

# from firestorm to rebirth

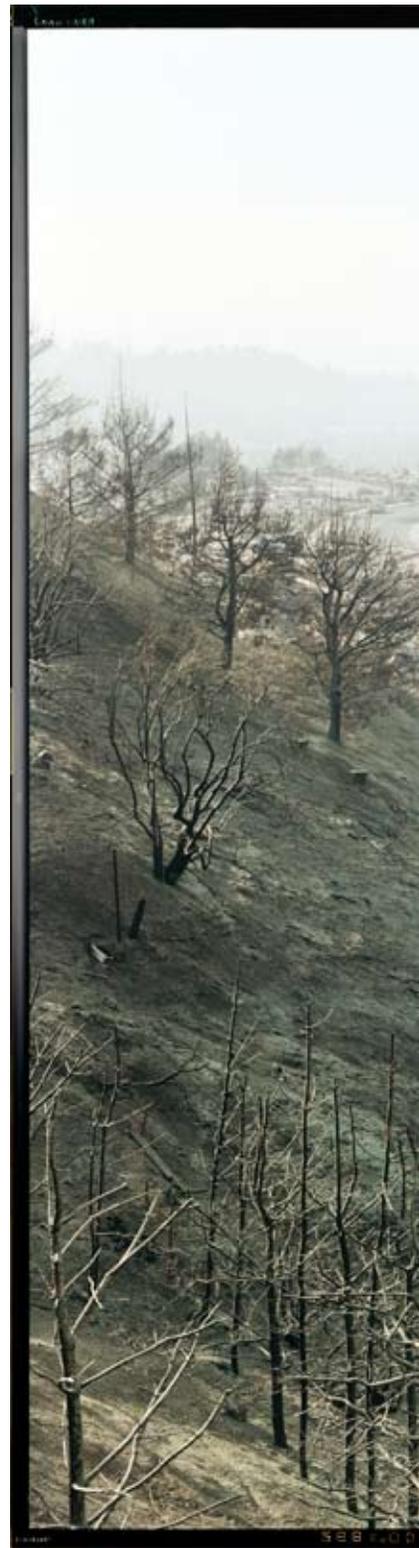
ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1991  
OAKLAND HILLS FIRE, AN EXHIBIT OF IMAGES BY  
CELEBRATED PHOTOGRAPHER RICHARD MISRACH  
INSPIRES REFLECTION AND RENEWAL

Major environmental catastrophes smolder in human memory. From Hurricane Katrina to the recent Japanese tsunami and nuclear meltdown, the devastation of these events is unforgettable; in fact, we mark time by them. We remember where we were, how we felt, and what happened to us and our loved ones before and after.

In 1991: *Oakland-Berkeley Fire Aftermath*, *Photographs by Richard Misrach*, photographer Richard Misrach documents such a landmark experience. The 1991 Oakland Firestorm was one of the worst fires in California's history, claiming the lives of 25 people and incinerating some 3,500 homes in Oakland and Berkeley.

Statistics are one measure of the wrath of that wind-driven fire. Misrach's signature color prints are quite another. The exhibit, which opens Oct. 15, features compelling iconic images—sans human beings yet bearing witness to the profound loss borne by countless individuals and the community they called home. The largest print, made by Misrach himself, is eight by ten feet—a printmaking feat made possible only with the technology of today's giant ink-jet printers.

Even as Misrach's disquieting images raise questions about the causes of the Firestorm, they also commemorate the enormity of the loss. Misrach, a longtime Berkeley resident, has donated fourteen of these prints to two local collections—seven each to OMCA and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, as well as 26 additional images to each institution. Thanks to his skill and generosity, this page in California's history—and our memories of it—will surely endure.



All photos on pages 14-17:  
Richard Misrach, *Oakland Fire Aftermath*, 1991.  
Edition #1/3, archival pigment print.  
©Richard Misrach.



“It is a simple, if almost incomprehensible equation: The world is as terrible as it is beautiful, but when you look more closely, it is as beautiful as it is terrible. We must maintain constant vigilance, to protect the world from ourselves and to embrace the world as it exists.”—Richard Misrach

“With this exhibit, we want to provide a place where people who lived through the fire can get together and remember. We also want people to think about the conditions that created it so this history will never be repeated.”—Drew Johnson, OMCA, Curator of Photography



## changing photography's point of view

Richard Misrach launched his career in the 1970s when, as a recent graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, he documented street life on Telegraph Avenue, images published in his first monograph, *Telegraph 3 A.M.* (1974). He then turned to the creation of “cultural landscapes” with an 8 x 10-inch view camera—forgoing black-and-whites that were then the mainstay of museum-quality craft, and helping to pioneer large-scale color photography with a sociopolitical edge.

Over the decades, the focus of Misrach’s keen sensibility has been described as, “the collision of nature and civilization.” He is perhaps best known for his ongoing epic

series on the American Southwest, *Desert Cantos*, freeze-frames of desert floods, bombing ranges, mass graves of animals, and more. Other topics of his work range widely and have taken him far afield, from the petroleum industry’s toxic wastelands along the Mississippi River and the detritus of Katrina, to the beaches of Hawaii and the pyramids of Egypt.

Misrach’s photographs have been exhibited worldwide and are held in the collections of more than fifty major institutions, here and abroad, including OMCA; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Art Institute of Chicago; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. He has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and four fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, among many other awards and distinctions.

*1991: Oakland-Berkeley Fire Aftermath, Photographs by Richard Misrach is made possible in part with support from Stone & Youngberg.*



## experience the Misrach exhibit

- View the exhibit from Oct. 15, 2011 to Feb. 12, 2012.
- Visit the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive to see its presentation of *1991: Oakland-Berkeley Fire Aftermath, Photographs by Richard Misrach* this fall. OMCA Members enjoy reciprocal admission to BAM/PFA, when showing proof of membership.
- Record your memories of the Oakland Firestorm in OMCA's storytelling booths before the exhibit opens and in the memory book during the exhibit's showing.
- Join Richard Misrach for a California Futures discussion and walk through of the exhibition on Oct. 14 at 7 p.m.

