

There is no water on the Moon

The Mojave Desert is a place where the conditions, soil and climate closely resemble those of the Moon. Since decades, NASA has performed tests in the Mojave Desert, simulating future explorations on Mars and the Moon.

Imagining the Moon's surface is quite a challenge, being here with our feet on Earth, so far away, yet so similar. But from the Amboy point of view, the moon seems to be kind of close. Because of this similarity, I found it fascinating to explore what it would mean to work on the water issue in Amboy, such a small town with its own rich micro-history. During the town's peak it boasted a population of 700 – currently in 2016 only four people remain.

There is no water on the Moon, is related to the first Moonlanding: « Buzz », astronaut Edwin Aldrin plants the American Flag on the Moon's surface on July 20 in 1969, the first landing on the Moon in mankind. I was five years old and along with millions of people all around the globe, I was sitting in front of my grandparents TV (my parents did not have one) staring at the astronaut gliding step by step out of his vehicle and walking on the Moon. Me, my brother and my sister were awoken by our grandparents in the middle of the night to see this, which at the time, seemed to be the most important community event in global history. My brother Maximilian, at the time six years old, was highly impressed. I wonder if his being a pilot today, is not connected to this big moment in his life.

"That's one small step for Man, one giant leap for mankind". There is an ongoing conspiracy – that the landing on the moon never happened but just has been a film shooting by Stanley Kubrick, who himself got secret material from the NASA in return. Another doubt which lead to many speculations is that the American flag, the Star-Spangled Banner, has been waving although this is not possible in the absence of gravity.

I arrived in Amboy, CA in June 2016 with my small sewing machine. In kind of a way I wanted to put myself in the role of the pioneers, the early settlers. A new world was conquered, and men and women coming from all over Europe started to set up families. Life was very hard and failure was part of it. All skills had to be improved and adapted to the new conditions. Crafts were important as they showed to be surviving tools. Women and men did not have a real choice as they all had to work in parallel and on different skills. Working on a sewing machine reminds me of those days, in a very modest way, an eye glimpse onto another story of spaceconquering.

“ The original Amboy school was a wooden structure built in 1903 in the open field between the railroad tracks and National Trails Highway on the west side of town. It was a two-room school with grades one through four in one room and grades five through eight in the other. [...] The school district in San Bernardino paid room and board for students to stay with families in Needles during the week, and on weekends the students returned home, usually on the train or by Greyhound bus. While the school was in operation, a school bus from Amboy picked up the children from adjacent communities like Bagdad, Saltus and Cadiz [...].”*

I wander through the ruins of the Amboy school, not knowing what really happened here. I find a total mess of broken furniture, books, school items, tools. Everything is lying on the ground as if the people were told to leave in a hurry, like it was war. This impression is reinforced by the bullet holes in the wooden walls and windows of the building. It feels eerie, what I imagine to be entering after an apocalypse. Faded chalk remains on the blackboards with children's handwriting. School books with children's names, drawings and posters laying like trash in chaotic piles on the

ground. Dust and sand with mouse-pee are mixed together.

The empty school is a strong image. The relation to the world starts via knowledge transmission and common skills. The abandoned books are testimonies of these first steps. "Because there are long stretches of empty highway in both directions, Amboy was a logical and popular place for travelers going east or west to stop for a break. This was also true for movie stars and other celebrities traveling through on their tour buses."*

"Fly me to the Moon – let me play among the stars, let me see what spring is like on Jupiter and Mars". Frank Sinatra, himself based in Palm Springs, came visiting Amboy School. He was supposed to sing some of his famous songs to the students: "Oh you crazy Moon", "The Moon was yellow" or "The Moon got in my eyes", "I wished on the moon" or "Reaching for the moon":

"The moon and you appear to be so near and yet so far from me
And here am I, on a night in June, reaching for the moon and you.
I wonder if we'll ever meet, my song of love is incomplete
I'm just the words, looking for the tune, reaching for the moon and you..."

"In later years, Lacy Veach, a space shuttle astronaut also visited Amboy School. Mary Bartel, the teacher at the time, recalls that hundreds of people showed up at the school the day of Lacy's visit. The gymnasium was adorned with red, white and blue ribbons, and even the Navajo families from Cadiz arrived for the honor of having an astronaut hold their babies."*

The school closed in 1999, as there were not enough students left to maintain it. The aridity of the desert made people loose hope in a possible life out here. At that time there was no water on the Moon.

Ten years later scientists found water in the form of ice on both the north and the south poles of the Moon. The missions Clementine and Lunar Prospector showed the evidence of more than 6 billions of tons of water at the Moon's poles. There is no water on the Moon is an installation of a textile sculpture, positioned on the remaining flagpost of Amboy School.

The installation in the display cabinet consists in a presentation of a selection of books found in Amboy School. A series of cyanotypes (white images on blue paper) integrate items found in the surroundings of Amboy School in June 2016. The technique of the cyanotype is very simple: the paper is prepared in a way that only sunlight and water develop the image. The statistics and quotations on water were copied by Emanuel Lopez, 18, on paper found in Amboy School. He was staying for some weeks in Amboy with his father.

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*All quotations are drawn from the book by Joe de Kehoe:
The Silence and the Sun. An historical account of people, places and events on old Route 66 and railroad communities in the Eastern Mojave Desert, California.
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