experience, but that we partake of on a daily basis through material consumption.

WATER

“I began to think about water as a subject for my work in 2007... Unlike *Oil* or *China* projects, with *Water* I had no preconceived notions about what the images might look like. I wanted to find ways to make compelling photographs about the human systems employed to redirect and control water... I feel this project encompasses some of the most poetic and abstract work of my career. I was seven years old when I discovered my love of making art, while painting landscapes alongside my father who painted as a hobby. I loved the tubes of oil paint and the smell of the linseed oil and the names of their colors: burnt umber, chromium blue, cadmium red. When I was 11 I got my first camera and a complete darkroom. I immediately fell in love with photography and never looked back. However, I never lost my love for painting and have tipped my hat to it a number of times throughout my work... The aerial perspective that I adopted for this project, as well as its subject matter, allowed those influences to seep into my photographs.”

Between 2007 and 2013, Burtynsky endeavored to document the way we shape, and are shaped



by, water—a project that led him throughout America, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Iceland, Asia, China, Spain, and India. His images explore water in agriculture and aquaculture, at waterfront and source, and in states of distress and control. Burtynsky's *Water* series creates a compelling global portrait that illustrates humanity's evolving relationship with the natural world and its most vital and rapidly depleting resource.

ANTHROPOCENE

Throughout Burtynsky's career, one body of work has often led organically to another, while revealing greater insights into the impact of human activity on Earth. His photographs record astonishing feats of human ambition and innovation, but also the existence of what he describes as "manufactured" or "residual" landscapes created by our pursuit of progress. Begun in 2016, his most recent series, *Anthropocene*, refers to our current geological age, during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. "I have come to think of my preoccupation with the Anthropocene—the indelible mark left by humankind on the geological face of our planet—as a conceptual extension of my first and most fundamental interests as a photographer. I have always been concerned with showing how we affect the earth in a big way. To this end, I seek out and photograph large-scale systems that leave lasting marks...The work always

leads me to new understandings, and new ways of perceiving."

"These images are meant as metaphors of the dilemma of our modern existence; they search for a dialogue between attraction and repulsion, seduction and fear. We are drawn by desire—a chance at good living, yet we are consciously or unconsciously aware that the world is suffering for our success. Our dependence on nature to provide the materials for our consumption and our concern for the health of our planet sets us into an uneasy contradiction. For me, these images function as reflecting pools of our times."

Detail of: Above: Edward Burtynsky, *Rock of Ages* #8, *Abandoned Section*, Wells-Lamson Quarry, Barre, Vermont, 1991. Chromogenic print, 34 x 41 inches (framed). Private Collection

PROGRAMS

Check our website calendar nbmaa.org/programs-events for details, forthcoming registration links, and updates.

Thursday, November 17 | Members Only Reception

Saturday, November 19 | Collector's Talk by Tom O'Neil

Sunday, December 4, 1 p.m. | Live Virtual Artist Talk with Edward Burtynsky

Sunday, March 5, 1 p.m. | Lecture with Ellen Carey: Back to the Future

Weekly Docent-Led Special Exhibition Tours

Look for announcements on Film Screenings of *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006), *Watermark* (2013), and *ANTHROPOCENE: The Human Epoch* (2018)



ABOUT THE O'NEIL FAMILY:

The O'Neils began collecting Burtynsky's work several decades ago and built their holdings strategically. From the outset, the goal was to place in permanent museum collections representative selections from his projects. In February 2014, the Baltimore Museum of Art announced a gift of 24 images that included several major works by Burtynsky. Later that year, the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth announced a gift of 39 photographs, including six works by Burtynsky.

Following a gift to the Middlebury College Art Museum, the O'Neils, who have strong Connecticut and New England roots, decided to work with the NBMAA to strengthen its permanent photography collection. Gifts in 2019 and 2021 included a total of six works by Burtynsky. Earth Observed will include works from their gifts to all four institutions as well as their family collection.

Edward Burtynsky: Earth Observed is made possible by the Howard Fromson Endowment for Emerging Artists and by the generous support of The O'Neil Family - Baltimore, MD, whose gifts of important photographs to the NBMAA inspired this exhibition. In-kind support is provided by Thomas Mach Interiors, Inc.

Cover: Detail of: Edward Burtynsky, *Shipyards #11, Qili Port, Zhejiang Province, China*, 2005, Chromogenic color print, 41 x 34 inches (framed), Private Collection

Detail of: Edward Burtynsky, *Stepwell #2, Panna Meena, Amber, Rajasthan, India*, 2010. Digital chromogenic color print. 41 x 54 inches (framed). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Purchased through a gift from the Dau Family Foundation; Barbara Dau, Class of 1978, Elizabeth Hoffman, Class of 2013 and Katherine Conway, Class of 2013. 2014.9

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