

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pascal Shirley
Blue Skies and Golden Sunshine All along the Way

6 November – 23 December 2021
Opening Reception: Saturday, November 6, 2:00 – 7:00pm

Walter Maciel Gallery is pleased to present *Blue Skies and Golden Sunshine All along the Way* by Los Angeles based photographer, Pascal Shirley. The exhibition marks Shirley's first solo show with our gallery preceded by his inclusion in the group show, *Selections: California College of the Arts Alumni* in 2007. The exhibition includes small, medium and large format archival pigment prints.

Soon after Los Angeles issued its shelter-in-place orders in mid-March last year, Shirley had the idea of documenting different parts of the city to reveal the eerie emptiness and quiet stillness of a place that is typically bustling with traffic, beachgoers, pedestrians and attendees of many cultural institutions. He teamed up with pilot, Alex Freidin from Hangar 21 Helicopters who offered him a lift in his helicopter within the first couple of weeks into the pandemic surveying the scene during mid-morning flights. Strapped in his seat and leaning out of the helicopter with his 100-megapixel medium format camera, Shirley shot iconic locations including Venice Beach, Santa Monica Pier, Malibu, Getty Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Dodger Stadium, downtown Los Angeles, Sunset Boulevard, LAX and Disneyland among others. Each scene captured in the glow of sunlight reveals an empty landscape where on any given normal day there would be large crowds of people communing in public spaces and going about their lives. The images capture a once-in-a-lifetime moment with all of Los Angeles freeways cleared of traffic and the recent winter rain leaving the skies a true blue color rarely ever seen in Southern California.

The images focus on the city center and move outward to the beaches and greater Los Angeles area. In one image of downtown Los Angeles, there is evidence of empty lanes and few cars traveling past the skyscrapers on the 110 freeway in the early morning light during the morning rush hour. The city appears to be at rest in an apocalyptic setting free from its usual activity and reminiscent of those first few hours after the collapse of the World Trade Center when life stopped for a moment until all planes had been grounded. Further down the road in the Miracle Mile neighborhood, an image of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is captured desolate among the palm trees and Chris Burden's iconic public sculpture *Urban Light*, shown in its emptiness which on any typical day has hordes of tourists taking selfies at this cultural magnet. The only evidence of human life is the security guard who is seen holding his post in the upper left area.

Moving west towards the ocean, Shirley documents Santa Monica Pier and the adjoining beach both revealing only a few signs of humanity as well as the noticeable shadow of the helicopter seen on the sand of the beach. Further north in Malibu, the beach and pier are similarly vacant with the loneliness of the waves crashing on to the bare stretches of sand. Flying over Venice Beach Shirley captures a sole rebellious woman who is running freely across the sand with her arms flailing as she looks up at the helicopter with glee, perhaps every Angeleno's dream moment of having the entire beach all to themselves. Even the scene at LAX looks quiet with near empty parking lots, very little traffic on roundabout and several planes parked at the gates. One of the most astonishing images in the show is over Disneyland which is typically a no-fly-over-zone but Freidin was granted permission for two rounds and Shirley captures the entrance of the park under the California sunshine completely empty with the topiary portrait of Mickey Mouse smiling back at us. Shirley's photographs of luminous abandonment are documents of an unexpected catastrophe allowing us to appreciate and reconsider our communal urban environment with poetic insight.

For the past several years, Shirley has worked as a commercial photographer in Southern California focusing on lifestyle, portraiture, travel and food photography. In 2006, He received his MFA in Photography at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco where he studied under Larry Sultan, Ari Marcopoulos, Jim Goldberg and Todd Hido. He was honored as one of PDN's top 30 photographers in 2015 and has been a part of many group exhibitions up and down the West Coast.