

Can You Spot the Hidden Images in These Psychedelic Landscapes?

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Terri Loewenthal doesn't know what her photographs will look like when she sets out to take them. This is rare—especially these days, when we often know a picture's perfect Instagram filter and caption before it's even shot. It's even more unusual for a professional photographer, but to Loewenthal the unknown is part of the magic. Her images capture the dream-like qualities of the American West, a place where time and space are freed from constraints.

Loewenthal, an East Coast native and self-identified Californian living in Oakland, brought all of that magic to *Psychscapes*, a photo series that explores the romanticism of her adopted home state, overlapping sky, mountains, and rugged terrain to create single alluring images.

And the photographer's process is as enchanting as the images themselves. Setting up shop on camping trips in the eastern Sierras and on journeys in Arizona, Loewenthal shoots her photographs with a Mamiya 645 and colored filters. Then, using self-made reflective optics (she won't fully divulge the secrets behind them), she composes scenes that look like double exposures but are actually single shots, each one a mix of light, reflection, and near and far subjects.

While Loewenthal has carefully studied what makes a good shot for the series—she spent nearly four years perfecting the methods for her psychedelic imagery—there’s also improvisation to her photographic process. When unexpected fog or mistiness shows up, she turns it into mystical haze; when the sunlight is bright, she makes it look like heavenly beams.

"It's very playful," Loewenthal says. "Everything is happening in front of the lens. If I see something interesting, I have to think on the spot how to modify the exposure to tweak the picture. It's very much a live event. And sometimes, it fails."

The process can often feel like painting. Using the landscapes like a canvas, Loewenthal uses the lenses to color them. It grants her an autonomy most photographers don't have: the ability to separate the color from the subject. This independence, Loewenthal explains, is what allows the series to become a personal expression of her sense of place.

"*Psychscapes* is very much about subjective experience," she says. "We all have our own feelings about the terrain and what it would be like to climb into these spaces. I love this idea of offering that to people."
