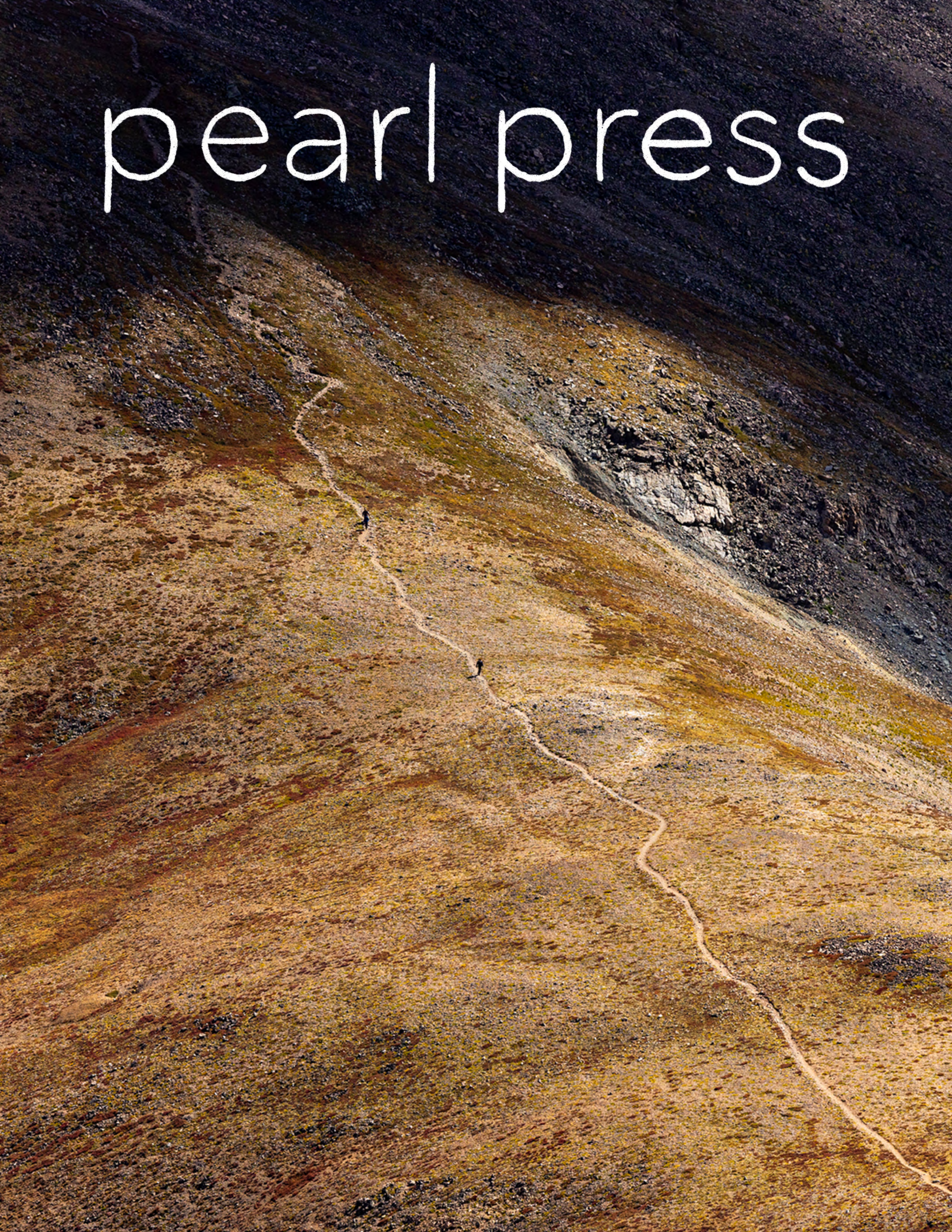


pearl press



ISSUE NO. 24: DUSTIN RANDALL KEIRNS

February 2025

Dustin Randall Keirns is a fine art photographer based in Denver, Colorado. Inspired by the landscape, he photographs nature to better understand our relationship to the planet. Since returning to Colorado in 2015, he has made the state's backcountry a central protagonist in his work, capturing the raw wilderness and natural abstractions that he witnesses on his adventures. Dustin creates imaginative dramas of epic landscapes that explore where humans and nature intersect. This intersection often begins with roads that lead us to trails, granting us the opportunity to experience wild places. Through these adventures we gain insight into our intrinsic connection to the environment and what it means to live on Earth.

Cover image: Dustin Randall Keirns

Curated by: Delilah Twersky

IN REGARD TO NATURE, POEMS FOR COLORADO, MELT

These three interconnected projects explore Colorado's wilderness and the environmental challenges shaping it. 'Poems For Colorado' is a visual ode to the rugged and resilient, yet subtle and gentle state, highlighting its landscapes and water systems while advocating for conservation. In 'Melt,' Dustin focuses on the disappearing snowfields of the Rockies, reflecting on the region's role as a headwater state and the broader impacts of climate change. 'In Regard to Nature' examines the human desire to explore wild places, surveying how our connection to nature is shaped by the changing environment. Together, these projects capture both the wonder and urgency of our relationship with the natural world.

Delilah: Can you tell me a little bit about your beginnings as an artist?

Dustin: I started photographing when I was around 13. My grandfather was an amateur photographer, and he was a really big influence on why I picked up the camera. He always had the newest, greatest camera and the newest, biggest lens. And so I got a lot of interaction with his collection as a young kid. We'd go into the mountains and really beautiful places in the American West and just go take photographs. And that's how I started with photography. As I became a little bit older and started to play around more with certain subjects, I decided that's what I wanted to do as a career. So I went to New York City and attended the School of Visual Arts for photography, where I found a community of other photographers who were also very passionate about what they were doing. I felt like I had found my place in the world.



Above Weather



Stand Up Straight



Snow



Pine



Delilah: Tell me more about your grandfather.

Dustin: I was the oldest grandson out of 14. I spent a lot of time at my grandparent's house when I was younger. He showed me how to use the camera and I was able to learn what he knew about photography and how to edit. We'd go on these photo adventures, and it was awesome to be without my siblings or parents and doing something I loved. As I got a little bit older and I came out, we started to grow apart. It's hard for some older people to understand a queer person in the world if that's never been part of their existence or if they were never exposed to that. So there was kind of a separation there from that point on. That was really tough, actually. I felt betrayed by one of the biggest influences in my life at the time. And then my grandfather had a stroke, and it was really hard as well to see him go through that. I had a lot of animosity towards him but he also created so much inspiration for me. If it wasn't for him, I don't think I would be a photographer. Maybe I would have ended up in some sort of other artistic medium, but not photography.

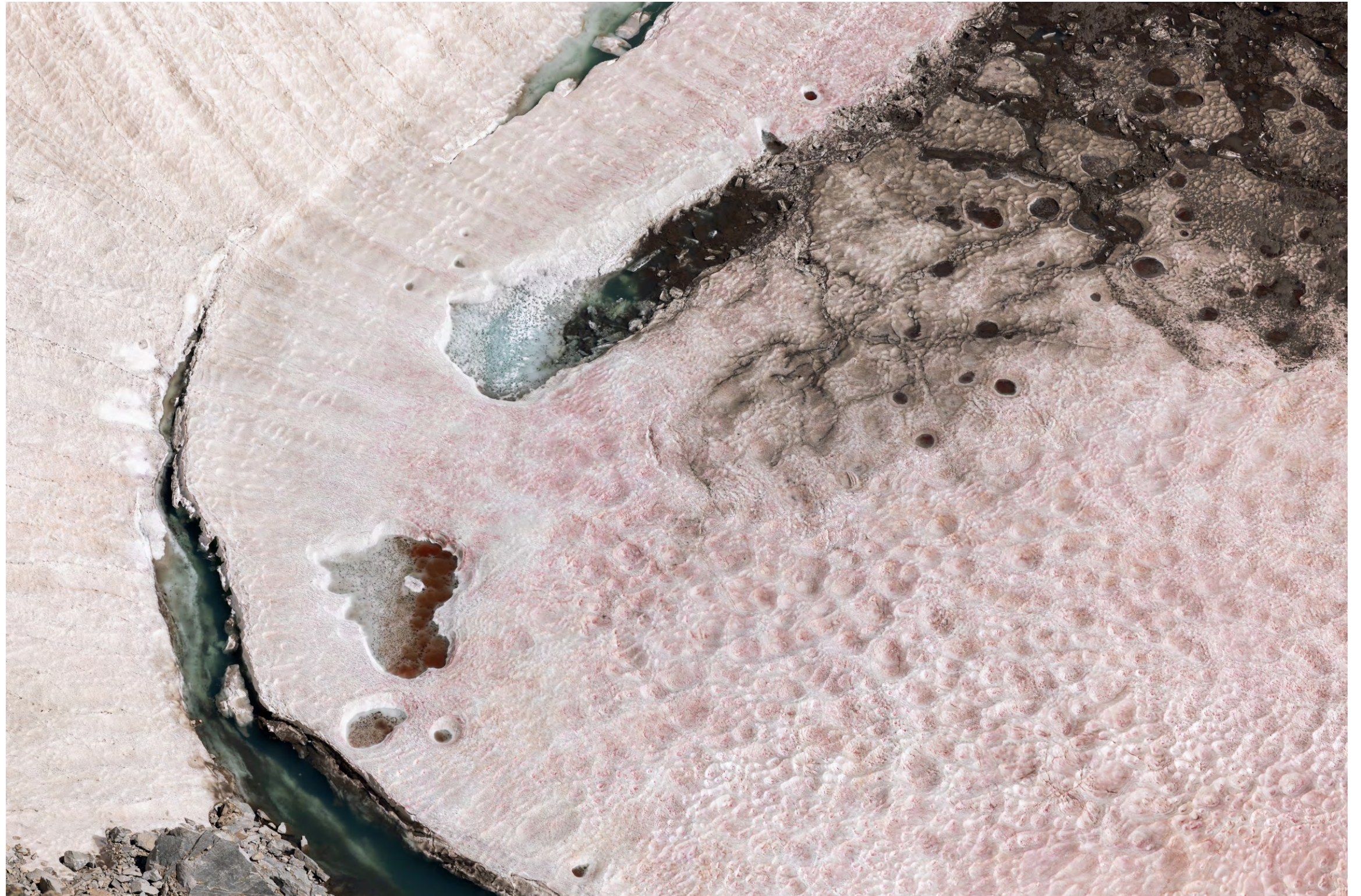


Yellow Brick Road

Dustin: And then suddenly in 2015 something terrible happened that changed everything. He was working on a property with my grandma that he was getting ready to rent out. He had gotten into a dispute with the neighbor, and the neighbor came out and shot and killed him. My hometown, Loveland, with a population of about 80,000 was an easy place to grow up - a non-dangerous place in my mind. So there's been some intense mixed feelings about him. It's funny we are chatting about him so much, because I have plans to photograph his house in the next few months. My grandmother still lives in the same house that I would go to all those years ago. I just photographed my grandma's house, on the other side of the family and it prompted me to think about doing the same for my Grandpa Donovan. That's what we used to call him. I don't think I've really accessed some of those emotions yet. I don't think I've really grieved my grandpa's passing. So I think photographing his house will bring up some things for me that are going to be healthy. And remembering his existence. Sorry to bring that into a dark place-

Delilah: No, don't be sorry at all. It gives context around the work. I think that's why photographing and making any kind of art around grief or around loss can be such a healthy activity, because it helps you access different parts of your brain that you wouldn't have accessed otherwise. It's a very special thing to be able to do. And it's wonderful that he's the one who introduced it to you.

Dustin: I feel very lucky to have found my passion in life.



Temporary Topography

[in reference to being a flight attendant]

I love to climb mountains because of the perspective, I'm sure it comes from being in the air so much. My favorite routes for looking out the window are the ones from Colorado to the West Coast. Flying over the Colorado Rockies and the Sierras always has me peeking out the window between beverage services. I have found amazing places to hike and mountains to climb by seeing them from the sky and then looking at how I can access them on the ground.



Rough 'n Tumble



Anomaly

Delilah: What brings you to nature?

Dustin: Nature has always been something that I've been drawn to, like a magnet. I keep going back to it. Even if I try to leave it alone for a little while, I end up revisiting what it feels to be a human in the landscape. I'm interested in the balance that nature holds that keeps everything running and in check. It's also an ever changing and evolving place. Water is another pivotal part of the work. The fact that the Colorado Rockies collect the snow that runs into rivers and tributaries that so many people rely on, makes it such an important place. There are big pipes under the mountains as well that pump water from one side of the mountains to the other. I find that super interesting, and just generally water rights in Colorado. That is where the idea for 'Melt' came from in the first place. But it is definitely present in 'Poems for Colorado.' There are some images I took in a canyon on a body of water called Morrow Point Reservoir. This water feeds into the Gunnison River which is a tributary of the Colorado River. In this canyon there is a remote campsite and to access it you have to paddle 2-3 hours, depending on the wind, to get to. Back in the day the canyon wasn't dammed and there used to be a railroad here that ran along the banks of the river. I've seen historic images of it and find it super interesting to take photos in the same place in this canyon full of water that was dammed to hold water. In a warming world, water might become the most precious resource and Colorado is super important for lots of surrounding states in this regard.



Tragedy



Melt



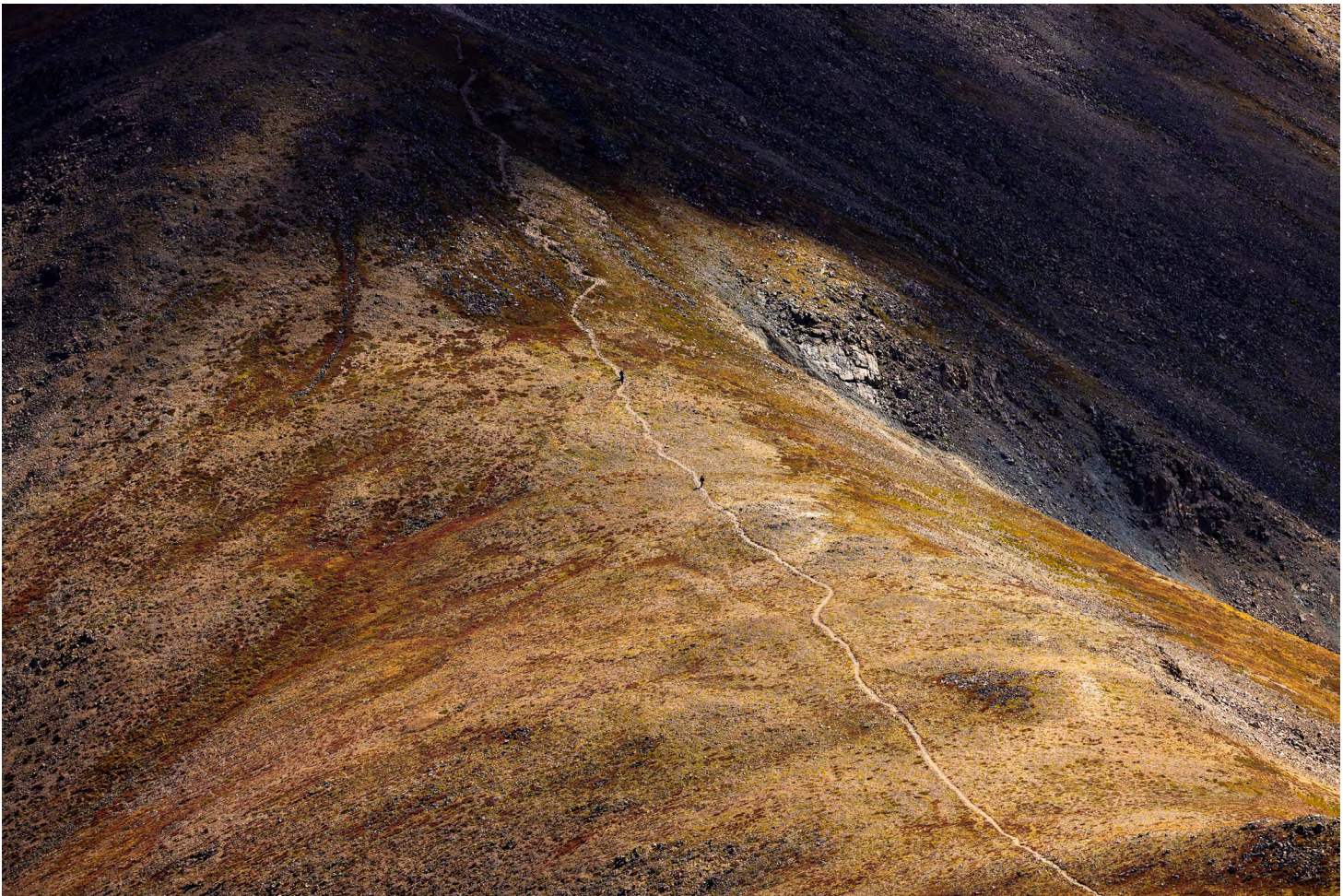
Teal Water Basin



Smokey Bear

[in reference to being a flight attendant]

A lot of times I do bring my camera with me. Although sometimes I feel like it's as inspiring to experience a place by taking it all in without pulling out the camera. You see the world in a different way if you don't have your camera. Those thoughts during the times without my camera create future images.



Ant Hill

Delilah: Are you able to see the effects of a warming planet in your photographs?

Dustin: I think it'll be something we see over time. We'll see certain characteristics about the landscape that'll show its effect. I have a series of images I made last year called 'Melt,' that is about melting snowfields in the springtime in Colorado. It speaks to a larger issue I see for the future, having enough water for everyone. Colorado is a headwater state for 5 major rivers that hydrate so many communities downstream. 'Melt' does touch on the fact that we have a global climate crisis. I think of what it would be like if the Rocky Mountains had no snow on them from the winter. Here on the Front Range we've had an increase of hailstorms and fires in the last couple of years that have been really bad. I think the effects of global warming will be more apparent over time, especially going back to the same places. I do like photographing the same place over and over to see how things change.

Delilah: How does it feel to capture nature in this political moment?

Dustin: When I go into the landscape, everything just fades away. It makes me feel really special to have this time with nature. We have so much going on in the world that it does become my escape in a certain way to go out and climb a mountain. It's been so hard the last couple of days especially [January 23, 2025]. I've been hanging out with my friends and everybody seems stunned and is feeling the shift. There's not really a lot of words to describe how people are feeling, in my friend circle. I feel it too. I definitely feel it. I went out yesterday with a friend to do a little mountain hike. I'm going to focus on connecting with my friends for the next four years and that usually happens most times outside in nature.



Drain the Tub



Wolf Figure



Good & Evil

In the mountains, you have to hang your food so the bears don't get to it. My friends did the bear hang, and I photographed it with my red headlamp. The image just shows the strings that were attached to the tree trunk, you don't actually see the food hanging. I'm going to be making more images like that in the future, something that shows our intentions in the mountains are good. We need to be mindful that this is mother nature. These animals live there, we need to respect them.



Bear Hang

Delilah: Where do you search for inspiration?

Dustin: I was very inspired by John Fielder's work as a kid. My grandpa had a lot of his books. He's a nature photographer from Colorado. Unfortunately, he passed away last year from cancer. Before he passed he donated all of his work to History Colorado. The museum is about to have its second show of his work. I teared up after seeing his last show. He's somebody that I always revisit. I've also been inspired by Richard Renaldi as well; I worked with him on my thesis project, he was a mentor to me. I have a class coming up with him at ICP called Seeing Pink: The Queer Perspective. I'm excited to work with him again. Oh, and I've become a Tate Modern member in the past year. I've been in London a lot for work so I thought why not. I've really enjoyed seeing all of their exhibitions, including Zanele Muholi's that just closed a few days ago. And I love the building! Sense of place is important in my work, so I find it inspirational that the building is an old Bankside Power House and you really feel it when you are inside.

Delilah: Where do you see your work heading?

Dustin: In my thesis work at the School of Visual Arts, I did a project called David and Gabriel. And that focused on the older generation of gay men that lived during the AIDS crisis. And it has a lot to do with me as a young queer person looking at an older generation and asking them questions and trying to navigate my way through life. And also it's about their stories and what they've gone through. At some point, I really want to work on a project that brings together my queerness and this idea of people in the landscape. I think that will be a good next step for me in my work.



Ode to the Sungods



Rich



Sad Little Man



Connected

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Delilah Twersky
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