

Kevin Cooley



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## Los Angeles photographer comes face to face with wildfire

By Maeve Heslin  
April 3, 2018



Kevin faced the power of nature head on. Photo by: Kevin Cooley

Last September, the La Tuna wildfire broke out in downtown Los Angeles, ravaging over 7000 acres and sadly destroying five homes. For residents in the area, including photographer Kevin Cooley, it was a terrifying experience. However, in order to come to terms with what had

happened, Kevin decided to face the destruction head on – capturing the aftermath of the blaze in a series of extraordinary photographs.

“The fire didn’t actually engulf my home, but it came very close”, Kevin tells Lonely Planet. “Staying long after it was safe to do so in order to take these photographs, I felt certain my house would burn to the ground. Luckily, it was spared thanks to LA City and LA County firefighters, who extinguished the blaze just yards away from my property. A few months later, we were evacuated again by the Creek Fire in early December. Coming so soon after La Tuna, the emotional impact was far greater, despite being less of a direct threat to house and home.”

For Kevin, taking these photographs was an almost instinctive response to this threat. “My practice is a quest to better understand the human connection to nature”, he explains. “I wasn’t sure how to process the wildfire and its impact on me and my family, without photography. If you ask my wife, she would say I put myself at risk of peril in order to capture some of these images. While that may be true, I can’t imagine it any other way.”

“As destructive as fire can be”, he continues, “it’s a natural part of the ecosystem in the Western United States, especially in the very dry, chaparral covered mountains in Southern California. My photographs have always been about aestheticising our relationship to nature, in an attempt to highlight that no matter what we do to alter our planet, for better or for worse, nature will ultimately be in control.” Kevin’s photographs of La Tuna, titled ‘Still Burning’, will be exhibiting at the Kopeikin Gallery in LA until 7 April.