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Great Salt Lake: Form and Beauty From the Air

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A change of viewpoint can dramatically alter the way we interact with our surroundings. Photographing the Great Salt Lake from the air enabled us to show the beauty of our everyday landscape that often goes unnoticed due to our perspective from the ground. This project also allowed me to challenge the fixed notion of what natural beauty is.

Photographing the Great Salt Lake with its unique mineral build up and other natural formations presents scenes of beautiful color and unique textures. The arid climate and excess salt creates colorful designs and patterns. From the ground these areas can be relatively mundane and many are inaccessible by foot.

Many people flying into the Salt Lake International Airport see some of the seemingly unnatural colors and formations in and around the Great Salt Lake. However these sights quickly move out of sight as the plane speeds along. The natural beauty that exists is rarely documented and seldom given time and attention to be appreciated.

The images from the project were very successful. The colors and natural forms turned out to be even more beautiful and unique than we had originally thought. The photographs made are mostly abstract in nature due to the unconventional viewpoint (see images on following page).

Photographing from a low flying helicopter was essential. We chose to use a helicopter because it can maintain a very low altitude compared to an airplane and can fly to precise locations with ease. Helicopters also fly at slower speeds than airplanes which enabled us to remove the door from the helicopter. This allowed us to photograph without windows or glass in the way. We worked with Upper Limit Aviation¹ and a pilot experienced in helicopter photography was assigned to us. The pilot helped plan the flight path and aided greatly in the success of the project due to his experience and expertise.

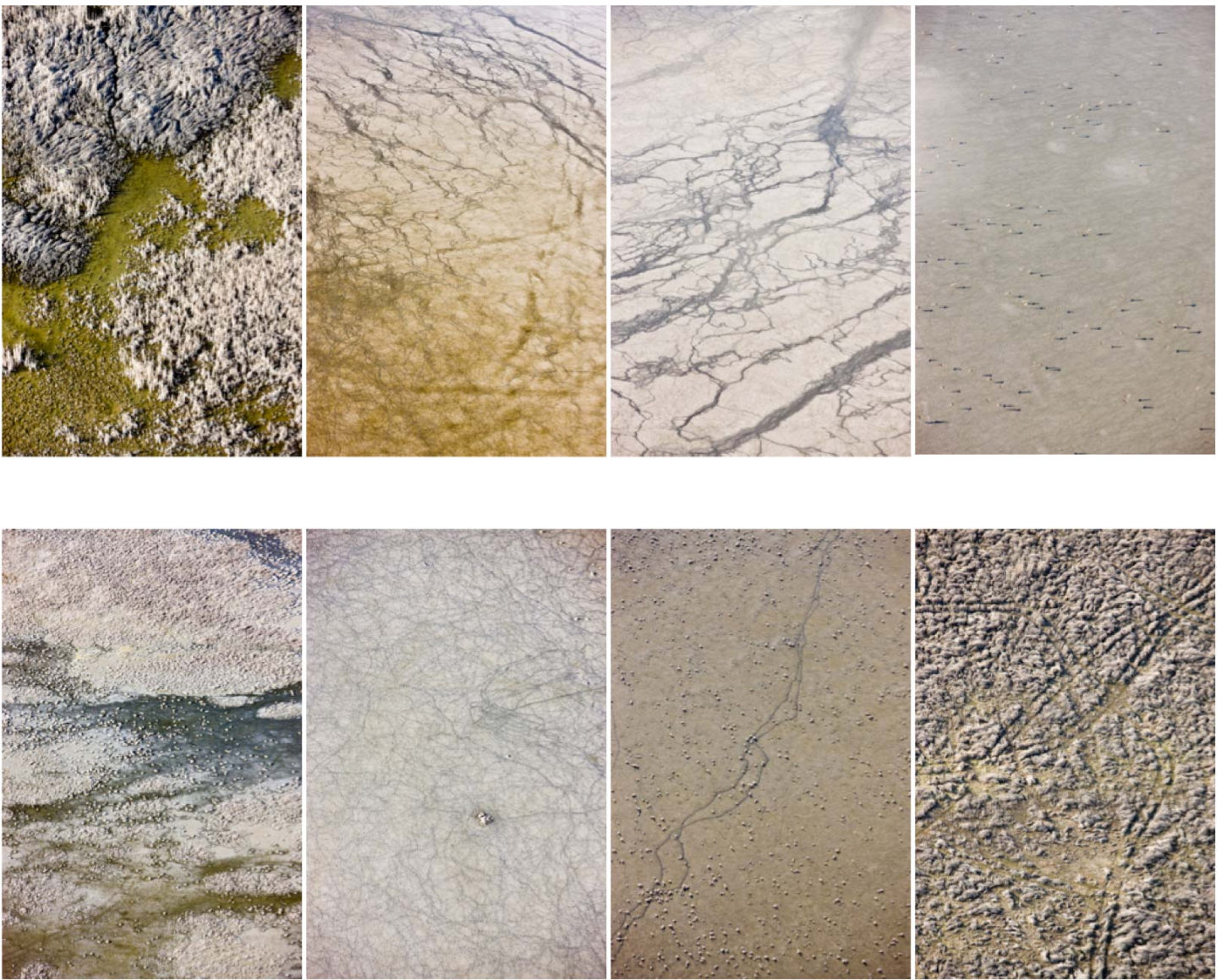
Weather was a factor that we had not originally planned for. Weather called for a number of flights to be rescheduled and ended up delaying the project a number of months. After the delays we chose to make one longer flight instead of multiple shorter flights.

Due to the vibration of the helicopter, camera-shake was a slight issue and caused some minor blurring in the images taken early on in the flight. As part of our research, Vincent Laforet, an experienced aerial photographer, was contacted and he suggested certain lenses and ideas we could try to get rid of camera shake. His suggestions worked and enabled many successful images to be made.

¹ Upper Limit Aviation: 619 N. 2360 W., Salt Lake City, UT 84116 (801-596-7722)

The images have not yet been shown in any galleries. This is due primarily to the delay in photographing because of weather related flight rescheduling. A private gallery in Salt Lake City has shown some interest in the work. The BYU Harold B. Lee Library will also be a possible venue where the work will be shown in 2009. The work has been shown on the Internet on my photography blog² and has received positive feedback. Eight images from the project are presented below.

The project was a success and provided excellent experience and training in aerial photography. I plan to further pursue the project by photographing different locations around the lake as well as different seasons. As I graduate this year and continue my career in photography the experience gained by completing this project was very beneficial from both an educational and a portfolio-building viewpoint.



² <http://mlwphotos.blogspot.com>