



ART

Vive La Résistance

A High Desert exhibition is an artistic response to the border wall.

BY STEVEN BILLER



Two works by Chris Sanchez, aka Kas Infinite, are a metaphor for the Mexican immigrant experience.

■ It finally took its toll, the president's repeated call for a border wall. And like any thoughtful artist and curator worth her salt, Elizabeth Tinglof felt compelled to do something. So she drove from her Los Angeles home to Joshua Tree to find the empty plot of land she had purchased 40 years ago and started working on a plan.

The desert is good for this sort of thing: Go to the open land, stare into the horizon, and get some perspective. Only then can you begin to imagine a better way.

"There's something about this place, something that shifts in the air," Tinglof says. "The visual plane is so different. It's serene and kind of desolate, but in this lovely, calming way. You take a long drive and hit those places that are quiet and open, and that's when contemplation comes in, and you're on autopilot. That's how it is for me."

After all these years, her raw parcel, populated by creosote bushes, prickly jumping cholla, and any number of interloping creatures and critters, would have a purpose. Tinglof decided to invite a group of artists to build a "lighthouse" on the property. Not an actual building, but an

amalgamation of artworks conceived in the spirit of what a lighthouse represents.

"The idea of the lighthouse is the opposite of the wall," she says. "It's inviting, it draws you in."

So does Available to All, as the exhibition is titled. It's the first site-specific presentation by Rough Play Projects, a spinoff of Tinglof's L.A.-based Rough Play Collective. "The idea stemmed from my feeling of deep sadness that our country has come to a place where we're building a wall when we're supposed to be inviting," she says.

Available to All uses her land as a welcome mat. Tinglof bought the property, on her mother's suggestion, when she was 18. "My family was always into the concept of land. My grandfather was a wildcatter who sniffed the ground for oil. For me, it was a good way to learn responsibility. If I hadn't made the payments every month, I would have lost the property."

For the exhibition, she called Rough Play co-founder Ashley Hagen and Sky Valley artist Deborah Martin to collaborate as co-curators, and they



selected five artists to create works on the site: Adam Berg, Kellan Barnebey King, Chris Sanchez (aka Kas Infinite), Aili Schmeltz, and Stefanie Schneider.

"It's like a puzzle," Tinglof says. "The artists came together with this idea in mind, and they each added their unique element."

Coachella-based Kas Infinite brings the full breadth of his practice to his sculptural installation, drawing mostly from found materials — a derelict trailer, Spanish palms salvaged from a Thermal wildfire, and lights like those he sees on farms near the Salton Sea — that reference place and his Mexican heritage.

Schneider, a photographer of dreamy, fictional High Desert narratives, wants visitors to frame and capture their experience on the land. Her work, *The Big Picture*, consists of hollow, Polaroid-like picture frames that can be positioned in front of one's camera. "Your placement of the 'big picture' is key to the story, giving the meaning, context, and authorship," the Morongo Valley-based artist says. "Some

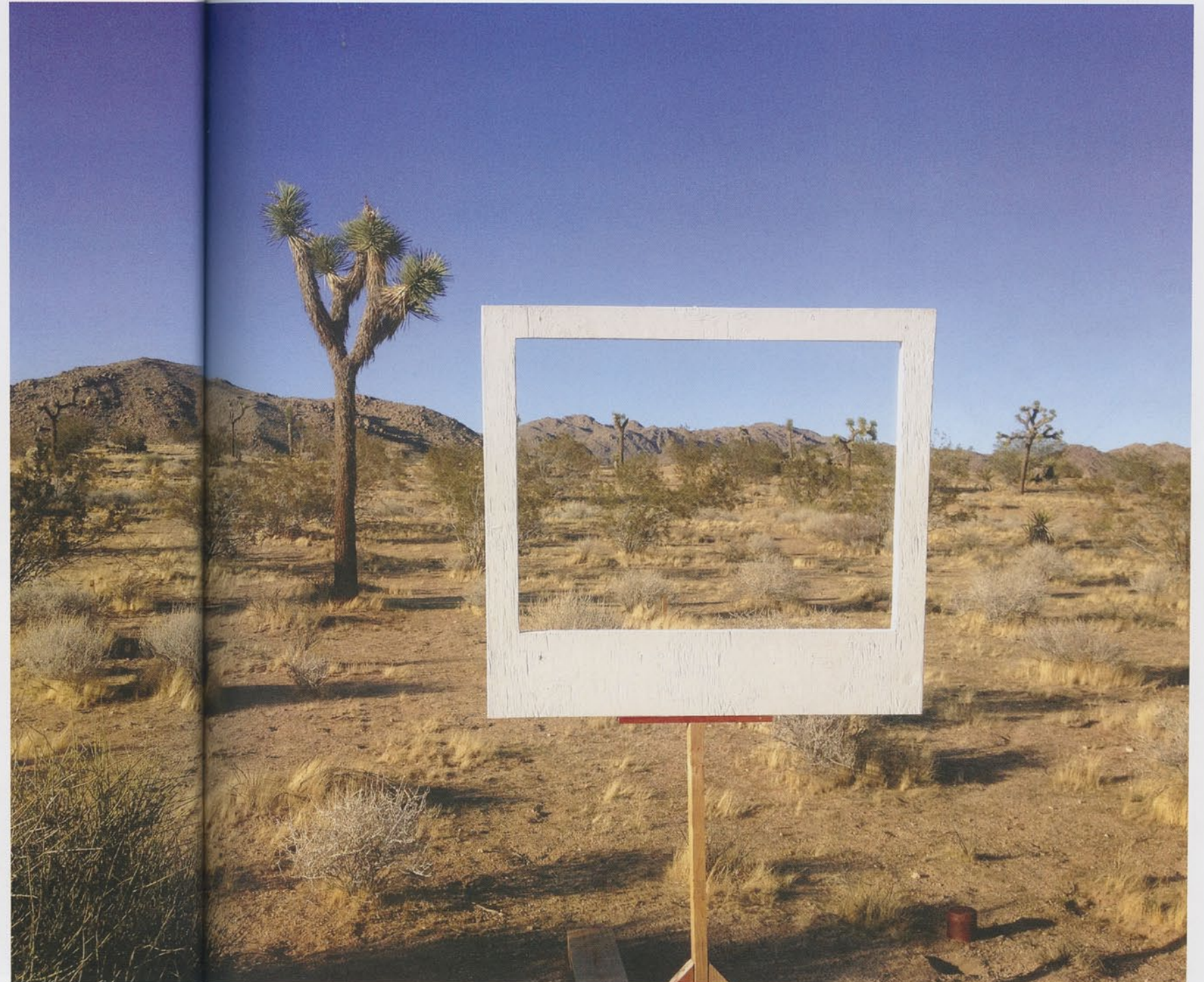
"IT'S LIKE A PUZZLE. THE ARTISTS CAME TOGETHER WITH THIS IDEA IN MIND, AND THEY EACH ADDED THEIR UNIQUE ELEMENT."

use it to reveal and some to conceal. You never know: Does it tell the whole story?"

King draws from childhood memories of the Point Vicente Lighthouse in Rancho Palos Verdes, "a calling point at the edge of the world cast in light, both inviting in its brilliance and dangerous in its purpose," he describes. In the desert, the L.A.-based artist was drawn to collapsed Joshua trees, comparing them to cattle bones littering the desert floor in so much Western fiction. For the exhibition, he cast the branch forms in polyurethane resin, blurring the distinction between the original and the copy. He supports the "skeleton" in a cube structure inspired by the desert's minimalist aesthetic.

Berg, also from L.A., takes interest in the climate, ecology, and sustainability. He constructed *Lighthouse Tree* with

Stefanie Schneider's *The Big Picture* welcomes visitors to tame and frame their surroundings. Above: A rendering of a work by Aili Schmeltz shows how her installations appear to create a void in the land.





Above: A rendering shows how Adam Berg's *Lighthouse Tree* lives off the sun. Right: Sarah Vanderlip's sculpture reflects the raw desert.



tall steel poles, stainless steel rods and spheres, solar panels, and lights to mimic the shape of a tree. "The image of the desert alpine timberline looks from the distance to be a severe line in the landscape, but in reality it is a gradual change," he explains. "It is the point in an environment where the soil is too dry and the elevation too high for tree growth to occur, and yet the Joshua tree, unique and otherworldly in its appearance, flourishes." Solar power illuminates the sculpture at night.

Schmeltz, who divides her time between L.A. and Yucca Valley, offers her *Object/Window/Both/Neither* series of matte black sculpture that appears to recede as a cutout of the landscape, the negative space obscuring the figure-ground relationship.

A sixth artist, Sarah Vanderlip of L.A.,

added an installation for an Earth Day event with Mojave Desert Land Trust. Her steel mirror sculpture relates to *CA Truckheads*, which she created in 2003 for High Desert Test Sites.

All the works will stay on-site through 2018 or until they succumb to the desert's wind and temperature swings.

"You have to expect [the art] will change, and that might be a lovely aspect to it," Tinglof says. "You can visit it multiple times over the months, at different times, in different light."

Martin, the co-curator, says the art will leave no trace when the exhibition ends. Rough Play Projects followed Mojave Desert Land Trust guidelines outlined in *Reading the Landscape*, "a conscious artist's checklist" for creating on-site. "We're all respectful of the land," she says. "The environment has

to be taken care of so it's still here to welcome you."

Available to All is located a couple blocks off Highway 62 at 60461 Chollita Ave. in Joshua Tree. Tinglof exudes a measure of pride because so many site-specific artworks in the desert — *Lucid Stead* by Phillip K. Smith III, *Social Pool* by Alfredo Barsuglia, and the "ghost cabins" by Rachel Whiteread — unfold on private or distant properties inaccessible to most people.

"This is open to everybody, and it's easy," she says. "We involve the entire community, visitors, and locals."

They probably have no chance of stopping the border wall, if its proponents get their way, but they will have done what art so often does: express the mood and emotions of people in a precarious time and place.