

# 15 Bytes

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**Exhibition Review: Park City**  
**Salt Lake Reconsidered**  
**Diane Tuft at the Kimball Art Center**  
 by *Hikmet Sidney Loe*

The surface of Great Salt Lake shimmers and glows as only an inland saline body of water can. It mesmerizes you into believing there are great depths and secrets below its façade, waiting for you to slowly eek out their mysteries. What if the façade is the answer, though, wherein looking in a new way revealed questions previously unasked and answers too strange to believe? Thus is the fascination with Diane Tuft's current body of photographs on display through March 15th at the [Kimball Art Center](#) in Park City.

Tuft's passion is photography, more specifically, photographing the land to new effect. She is an avid world traveler, capturing images of jungles in New Guinea, sand dunes in Tunisia, glacial planes in Greenland. Her creative eye ranges over an environment's macrocosm down to its smallest particles; each photograph invites the viewer to witness nature in a new way.

Although Tuft is an artist of many mediums – painter, printmaker, sculptor – it is through photography that we have come to know of her aesthetic passion. For over fifteen years she has focused on the effects of infrared light on her subjects, employing the photographic medium to heighten, or draw out, nature's secrets. Tuft's interest in Great Salt Lake grew as she learned that saline water interacts with ultraviolet (UV) rays in unique ways, which can be captured with infrared film. Salt, water, high altitudes, and ultraviolet light all work to the photographer's advantage.

In 2005, Tuft flew across Great Salt Lake to capture black and white images of the Spiral Jetty and Sun Tunnels using infrared film. (Time for the disclosure statement – I accompanied Tuft on her lake trips, serving as guide as we traversed the lake and Utah's western deserts). Watching her work was an education in seeing. How do we know what another truly sees? Do we know they are viewing an object in the same way we are, responding to that object in the same way? These questions were present as I saw her photograph the Spiral Jetty and Sun Tunnels for hours, since different times of day also affect UV rays in different ways. As I was viewing the waning of the day, Tuft's camera was viewing magic occurring on the land and the walls of Utah's earthworks that the normal eye does not see.

On the aerial trip from North Salt Lake to Rozel Point, then to points on the lake's western shores, Tuft was awed by the mosaic of the lake below her – from dotted mounds of grass near the shoreline, to northern salt evaporation ponds – from crystal blue water and the reflection of endless skies to scarlet red depths under the lake's surface – Tuft knew she had to return to Utah to take images of the lake itself, this time in color.

The large format color photographs that resulted from a second trip to Great Salt Lake, which are currently on display, seem unreal, with colors that appear saturated stemming from land surfaces that we can't easily recognize. Yet Tuft has not altered or heightened her work's coloration at all – we see exactly what the camera saw a few years ago. These photographs show the lake during different times of day, showing off the myriad ecosystems that make up Great Salt Lake. Some scenes are recognizable in nature, such as the monumental



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These photographs show the lake during different times of day, showing off the myriad ecosystems that make up Great Salt Lake. Some scenes are recognizable in nature, such as the monumental photograph "States of Matter," one of the largest in the show at 54 x 80 inches. Here the lake is traversed by pond borders and mountains as it mirrors the sky's clouds. Although the colors appear heightened, we have identifiable markers to ground ourselves in the landscape.

Other lake views appear from another world, giving us no identifiable signposts to hang on to. Abstract shapes swirl unto themselves, colors bleed, landmarks disappear. Viewing these images we see how much we really don't see at all. During the opening of Tuft's exhibit at the Kimball, viewers tried in vain to identify where she had shot these

abstract photographs, as if grounding ourselves in a specific spot would give the image more credence. For this reason the abstract photographs are my favorite: they allow us to "look" at the lake in a new way. Pattern and color take on new life and speak to the incredible system that makes up our unique lake, the largest saline water lake in the Western Hemisphere. The lake is teeming with microorganisms brought forth to life in abstraction. Here we see vestiges of foam, bacteria, brine shrimp, salt, minerals, and maybe more we don't know of, because we see through a lens. The surface of Tuft's photographs, which are hung without intermediary glass, have a smooth glass-like veneer, oddly embodying the sheen of the lake. Each surface reflects back to you yet allows you to see through it. The seduction of the photographic process is complete.

Tuft's unique look at Great Salt Lake deserves time spent in Park City: the lake shines brightly through Tuft's photography. Her works will soon be published in a book to feature a wide span of her nature photographs, of which the Kimball has a copy, with an essay by William L. Fox, one of our most well-respected and vital voices in environmental writing (Fox was recently named as director of Nevada Museum of Art's new Center for Art + Environment).



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DIANE TUFT: *Salt Lake Reconsidered* is in the Main Gallery of the Kimball Art Center through March 15.

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