



# Stop The Car, Dad!

Nevada Great Basin Roadside Culture  
Photographs by Erik M. Lauritzen

“I find it very difficult to express why I make photographs. I make my work instinctively at this point, and I think I always have. I just know if the work is right or not, and I can’t explain why. If I could explain why I make photographs then perhaps there would no longer be a reason for making them. Part of the creative process, or perhaps the entire creative process, is the journey one takes to solve a problem: in my case a visual one that communicates something within what I think is a spiritual charge I have been given to live my life by.”

—ERIK M. LAURITZEN

## GALLERY NOTES

Based on an exhibit previously curated by the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, *Stop the Car Dad!* is organized by the Nevada Arts Council, a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs. This exhibit is featured in the Nevada Touring Initiative – Traveling Exhibition Program and is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Nevada State Legislature.

## Nevada Great Basin ROADSIDE CULTURE



*Military Balls, Hawthorne*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print

“This exhibition introduces another layer to Erik’s work—that of humor. In previous bodies of work, humor is relatively non-existent; instead there is a serious design and technical approach to the work. I would analyze this exhibition as Erik’s way of getting us to see what is blatantly in front of us. The humor is in our face and although many people may not call it humor, the first rule is to be able to laugh at oneself. It is pure Nevada. It is documentary. It is also indicative of Erik’s style—the composition, use of color and design and impeccable technique. I like to think of this exhibition as Erik’s parting shot of the place he lived and worked in, poking fun at Nevada in a way but as through the eyes of a child.”

—NOLAN PREECE, PHOTOGRAPHER

*Stop the Car, Dad!* consists of selections from Erik M. Lauritzen’s recent series of color photographs taken during his automobile journeys throughout the Great Basin of the American West. While traveling the often-deserted roads of Nevada, Lauritzen (1953–2007) was captivated by the evidence of human presence affecting the Western landscape. From abandoned military installations to roadside vernacular architecture, the sites Lauritzen photographed reveal a certain irony underlying everyday encounters in the Nevada desert.

The series *Stop the Car, Dad!* takes its name from

the moment of curiosity that often accompanies the discovery of a roadside attraction. Whether bizarre, beautiful, or disturbing, these unexpected sites are strangely alluring. Lauritzen’s images record places where development has given way to dilapidation. Now abandoned, these way stations are evidence of the “boom and bust” lifestyle accompanying the mining industry of Nevada. Solitary signs and deserted buildings emerge as intriguing records of history, and Lauritzen’s photographs remind us that even mundane places can be awe-inspiring and otherworldly.

IMAGINE YOU ARE ON A ROAD TRIP THAT ERIK LAURITZEN MIGHT HAVE TAKEN DURING HIS MANY EXCURSIONS THROUGHOUT THE GREAT BASIN LANDSCAPE. WITH HIS MOTHER AS A FREQUENT COMPANION, LAURITZEN TRAVELED TO DOCUMENT THE MANY UNIQUE SIGHTS HE FOUND ALONG THE SILVER STATE'S HIGHWAYS AND BACK ROADS. FOLLOW THIS NARRATIVE TOUR AND IMAGINE WHAT HE MIGHT HAVE SEEN WHEN HE MADE THE PHOTOGRAPHS THAT YOU SEE DISPLAYED IN THIS EXHIBIT.

## Northern Nevada – COWBOY COUNTRY

### Wendover

Let's start the journey in Wendover. This border town between Nevada and Utah supports the historic World War II-era airfield that once helped to train military troops to drop bombs on Japan. Ironically, it also hosts the state's official welcome center. The land is vast, dry, and seems to go on forever.

**Top Photo:** Like the town, this shot is a great example of the irony that often made its way into Lauritzen's work as he captured the sights of the Nevada landscape. Here, in the middle of this hard slab of grey concrete, in the dry, hot desert, is the *New Orleans Style Sno-Balls* cart. This deserted and shut-down cart in the middle of the desert seems like it ought to have children running around it with colorful sno-cones in their hands. What kinds of sounds, smells, and tastes does this image conjure for you when you look at it?

**Right Photo:** Lauritzen must have loved the perspective from this viewpoint—how your eye just gets sucked along the red-lined reflectors along the edge of the flatbed and drawn into the tiny space between the two trucks; and how the mountains and the buildings and the trucks all seem to create one continuous skyline in the background. Can you follow this contour line that runs from left to right across the tops of the roof, the mountains, and the train car?



**TOP:**  
*New Orleans Style Sno-Balls, Wendover*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print

**RIGHT:**  
*Untitled, near Wendover*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print





*Gravel Pit, south of Battle Mountain*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print

“Art is not simply the making of ‘things’ as inspired by one’s feelings or values; it is a culmination of life experience. An artist photographs, or paints or dances because he/she feels a kinship to a particular medium and knows that this will be the way life experience can best be expressed. More importantly, an artist creates because he/she has to.”

—ERIK M. LAURTIZEN

## Northern Nevada – COWBOY COUNTRY (CONTINUED)

### Battle Mountain

Let’s head west toward Battle Mountain, a town that famously has been dubbed the “armpit of America” in a 2001 *Washington Post* article, despite—or perhaps because of—the fact that its main industries are still gold mining and legalized gaming (with some silver and copper to boot). Those Washingtonians just don’t get Nevada! Battle Mountain was the operating headquarters for the Nevada Central Railroad until 1938, and is today known for hosting the World Human Powered Speed Challenge and other annual bike races. Since the 1960s, the town has seen several booms due to mining—first copper, then barite, and then even gold; but these were all short-lived.

The land between Battle Mountain and Winnemucca, the next stop, is dotted with sagebrush, with small mountain ranges off in the distance. The desert landscape is flat, hot, and beautiful; the ever-present vast desert sky is always there to fill Lauritzen’s images with the most amazing blue backdrop.

Lauritzen must have found this spot to be really visually intriguing...the way the gate sits just slightly ajar—inviting the viewer to wonder what lies beyond it—but is chained closed, so you can’t really go in. This is such a strong image, with such a clearly delineated foreground (gate), middle ground (gravel area), and background (far gravel piles and sky). As an artist, he would have been drawn to the interesting juxtaposition of the straight, bold lines of the fence with the organic mounds of gravel in the background...the dynamic forces created by the opposing horizontal lines in the fence with the perspective of the image, which draws the viewer straight into the open gate and off into the distance. Where does your eye travel as you look at this image?

## Northern Nevada – COWBOY COUNTRY

(CONTINUED)

### Winnemucca

The infamous “Winnemucca to the Sea Highway” starts just north of Winnemucca, and runs clear to the Pacific Ocean. This claim to fame has prompted locals to declare Winnemucca as the Gateway to the Pacific Northwest and the Black Rock Desert. Located at the junction of Highways 80 and 95, this small town is named after the great Paiute Chief Winnemucca, and still has an active and profitable gold mining industry.

Notice the timelessness of this scene...the old motel and the bug could be straight out of the 70s, but here they are, captured by Lauritzen’s camera, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. You can just see the mountain peeking over the top of the motel roof. There is an interesting contrast that is drawn straight through the middle of the image; the rhythmic geometry of the windows and doors on the bottom, and the seemingly flowing rooftop, wires, and mountains on the top. Lauritzen loved to find and document these contrasting elements, which provide a certain tension, and bring his images to life. Stare at this photograph. Can you imagine that this is really two separate horizontal images, with the green line that runs from left to right dividing the scene in two?



“When making a photograph the photographer and the camera are no longer two opposing objects but one reality.”

—ERIK M. LAURTIZEN

*Green Bug, Winnemucca*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print



*Once a Lake, near Fallon*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print

“To Lauritzen the desert represents a place that is vast, open, seemingly empty, seemingly without a great deal of life. Yet, on close, intimate examination, one discovers that this is a place where there is a greater diversity of life than anywhere else in this world. These empty walls and planes become the deserts which he offers to us. As we quietly observe their implacable, empty surfaces we begin to encounter a shift in our awareness, a fine tuning. Details start to rise and fall. Colors, forms, tricks of plane and perspective, all gently show themselves in his subtle theater. The photographs become mirrors, too. In their emptiness we look for information, for stimulation. Instead, what we find is stillness and the reflection of our own looking. If we stay long enough, the looking becomes a meditation.”

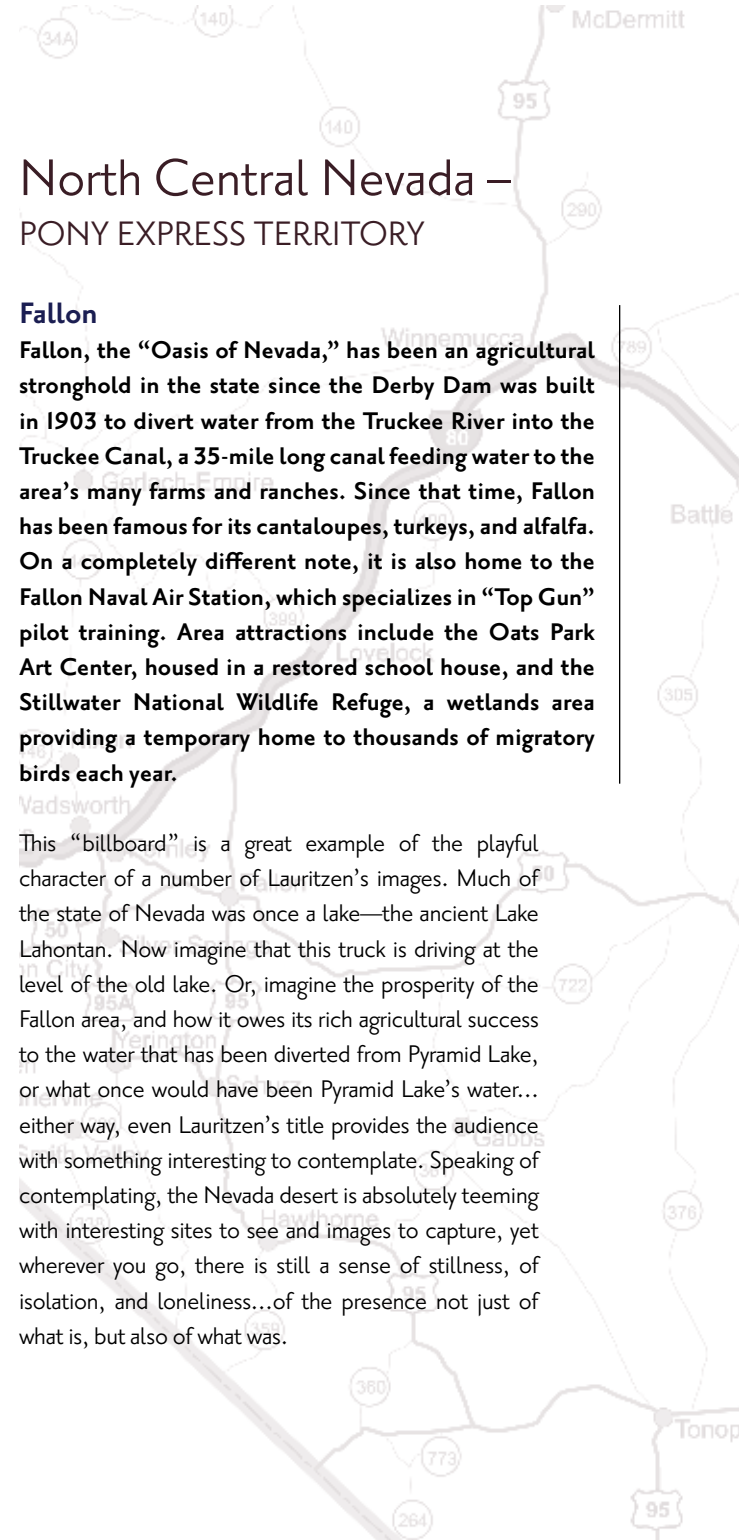
—MARIANNE MURRAY

## North Central Nevada – PONY EXPRESS TERRITORY

### Fallon

Fallon, the “Oasis of Nevada,” has been an agricultural stronghold in the state since the Derby Dam was built in 1903 to divert water from the Truckee River into the Truckee Canal, a 35-mile long canal feeding water to the area’s many farms and ranches. Since that time, Fallon has been famous for its cantaloupes, turkeys, and alfalfa. On a completely different note, it is also home to the Fallon Naval Air Station, which specializes in “Top Gun” pilot training. Area attractions include the Oats Park Art Center, housed in a restored school house, and the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, a wetlands area providing a temporary home to thousands of migratory birds each year.

This “billboard” is a great example of the playful character of a number of Lauritzen’s images. Much of the state of Nevada was once a lake—the ancient Lake Lahontan. Now imagine that this truck is driving at the level of the old lake. Or, imagine the prosperity of the Fallon area, and how it owes its rich agricultural success to the water that has been diverted from Pyramid Lake, or what once would have been Pyramid Lake’s water... either way, even Lauritzen’s title provides the audience with something interesting to contemplate. Speaking of contemplating, the Nevada desert is absolutely teeming with interesting sites to see and images to capture, yet wherever you go, there is still a sense of stillness, of isolation, and loneliness...of the presence not just of what is, but also of what was.



# Northwestern Nevada – RENO-TAHOE TERRITORY

## Nixon

Nixon is home to the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, and sits along the shore of Pyramid Lake, about 35 miles northeast of Reno, at the end of the Truckee River. From Nixon you can see the lake’s turquoise water and some of the giant tufa formations that sit at its edges, including the famous pyramid and the legendary Stone Mother who created the lake with tears of grief over her missing, banished children. Today Nixon is a fairly sparse little town that you almost miss if you blink. The Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Museum and Visitor Center stands next to the local high school, which you can’t miss, with its distinctive pyramid rooftops. Nixon is also home to the Numana Fish Hatchery, which is—among other things—working to restore the population of the indigenous cui-ui fish to the lake.

This austere image grabs our attention. The three crosses mark the sites of graves. We do not know who these graves belong to, but as humans, we are sympathetic and respectful of death. Lauritzen made this image during his final few years, when mortality was most likely on his mind. He adds a spark of humor in his own way though, as he chooses a composition which includes the small chair in the background. How does this image tell a different story than if he had made a photograph that included only the crosses?

## JOURNEY HOME

Erik Lauritzen’s life as an artist ended prematurely, and there were many projects that he left unfinished; many sights that he left unseen and undocumented. You can continue his journey by exploring Nevada’s many locales, and finding the sights that speak to you as these sights did to Lauritzen. The beautiful, the quirky, the colorful, and the mundane—all are a part of the rich tapestry of history, culture, and land that is Nevada.



*The Trinity, Nixon*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print

“My photographs illuminate the underside of ambiguity, a view of reality we often avoid for its complexities. The images are swept clean of local references and communal context: such tight control enables the images to assume larger issues. Each one confirms that the structured unpredictability of reality, that vivid basement of our perceptions, is both an omnipresent and magical subject found only in the corners of our citified environment.”

—ERIK M. LAURITZEN

## A Photographic EXPERIMENT

Try this project and see how imaginative you can be with a camera. Select one object in your yard that is larger than you. Load one roll of color print film, 24 exposures and make 24 photographs of this object from 24 perspectives.

### SHOOT:

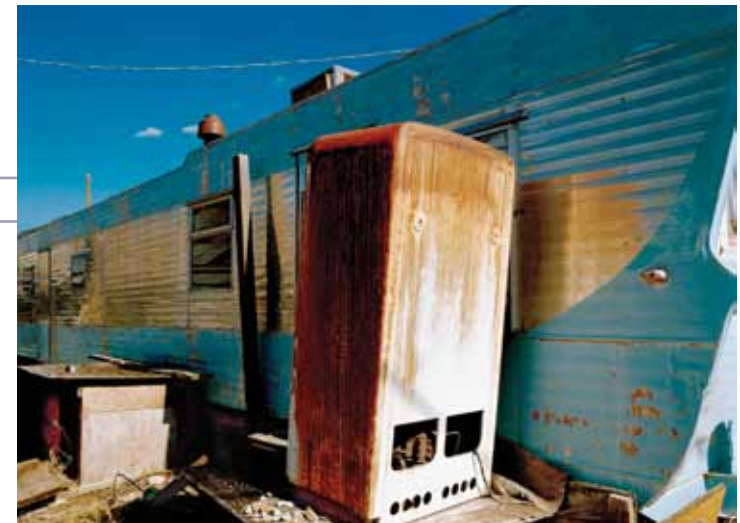
- 1) its texture (close-up)
- 2) its location in the yard (documentary)
- 3) a vertical
- 4) a horizontal
- 5) from a worm's eye point of view (on your stomach)
- 6) tilting the camera diagonally
- 7) framing it (the object surrounded by something)
- 8) looking down at it (if possible)
- 9) looking up at it
- 10) at different times of the day (before the sun rises, as the sun sets, high noon)
- 11) under-expose the photo (make it darker)
- 12) over-expose it (make it lighter)
- 13-24) try anything, odd angles, etc.; it just might look good.

When you get the pictures back, try arranging them in a large rectangle of four deep and six across. How does each picture define your subject differently? Can all 24 make one large photograph—a photo collage perhaps?

This activity was created by Eric Lauritzen for an article titled “Are We ‘Making’ or Simply ‘Taking’ Pictures?” for Datalink. In an author’s note, he states that he hopes that the ideas will “stimulate new and exciting ways of seeing and ‘making’ photographs.” Lauritzen goes on to say:

“When we take a picture, we select certain objects to include in the photograph. When we click the shutter, however, the camera sees everything in front of us. Many times, it sees more than we did. We see selectively, but the camera sees objectively. For our photographs to convey our feelings, we must be aware of what is in the entire frame of the camera...we are responsible for organizing (composing) what is in front of us if our pictures are to communicate creatively...It is through compositional and technical manipulations of our visual world that we ‘make’ photographs instead of ‘take’ pictures.”

The material in Lauritzen’s experiment is obviously dated by his direction to use print film, which, while still available, has largely been replaced by digital photography. The activity, however, is still a great one for budding photographers of all ages.



TOP:

*Untitled, Manhattan*

2000 – 2007

Archival digital pigment print

BOTTOM:

*Untitled, Hazen*

2000 – 2007

Archival digital pigment print



## The Artist's LIFE



Lauritzen's own history was artistic from the beginning. Raised by a painter and a ceramicist, he lived among artists his entire childhood. He was born in 1953 in Carbondale, Illinois, and moved to California at the age of four. Originally drawn to a career in musical composition, he switched

to visual arts in college and developed into an esteemed artist and educator. Lauritzen received his B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute, and later earned his M.F.A. from California State University Northridge.

Lauritzen received much of his practical photographic training through his experiences as a workshop assistant for Ansel Adams, Morley Baer, Oliver Gagliani, and Pirkle Jones. He also printed *Portfolio One* for Ruth Bernhard.

When Lauritzen was four years old, he was diagnosed with polycystic kidney disease and given four to five years to live. Throughout the course of his life, which was much longer than the original prognosis, he received three kidney transplants—one from his father—as well as numerous other medical treatments, and went on to live an artistically productive life.

Lauritzen's mother, Martha Lauritzen, was a huge influence and source of professional and personal support in his life, particularly in his last few years when he was quite ill. Here she shares some of her stories and memories of her son:



"The Stop the Car series was the result of his and my love of the emptiness of the Nevada landscape and the odd attempts of people to change and affect the enormity of it. The subjects were just strange encounters on the road—ephemeral things which caused one to stop and wonder 'Why?' In fact, as he was making the shot of the submarine in Hawthorne (where the Navy trained submarines in Walker Lake), a family in a camper stopped and all got out to observe the oddity—so the title *Stop the Car, Dad!* seemed appropriate.

The images in this exhibit were taken over a series of years. Erik was too sick to travel for long periods, so we went mostly on weekend trips and never made it as far south as we would have liked—so the images are mostly from Northern Nevada.

He taught at Truckee Meadows Community College for 15 years and originated the photo department and college galleries. He was a great teacher and did affect the lives of many students. I think of two ex-Vietnam Veterans who were able to work out post-war stress and one lovely young girl who left a job at a brothel to find another life.

He and I had a lot of fun on short trips to do the Stop the Car series. I was here in Reno with him for ten years and we did as much as his energy allowed. He taught until 2004, when he was given Emeritus status and went on disability. During those years, he taught himself all the intricacies of computer and digital technologies but he always maintained that to be a good photographer one should begin with a strong basis in drawing, design and black and white techniques.

...I do think his work was his whole reason for going on. Somehow the control of composition in his photos made order out of a chaotic world, gave structure and stability."

—MARTHA LAURITZEN



*Trash Goes Here, east of Tonopah*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print

“Erik’s special brand of teaching encourages students to do their very best, to appreciate the value of quality in fine artwork and to practice their art with patience, diligence, and imagination.”

—LARRY WILLIAMSON, CERAMICIST

“I knew Erik about thirty years. The word ‘solitude’ comes to mind in thinking of Erik’s work. As a teacher, he was patient and kind. A deep thinker, he always looked for meaning. Fastidious in detail, his craft was excellent. Nothing was casual, in his art, in his teaching, and indeed in his life. Those of us who knew him, always held out hope that the next treatment, the next operation, might give him relief. It never happened. Through all of the tribulations, his mother was always there for him, with love and constant support. Without her, I know he never could have gone as far as he did.”

—AL WEBER, PHOTOGRAPHER

Lauritzen died August 9, 2007 in Reno. Lauritzen was a beloved and respected member of the regional arts community in Northern Nevada, and he often traveled the Silver State as part of the Nevada Arts Council’s Artist in Residence Program. Lauritzen established the photography department at Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC), taught photography and fine art from 1991 to 2004, and was named Professor Emeritus in 2004. He oversaw the creation of an Associated Arts degree in Fine Arts, the design of a unique art course for adults with developmental disabilities, and the development of TMCC’s art galleries—acting as both manager and curator. From 1991 to 1998 he managed both the Red Mountain Gallery and the Photo/Print Gallery, whose name was changed to the Erik Lauritzen Gallery shortly after his death.

Throughout his life, Lauritzen made significant contributions to his students, his educational institution and his community. His unrelenting passion and commitment was recognized in 1998 when Governor Bob Miller presented Lauritzen with the Governor’s Arts Award for Arts and Education.

While maintaining a full-time academic position, Lauritzen continued to challenge himself as an artist. His work has been in hundreds of solo and group exhibitions in 17 states and is represented in a number of public, corporate, and private collections across the nation including at the Kresge Art Museum in Lansing, Michigan, the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and the Johnson Museum in Ithaca, New York.

A special collection of photographic and digital prints, posters, exhibit announcements, reviews, and ephemera by and about Lauritzen is housed in the University of California, Santa Cruz's Special Collections and Archives. He was interested in having his work preserved at Special Collections, as its archive has major holdings of many prominent Northern California photographers whose work exemplifies the grand American landscape tradition, including his mentors and good friends Pirkle Jones and Al Weber. Jones taught at the San Francisco Art Institute, and Weber worked as an assistant to Ansel Adams, as did Lauritzen.

The UC Santa Cruz photography collection is an exceptionally strong archive that contains close to half a million items. The archive began with a gift of Edward Weston prints in the late 1960s, and today contains work by noted photographers Ansel Adams, Al Weber, Pirkle Jones, Morley Baer, Ruth-Marion Baruch, Philip Hyde, and others, including Lauritzen. Some of Weston's whimsical landscapes were influential to Lauritzen, whose work often documented the odd roadside attractions and dilapidated scenes of locales which had seen better days.



*Passenger Pigeons, northern Nevada*

2000 – 2007

Archival digital pigment print

“A successful photograph raises questions of who we are, where did we come from, and why are we here pointing a box at what we see in front of us, therefore separating ourselves from the very reality that we choose to record.

Making a photograph does so without resort to the vocabulary of the literary language, returning us back to the source and the impulse to communicate about all life. A camera is a means of communication but only when operated by someone who knows how to communicate without one to begin with. It is stronger than words at times and weaker a language when it tries too hard to make a statement.”

—ERIK M. LAURITZEN



## RESOURCES

Special Collections and Archives at the University of California, Santa Cruz  
<http://library.ucsc.edu/oac/exhibits/ms23/intro/intro.html>

Erik Lauritzen  
<http://eriklauritzen.com/>

Erik Lauritzen Internet Portfolio  
<http://eriklauritzen.mosaicglobe.com/>

Erik Lauritzen Resume  
<http://eriklauritzen.com/resume.html>

## CONTRIBUTORS

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The Nevada Touring Initiative (NTI) features two components—the Traveling Exhibition Program and the Tumblewords Program. These programs are designed to increase access to visual arts exhibitions and writers in residency at the local level. Website: [www.NevadaCulture.org](http://www.NevadaCulture.org)

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### FRONT COVER IMAGE CREDIT:

*GAS, near Lovelock*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print



### TOP:

*DJ's Miniature Golf Course, Weed*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print

### BOTTOM:

*Frustrated Painter, Battle Mountain*  
2000 – 2007  
Archival digital pigment print