



OCT 30 **JOEL STERNFELD: AMERICAN PROSPECTS | THE BRUCE MUSEUM**

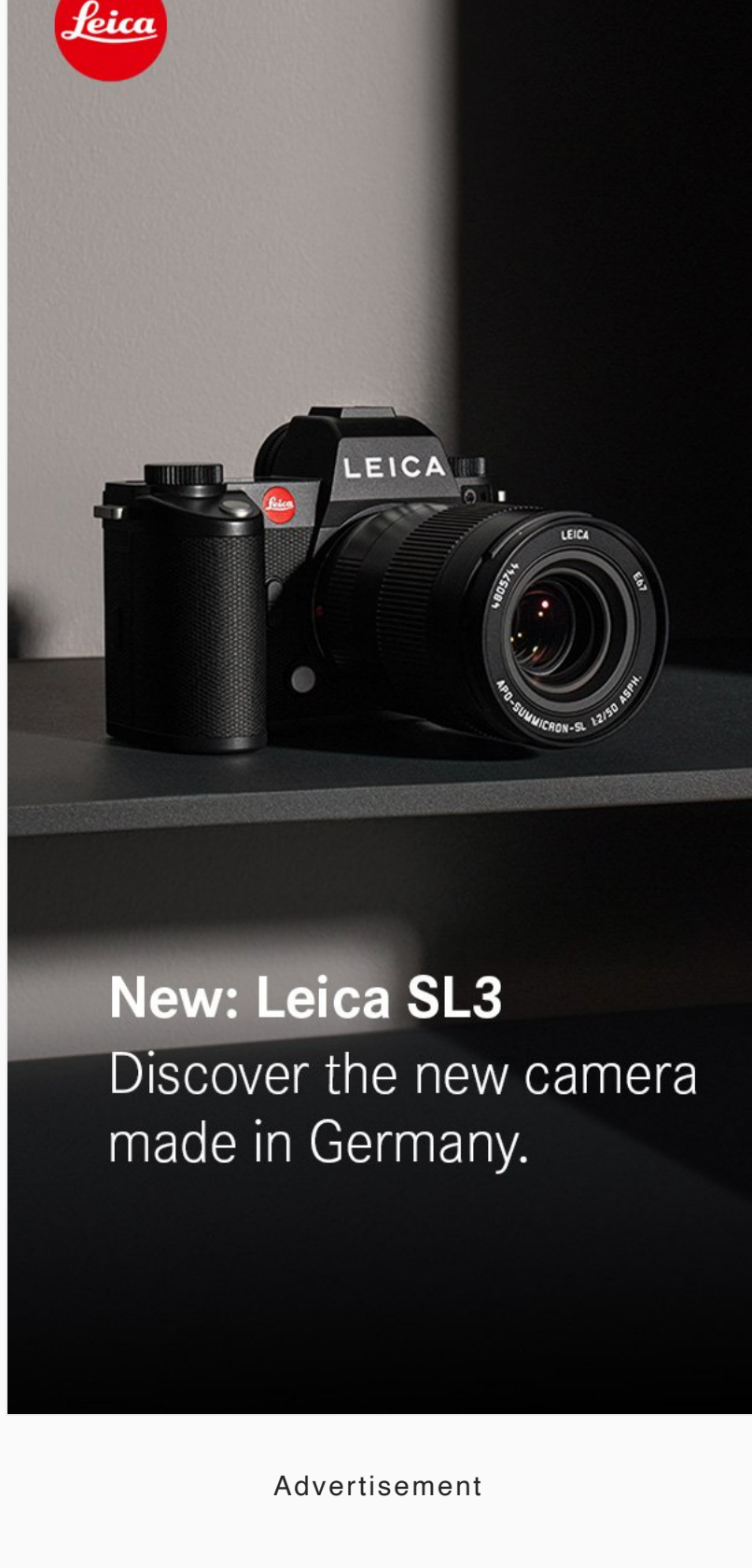
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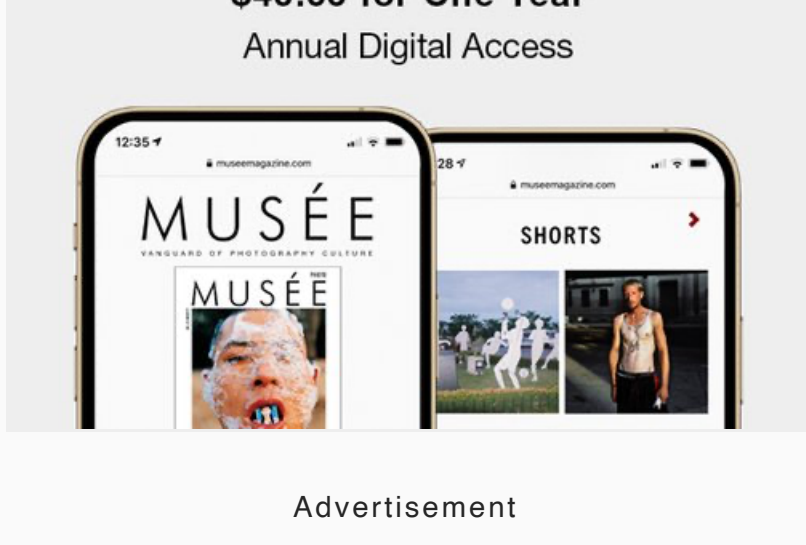
Joel Sternfeld, *Glen Canyon Dam, Page, Arizona*, 1983. Courtesy of the artist and the Bruce Museum. © Joel Sternfeld

Written by Giuliana Brida

Joel Sternfeld doesn't just capture America; he exposes it. With each photograph, he peels back layers of familiar landscapes to reveal the ironies, contradictions, and hidden stories that shape the American experience. A pioneer in color photography, Sternfeld's lens turns everyday scenes into striking narratives where beauty meets decay, and hope intersects with abandonment. His images, timeless, yet hauntingly relevant—a cross-country journey that invites us to look deeper and question what lies beneath the surface.



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Joel Sternfeld, *Pendleton, Oregon*, 1980. Courtesy of the artist and the Bruce Museum. © Joel Sternfeld

The Bruce Museum's *American Prospects* offers a rare encounter with Joel Sternfeld's profound exploration of the American Dream—its triumphs, fractures, and quiet absurdities. Since its first release in 1987, this series has stood as a seminal work in color photography, redefining the medium and reshaping our perception of American landscapes. Like his contemporaries William Eggleston and Stephen Shore, Sternfeld used color to move beyond documentation, crafting layered narratives that invite both reflection and critique. On view through January 5, 2025, Sternfeld's lens frames America as it is—flawed, resilient, and enduringly hopeful.



Joel Sternfeld, *Abandoned Uranium Refinery, Near Tuba City, Arizona, Navajo Nation*, 1982. Courtesy of the artist and the Bruce Museum. © Joel Sternfeld

In *Abandoned Uranium Refinery, Near Tuba City, Arizona*, Sternfeld confronts us with a haunting testament to industrial intrusion on sacred land. The muted pinks and warm ochres spread across the landscape, evoking the natural beauty of the Navajo Nation's desert. Yet, at its heart, the photograph holds a darker, fractured reality—the scars of industry etched deeply into the land, an intrusion upon both the environment and the community's heritage. Sternfeld's light is gentle yet harsh, and his careful composition balances the serenity of nature against the unease of contamination. It's a scene that commands attention, evoking reverence while quietly asking us to grapple with the unsettling impact of human intervention.



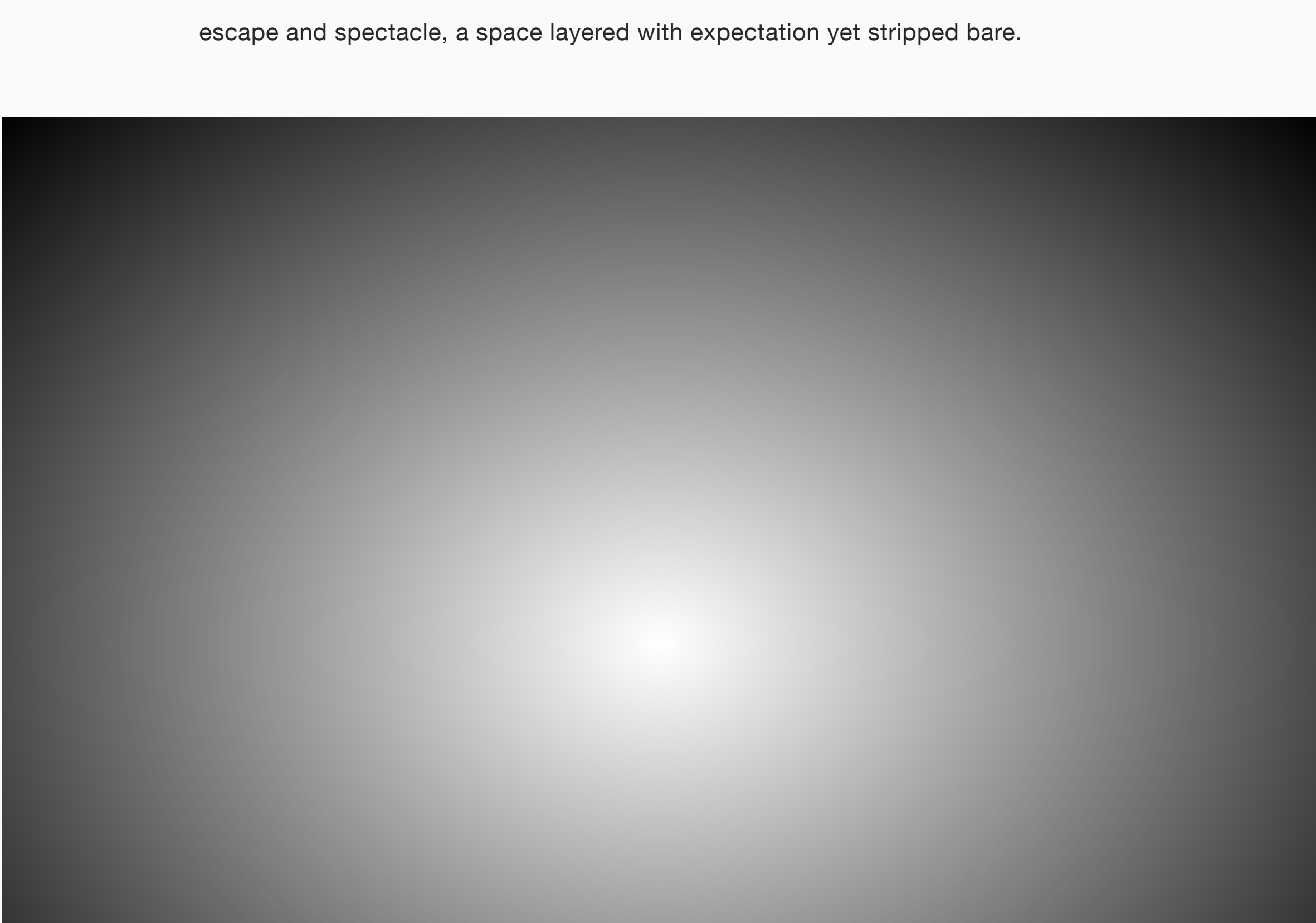
Joel Sternfeld, *Coeburn, Virginia*, 1981. Courtesy of the artist and the Bruce Museum. © Joel Sternfeld

*Coeburn, Virginia* brings Sternfeld's eye for subtle irony to life within the seemingly serene environment of a small town. Here, the frame captures the tension between the landscape's lushness and signs of quiet disrepair—houses sitting precariously against a verdant backdrop, hinting at lives lived in the margins. Through muted earthy tones and a sparing splash of green, Sternfeld avoids romanticizing rural life, instead highlighting the fragile balance between nature's persistence and the impermanence of human structures. The result is a scene that feels both intimate and detached, inviting us to see Coeburn not as a forgotten place but as a testament to resilience and transience.



Joel Sternfeld, *Canyon Country, California*, 1983. Courtesy of the artist and the Bruce Museum. © Joel Sternfeld

In *Canyon Country, California*, Sternfeld turns his lens to the sublime—a canyon that feels at once vast and void, a sprawling testament to the untouched beauty of the American West. Here, the land stretches endlessly, exuding a calm that contrasts sharply with the bustling, culturally charged image of California we often imagine. Sternfeld's framing, balanced with a quiet geometry, amplifies the canyon's emptiness while subtly pointing to the tension between this natural expanse and the human inclination to intrude, consume, and commercialize. It's a scene that invites introspection, leaving viewers to consider California as both escape and spectacle, a space layered with expectation yet stripped bare.



Joel Sternfeld, *The Space Shuttle Columbia Lands at Kelly Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas*, 1979. Courtesy of the artist and the Bruce Museum. © Joel Sternfeld

The Bruce Museum's *American Prospects* invites us to traverse Sternfeld's America—a land as haunting as it is beautiful. With a careful eye for color, geometry, and narrative tension, Sternfeld transforms these landscapes into timeless scenes, at once grounded and surreal. Each photograph holds a quiet of melancholic grandeur, inviting viewers not just to observe but to confront the quiet dramas embedded in America's vast, varied, and vulnerable terrain. In Sternfeld's vision, America is an open road of paradoxes—where beauty meets desolation, and where each mile reveals a new truth we can't ignore.

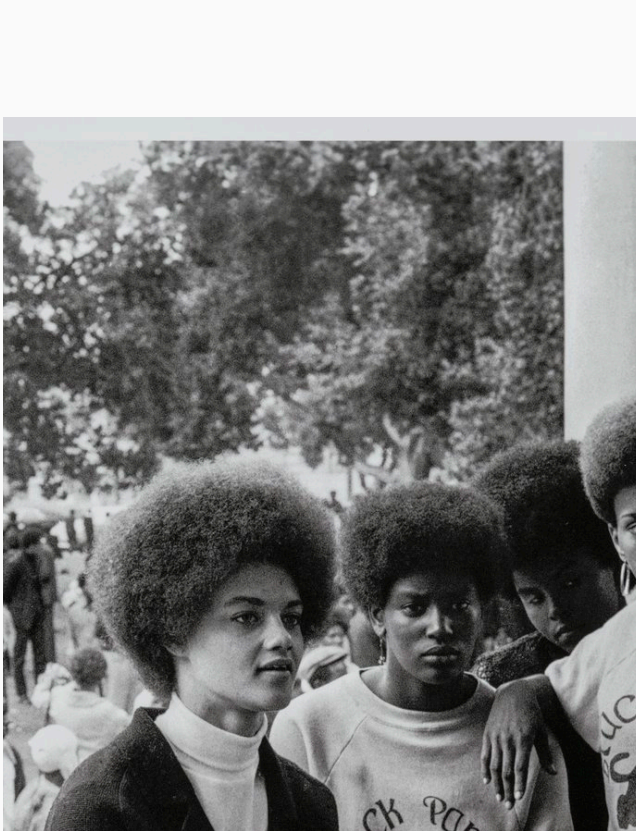
Joel Sternfeld, *American Prospects*, The Bruce Museum



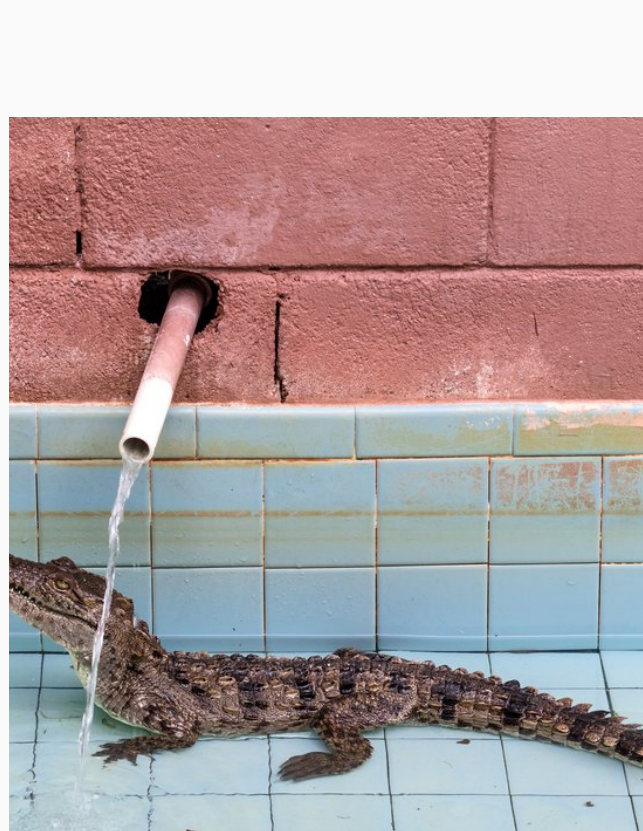
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