

Toronto Exhibition

## Jean-François Bouchard

EXILE FROM BABYLON

April 27 – July 15, 2023

Opening:

Friday, May 5, 5 – 8 p.m.



*Tree of Life #1, 2019, Archival Pigment Print, 54" x 26".*

Arsenal Contemporary Art Toronto is pleased to present *Exile from Babylon*, a solo exhibition by photographer Jean-François Bouchard.

Driven to seek alternative means of survival due to homelessness, addiction, or libertarian ideals, some Americans reject modern society—or Babylon—in favour of what they call “Slab City,” forming unlikely communities of squatters and wanderers in search of collective refuge. Settled on a decommissioned military base in the Sonoran Desert, the location photographed by Bouchard shows life without any form of local government or basic services like running water, electricity, and garbage removal. Residents establish themselves in shanties, makeshift tents, shipping containers, crumbling recreational vehicles, and even dens dug into the ground.

In *Exile from Babylon*, Bouchard represents the community’s reality metaphorically, through eerie still-life photographs of trees. Collectively, these gritty scenes testify to the vast disparities that are increasingly apparent in modern society, as well as the quest for fulfillment derived from absolute freedom and how this is achieved only at great personal sacrifice.

The three-channel video featured in the exhibition highlights the people in the community, as well as the highly transient, anonymous, elusive existence that most of them exemplify. The residents come and go, receding without notice for periods of time, and disappear under strange circumstances. Some are known to be fugitives seeking refuge and anonymity, but their true identities often remain hidden, as many are known only by their nicknames.

Jean-François Bouchard has worked in lens-based visual art since 2003. His visual focus is generally on marginalized, misunderstood, and often ostracized groups in Western society. His work has been exhibited in galleries, museums, and festivals in Canada, the United States, and France, and his photographs have been published in *The Washington Post*, *Stern Magazine*, *Wired*, *British Journal of Photography*, and many other publications.

Inquiries:

+1 647 346 9082

[info.to@arsenalcontemporary.com](mailto:info.to@arsenalcontemporary.com)

[www.arsenalcontemporary.com](http://www.arsenalcontemporary.com)