

Smoke & Mirrors | Sean Deckert



Haboob derives its meaning from the Arabic word for violent or strong wind. The term is now being used to describe the massive dust and sand storms plaguing the city of Phoenix during the summer monsoon season. The increase of these types of storms is directly related to global warming and the escalated heat indexes on the valley floor – especially within the downtown Phoenix business district where this most concentrated and developed area of the city features intersecting arterial roads, freeways and overhead flight paths. The phenomena is referred to as the Urban Heat Island.

As the sun's rays beat down on the city day after day, the heat is absorbed into the roads, buildings and other infrastructure materials. At night, these heat-saturated materials release their concentrated warmth into the atmosphere, in turn increasing local temperatures. With the rising sun, the cycle repeats itself in a timeless loop long before the city is able to cool off before night sets in. In certain areas of Phoenix there is no place to escape the sun while outdoors. The combination of concrete, mirrored glass, steel buildings, asphalt, and the constant movement of vehicles becomes a heat signature for the city; negatively affecting the local ecology and causing the city's few pedestrians to hibernate indoors throughout the day.

Smoke & Mirrors addresses Phoenix's Urban Heat Island phenomena through a recreation of the epic urban dust storms using still photographs taken in downtown Phoenix. The photographic prints are combined with a lenticular photographic print process incorporating a series of convex lenses mounted parallel to each other directly on the photographic image. A holographic print if you will. The mounted lenses change what can be seen on the print based on the viewer's angle of sight, in turn creating a dynamic layering pattern effect that allows the lens to reveal new perspectives from a variety of viewing angles. As the viewer moves around the image a subtle animation-like effect occurs although most of the image remains static. The dust storm is recreated as viewers walk past the mounted print. A soundscape is included in the installation of recorded street sounds and other urban ambient activity to compliment the viewer's experience.

The project's goal is to render a vision of such a fleeting experience of heat and also reveal statistical analysis that expands the knowledge base of urban design in extreme climates.

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