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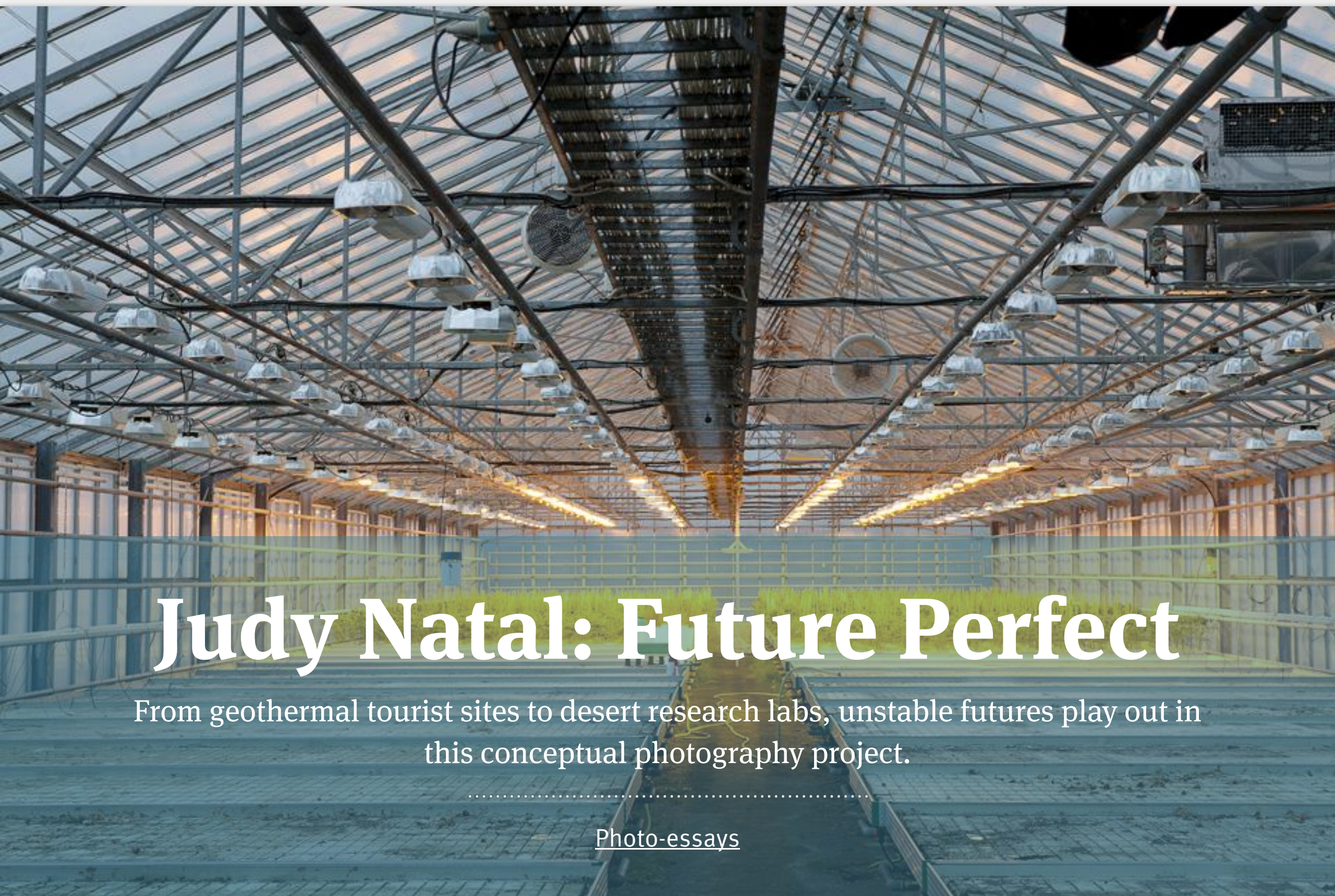
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Judy Natal: Future Perfect

From geothermal tourist sites to desert research labs, unstable futures play out in this conceptual photography project.

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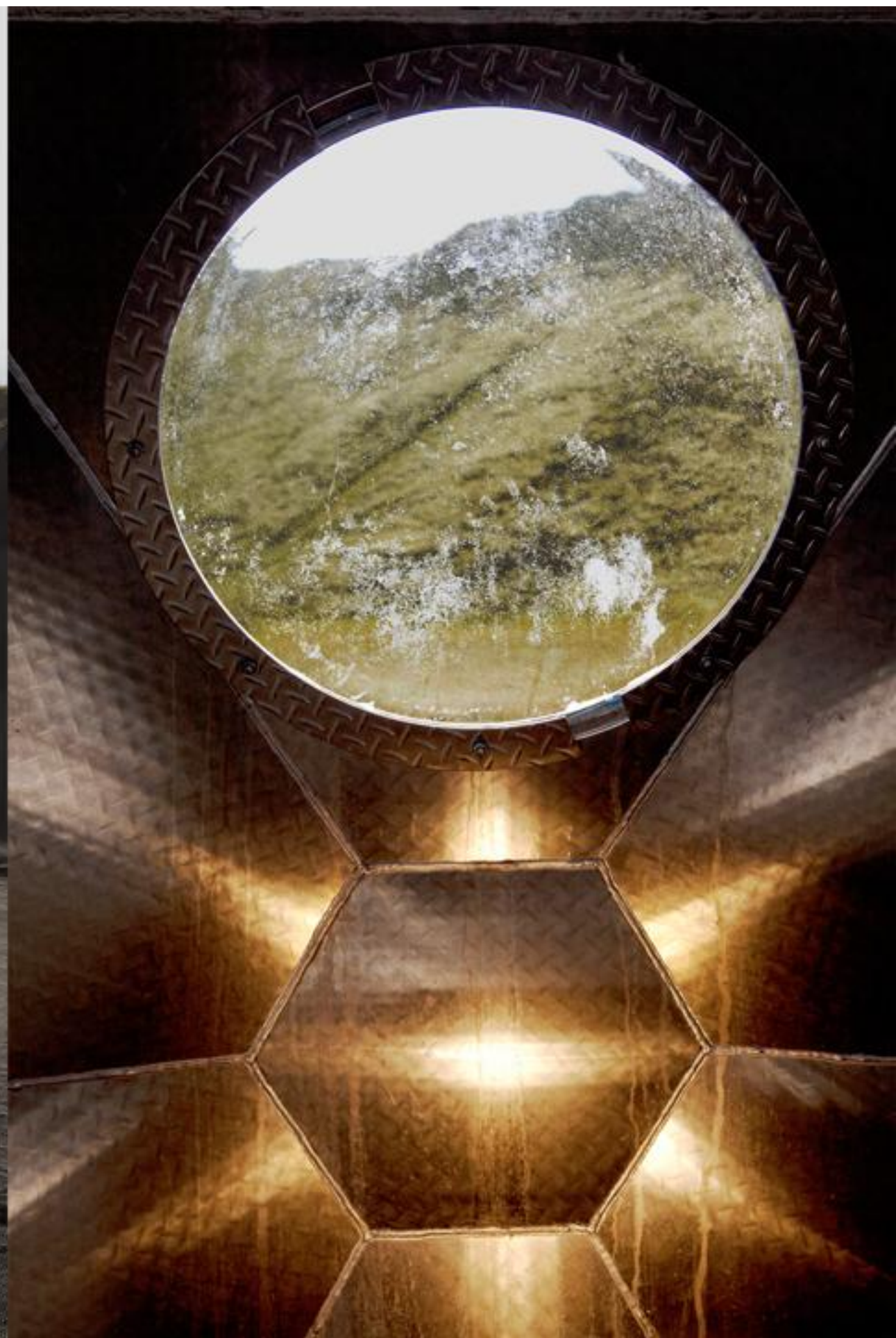
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Judy Natal's photographic visions portray indeterminate scenarios where research architecture, land use, and scientific signifiers all collude to create an air of what the artist calls "futurity."

In one sense a straightforward representational survey of three peculiarly evocative sites—a Las Vegas desert preserve, the closed-ecosystem experimental research lab Biosphere 2, and Iceland's geothermal landscapes—*Future Perfect* is sited in geographies that may be worlds apart from each other, yet in their disorienting capacities suggest human survival through technologized land use.

This is the realm where landscape reality and scientific practice meet the mythologies of tomorrow. As Natal says, "*Future Perfect* provokes opportunities for reflection and analysis by moving poetically between clear, precise imaging to layers of ambiguity and possibility, examining our human interconnectedness with such strong, yet ultimately threatened landscapes."



↑ **Opening photo:** Judy Natal *Future Perfect* 2010, *Geothermal Greenhouse*. **Above:** Judy Natal *Future Perfect* 2040 *Astro Turf* and *Through the Window*.

Alan Rapp: *Future Perfect* seems to deploy visual tropes of science fiction and speculation, but the narrative is ambiguous. What do these settings indicate to you as components of futuristic scenarios?

Judy Natal As an artist, I find my role as a visual fortune teller, time traveler and archaeologist, creating acts of interpretation portraying our hopes and fears about life on earth. The subject of *Future Perfect* is the future itself. Unknowable, I imagine our trajectory mutating what it means to be human, creating myriad alterations to all forms of life. *Future Perfect* is at once a radical vision, cautionary tale and Utopian dream.

The photographs establish unexpected but compelling

resonances between these landscapes, to distill and display our hopes, perceptions and misunderstandings of nature, and suggest both the potential and pitfalls of our future on earth. I portray these sites as indications of our future, illuminating the present moment and the choices we have yet to make.

Moving backwards through time from 2040 to 2010, *Future Perfect* immediately displaces the viewer and subverts the way photographs are usually read. Creating enticing invitations to not know the who, what, where, why, when of the image, *Future Perfect* weaves together several narrative-landscape threads. Portraits of tourists from all over the world made at geothermal sites in Iceland where the wind, the constant force of the steam gushing out of the earth, and humans, all conspire together to portray our fragility in the face of such immense natural forces. They also become metaphors as we look hopefully toward the future. .

These images also utilize humor, gesture and posture; the automobile as icon of the 20th century; public art that displays fears and anxieties about the future; and photographs of children's drawings representing future generations. Some of these were made during *Imagining the Future* workshops I taught while in residence at Biosphere 2, inviting all ages to draw, paint, and collage together, creating an imaginative dialogue while planting seeds for change.

Future Perfect unfolds as I probe more deeply into utopic, dystopic, and ecotopic environments, depicting the moral territory of designed nature and the post-human. My focus has progressively shifted toward an examination of landscapes that have been altered by scientists, engineers, designers, Utopians. *Future Perfect* now continues to morph as I recently explored the almost-human during a month-long residency at the Robotics Institute in summer 2011.



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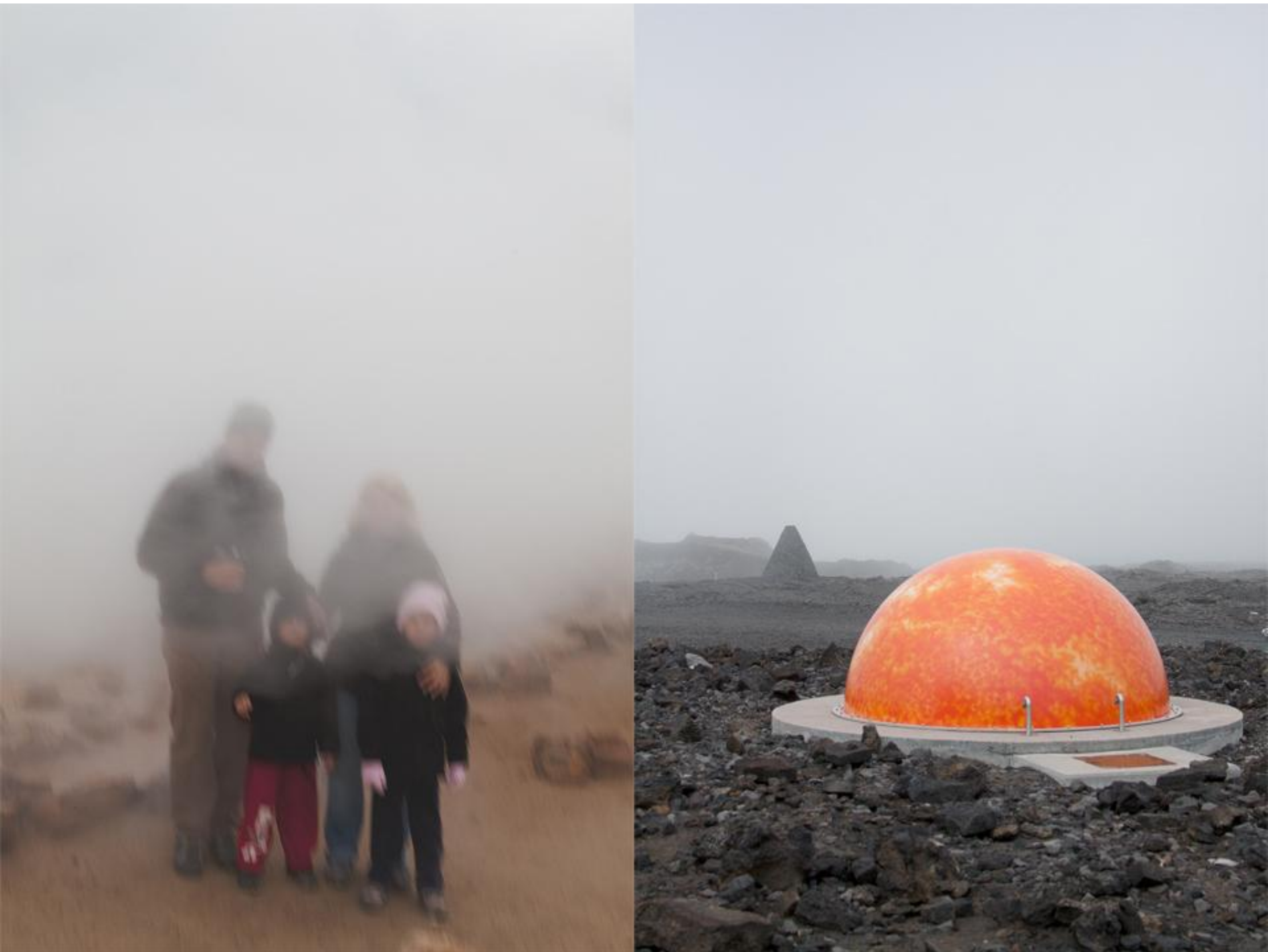
Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2040 Steam Portrait*
Family and Sun in Fog.

You have been artist-in-residence at Biosphere 2 since 2008. How are you engaging the site and what is the experience like?

My experiences there have been amazing! Biosphere 2, a unique, world-class scientific laboratory, now managed by the University of Arizona's first rate School of Sciences, is a one-of-a-kind facility. In 2007 I proposed B2 begin an artist-in-residence program where artists and writers could create a mutually beneficial relationship with the Biosphere 2 team, working collaboratively within the scientific and local communities, while contemplating the questions that built B2: how will we live in the future? Where will we live? If not earth, where?

I first went to B2, like many folks, to take the tour and marvel at this man-made wonder of the world. It was love at first sight. Situated in Arizona's Canyon Del Oro desert, the environment is stunning! I became their first artist in residence in 2008, and I continued my work there by creating their first Open Studio from November 2010–March 2011, inviting the hundreds of B2's visitors from all over the world, into my art-making process, engaging with them about climate change, the questions that are before us, and whether our crystal balls are working.

At once extreme and provocative, the photographs join aesthetic and scientific impulses embracing a wide range of contemporary concerns including the relationships between landscape, ideology and built habitats and human response and responsibility toward natural environments.



↑ Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2040 Steam Portrait Family and Sun in Fog.*

By failing to meet the goal of creating a completely self-sustaining environment for inhabitants for a period of

two years, some called Biosphere itself a scientific failure. How does your depiction of it as a somewhat feral-comment on optimistic visions of a future that transcend the bounds of our contemporary condition through technological achievement?

Biosphere 2 was not considered a "failed experiment" by the original builders and Biospherians or by the current scientific occupants. The knowledge gleaned by its history and experiments being conducted now for future trajectories address very real problems like drought, rain-forest survival, water and soil erosion, with an architectural design influenced by Buckminster Fuller. If we recall, he was considered a dreamer until late in life when the youthful, optimistic 60s generation embraced ideas laid out in his many publications including *Utopia or Oblivion* and *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*.



Your landscapes are unconventional considered next to late modernist observational modes—however skeptical some of that work may be. You include vernacular and 'naif' elements (tourists posing in front of vistas), but lace them with suggestions of catastrophe. How does this narrative-fantasy technique help articulate your vision? Why can't a more 'objective' approach work here?

It is pretty hard to be "objective" about the future! What we do today will define and sculpt tomorrow. On his website *Mind Hacks*, Tom Stafford wrote that "Philip K. Dick didn't come here to predict the future, he came here to change it." I believe that art can be a catalyst for positive change and still be significant as art.

All the best science fiction utilizes the "known" to map and explore the "unknown." At once extreme and provocative, the photographs join aesthetic and scientific impulses embracing a wide range of contemporary concerns including the relationships between landscape, ideology and built habitats and human response and responsibility toward natural environments.



↑ Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2040 RV* and *Steam Portrait Woman and Child*.

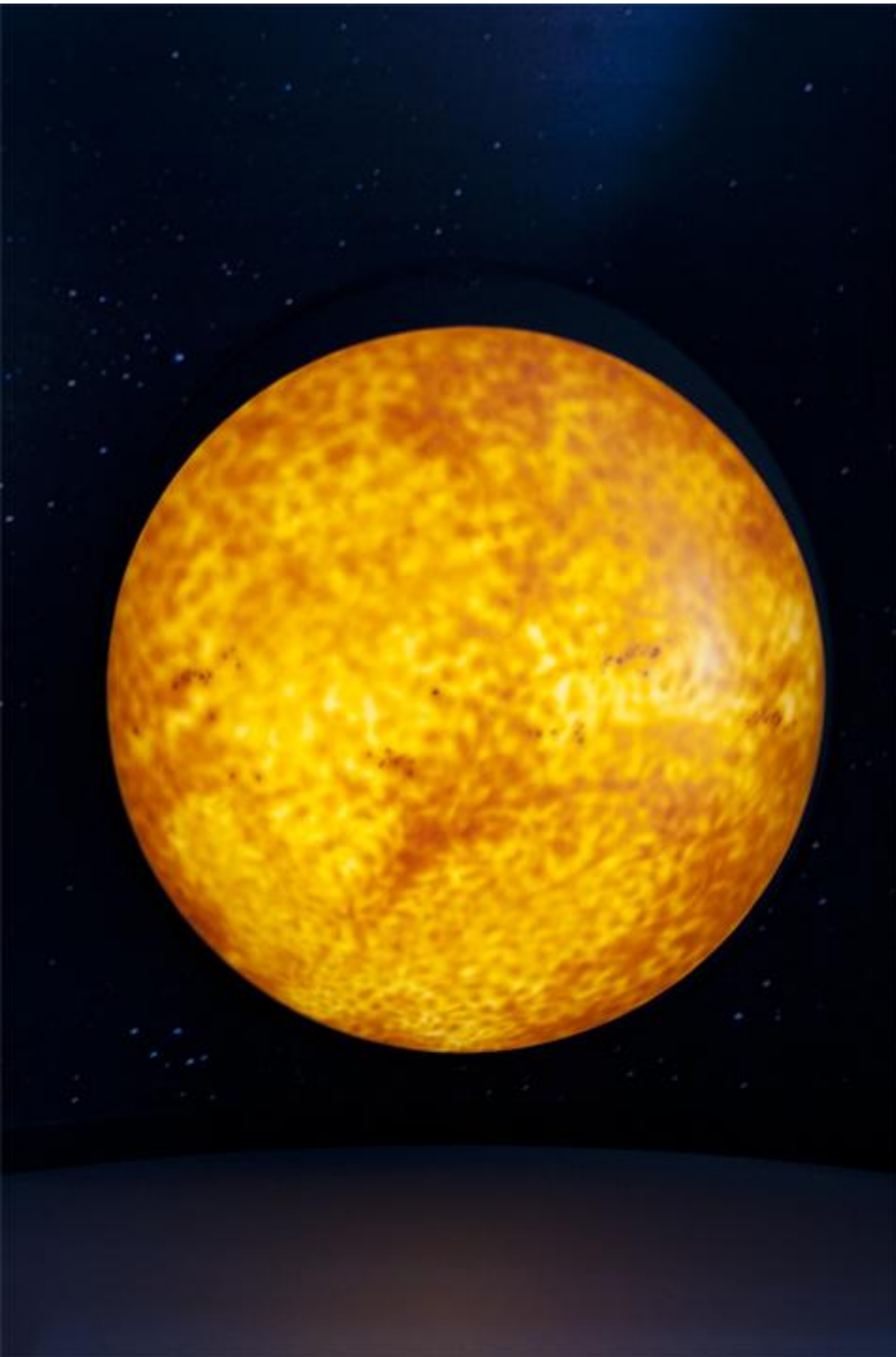
Judy Natal is an artist and professor at Columbia College in Chicago. Her photographs are in numerous permanent public collections, and have been exhibited internationally. She is the recipient of several notable residencies most recently in Iceland, Biosphere 2, and the Robotics Institute for her current work *Future Perfect*.



↑ Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2030 Shakespeare* and *Tyvek Suits*.



↑ Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2030 Baby and Power Plant and Crater.*



↑ Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2030 Fake Sun and Black Glacier.*



↑ Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2020 Steam Portrait with Fox and Stairway to the Future.*



↑ Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2010 Kid's Drawing Stelkur and Ocean View.*



↑ Judy Natal *Future Perfect 2010 Prehistoric Ocean and Steam Portrait Woman With Green Scarf.*

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Daniel Kariko: SpeculationWorld

Aerial perspectives on the real estate bust act as an autopsy on the geometries, and assumptions, of the American suburban neighborhood

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Tuca Vieira: This is not Berlin

Nocturnal, depopulated photographs provide a disarmingly theatrical view of the German capital's many layers.

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Shai Kremer: Fallen Empires

With new work at Julie Saul Gallery, Kremer continues to explore the ruins of Israel and the military sublime.

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A photograph of two children walking on a construction site. The child on the left is wearing a green beanie and a dark jacket with red accents. The child on the right is wearing a dark coat. They are walking on a path of gravel and dirt. In the background, a city skyline is visible under a blue sky with some clouds. The Twin Towers are prominent in the skyline. A suspension bridge is also visible on the right side of the image.

Camilo José Vergara: The Twin Towers and the City

A chronicler of the urban environment documented the World Trade Center over the decades-long course of its construction, lifetime, destruction and regeneration.

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Richard Barnes: Unnatural Spaces

A retrospective exhibition surveys the complications between built space and the artifice of display.

[Photo-essays](#) / Richard Barnes



Monica Castiglioni: a reflection in the puddle

From October 12–25, Galleria Francesco Zanuso in Milan will host Monica Castiglioni's first photography exhibit, curated by Francesca Alfano Miglietti.

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Labyrinth: [Pieterjan Gijs and Arnout Van Vaerenbergh realized an experimental labyrinth at arts centre C-mine](#)



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Corian Charging Surface

Launched at NeoCon 2015, DuPont Corian Charging Surface is a new technology that easily charges mobile devices without the need for wires and plugs cluttering the countertop.

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A visionary architect

The 2015 Pritzker Architecture Prize has been awarded to Frei Otto – who dies in his native Germany on March 9, 2015 – for his contribute as architect, visionary, utopian, ecologist, pioneer of lightweight materials and protector of natural resources.

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Lakefront Competition

The Chicago Architecture Biennial Lakefront Kiosk Competition, is a call for design proposals for a kiosk that will be installed in Spring 2016 along the iconic shoreline of Lake Michigan.

[News](#) / Iwan Baan

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