

# WYOMING DUST



*Brooks Jensen*

*A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication*



**The Earth** is all dirt, *star dust* as they say. Wyoming dirt is special. On the 26th of February in 1954, the dirt of Wyoming (along with my parents and older brother) welcomed me to the planet. Dust unto dust, I suppose, implies that I am Wyoming star dust. At least to me, Wyoming dirt is special.

Visiting family in 1995, I drove past a hole in the ground near Casper, Wyoming known as Hell's Half Acre. Nice tourist bait. Except it didn't work because there simply aren't enough tourists to drive by and be seduced by the view or the ice cream cones. The concession was long ago boarded up and out of business. The hole was still there, so I descended into Hell, made a couple of photographs — and a note to myself to return one day and take a more leisurely look.







Finally, in 2006 I returned for a week of photography with my friend Joe Lipka. A week of photographing dirt. In a hole. In the middle of nowhere, in the middle of Wyoming. There are many clues that one is a dedicated fine art photographer and I suppose this could be interpreted as one.

We spent 8 days — 10-12 hours a day — “working” this little spot of landscape, waiting for the light, racing to catch the clouds, returning to the same spots time and time again to see how the light changed with the time of day and angle of the sun. I made over 200 different compositions, all of Wyoming dirt in an out-of-the-way roadside attraction. Sometimes artmaking is senseless unless you are the artmaker.





Why does one photograph dirt? I'm not sure I can answer that. If asked, I'd say, "To make art." But that doesn't really explain much. In fact, it sounds more like self-puffery and an excuse for wasting time. Or ...

Perhaps it is a way to *connect*, to spend time *without* a reason. To breathe, walk, sit, look, ponder, and yes, even to nap in some comfortable nook. Perhaps just *being there* — for an uninterrupted week — is the real reason to go, and *artmaking* is merely a socially acceptable excuse that appears saner than the truth. I don't know. However, I do know that to *not* go is not an option. Wynn Bullock used to talk about photography as "A Way of Life." Count me in.





























Working usually results in, well, *results* — photographs that very likely may not mean anything to anyone. *Ever*. But to me, they are, at the very least, *evidence*.

More than mere memory, the photographs attest to something concrete — to time spent, to a life lived, to a connection between photographer and place, between photographer and idea, between a photographer and their quiet thoughts. Viewing photographs may not connect the *viewer* to the scene, but it does show the viewer that the *photographer* connected with the scene. In that sense, photographs can tell us something about their maker, the person behind the camera who chose that place, that moment, that composition, that connection as being important enough to expose, produce, and preserve the evidence.

Of all the moments of their life, of all the clicks of their shutter, these are the ones the photographer has chosen to submit as evidence of their life. I try to remember that every time I look at a photographer's work. Perhaps that is the best reason I can offer for these photographs. I hope they communicate something about life and the land, but if they only offer something about *me*, that will have to do.









**Brooks Jensen** is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist's books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 73 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly world-wide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 900+ podcasts are available at [LensWork Online](#), the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with *LensWork Extended* — a PDF based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of seven best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); and *Looking at Images* (2014); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next book will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)*. A free monthly compilation of of this image journal, [Kokoro](#), is available for download.

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