

Photographer Chris McCaw Uses the Sun to Burn Its Own Image

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Like many photographers, [Chris McCaw](#) is obsessed with the materials and techniques of his trade. He even goes so far as to build his own [large-scale](#) cameras and has developed a unique process of [time-lapse](#) photography that sears his chosen image into each of his pictures.

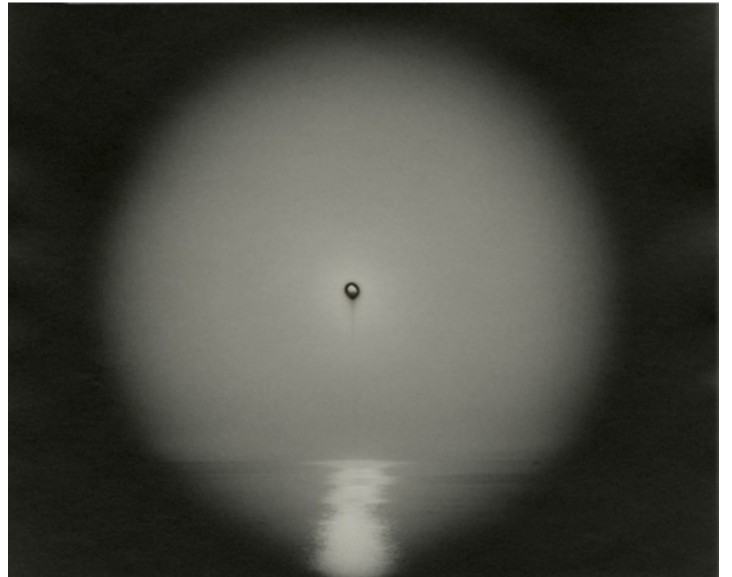
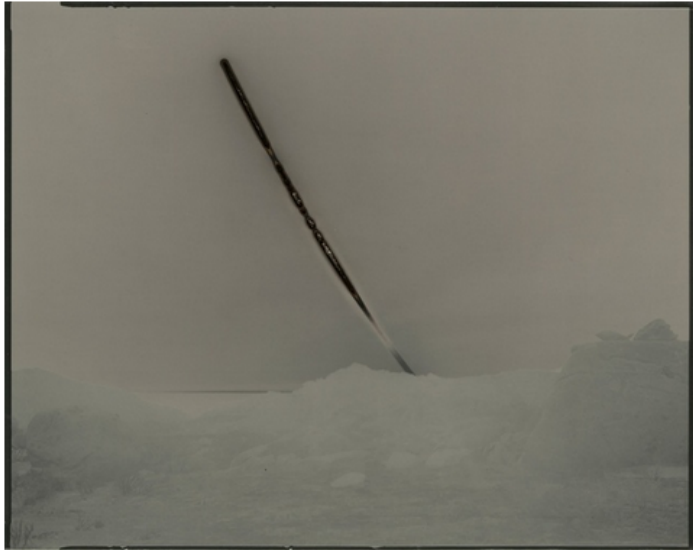
The photographs of the [California](#)-based artist require intense labor in every step of their creation. McCaw builds his own large-format cameras, which create [photogram](#)-like contact prints: photographs made from direct exposure to the exterior world, rather than through the use of a negative. The resulting 8x10-inch gelatin silver prints are [atmospheric](#) and [psychedelic](#). He has documented many subjects, but his current series of pictures of the sun appear as if the light of the sun has etched the surface in black, even burning a hole in the film.

McCaw discovered his technique by chance after a night of revelry on a camping trip. “I usually set the camera up at night,” he [explains](#). “I woke up at like 10 in the morning, and the lens had been wide open. You can see the horizon line ... and the sun coming up ... burning a hole in the film.” McCaw has captured numerous different vistas using this process: in one, the sun’s ascent is charted in a clean arc across the sky. *Sunburned GSP #687 (Pacific Ocean)* and *Sunburned GSP #691* (both 2013), are almost polar opposites. In the former, a dark sun rises over a dark landscape, highlighted with a deep silver glow at the center. The coastline is barely visible as silhouette at the lower left and gives way to the ocean. In the latter, the sun is a thin, burned line in a white, snowy [landscape](#). Here, the image is made entirely of subtly differentiated shades of pale gray.

Another sort of image made by McCaw involves much shorter exposure times and results in the sun depicted as a still dot scalded into the atmosphere, rather than the rocket-like projections that rise over the earth in his other series. McCaw’s 2009 photograph, *Sunburned GSP #363 (Pacific Ocean)*, is a circular [vignette](#) framed in black. The sun shines brightly over the ocean, with no other landscape visible. But rather than the white reflected on the water, the sun itself is a circular black burn surrounded by a pale corona. Similarly, *Sunburned GSP # 334 (Pacific Ocean)*, also from 2009, shows the sun as an eclipse light in the sky, glowing across a field of clouds and over still oceanic water.

Like photographers such as [Thomas Weinberger](#), McCaw focuses on the sun as a marker of time’s passage. The light of the sun marks his images not only in the [black-and-white photographs](#)’ gradation, but also on the material of the image itself.

—[Stephen Dillon](#)



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