

SAND PAINTINGS

The Earth At Ernst Tinija Basin

Here is a test of what we bring to the landscape - all of our stuff, our luggage, our culture, our humanness.

It's hot desert in the Big Bend desert, deep in a narrow canyon a mile in from the campsite. This wash runs from the Ernst Tinija Basin - a place where the earth shuttered and crunched and tore layers of limestone in fits of tectonic tension. At my feet are exquisite compositions in sandstone.

Click. Click. Click, click.

Returning home and studying these images, I see their movement, the splash of colors, the composition and flow, and compare them to my experience of abstract painting. What makes me feel this movement and emotion in images of rock? All those art history courses, cultural or something inherent in the psyche? Native Americans feel a deeper spirit in the earth. I don't understand it to be visually cued, but rather carried from generations of living close to the land. They might see this as simple rock - with the spirit to be found elsewhere - or everywhere.

From my background, a thought experiment: These images are formed completely by random layering and erosion - no hand of man intercedes in their creation. Yet as photographer, I have carefully selected and composed them, isolated them in a frame and presented them as a visual experience. Is it just this selection, framing and presentation that I respond to?

I feel them speaking - but from where?

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