

JEAN-FRANCOIS BOUCHARD

*In Guns We Trust*

30 April - 23 June 2019

“Through his surreal series of images and installations, Bouchard parses the extremity of this marginalized gun culture at ground zero, their place of worship. In his brief essay, Douglas Coupland brings us a sharp and insightful take on this culture. This book is a must-have for curious minds trying to comprehend the perplexing condition in which we find ourselves.”

-Edward Burtynsky

Arsenal Contemporary is pleased to present *In Guns We Trust*, Jean-François Bouchard's first solo exhibition in NY.

Jean-François Bouchard's fleet of cinematic photographs, found objects, and video carve out a complex image of American gun culture deep in the heart of Arizona. Eerily lit, taken from aerial views, these vivid images relay the effects of a culture on the land while offering panoramic insight into a social sphere otherwise concealed.

The photographs follow the artist's pursuit into the Big Sandy Shooting Range, chronicling the material and physical activity of gun aficionados in a unique form of tourism. Narrowing his foray into a macro discussion of guns in the US, Bouchard resolves to enter the conversation with precision rather than derision, while nevertheless being set apart from his subjects. Captured in the deep hues of arid sunsets, set against a roving desert landscape, Bouchard's images offer gravitas to the material culture of great destruction brought about by the recreational use of military grade weapons. Embalming these events in the aesthetic of high-production value cinema, Bouchard underlines the performance necessary in the realization of all accepted social norms, no matter how peripheral they may seem. Motor vehicles pocked repeatedly by bullets, desert flora covered in smut from a recent explosion, a flip-flop donning woman flaunting her Uzi machine gun—these are the props, backdrops, costume, and characters of a theater that exists in a nearby America.

As Douglas Coupland writes in the preface to Bouchard's monograph (published by Magenta and distributed by Thames & Hudson), “The images themselves are heightened versions of what are already borderline surrealistic situations.” In their defiant beauty, the photographs make accessible to the viewer a culture that undergirds a substantial part of the US economy, which allocated 54% of all federal discretionary spending on military in the same year that Bouchard set into the desert to shoot. Evoking the controlled ravaging of a landscape, the unwavering patriotism of a select group, and an exaltation of weaponry, all captured in night shot, the resulting images constitute an uncanny recalling of war imagery. Both Bouchard's suite of sensuous photographs and television footage of war are commonplace, making up the fabric of this nation, all the while perpetually set in a landscape apart from our own, decidedly estranged.