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103
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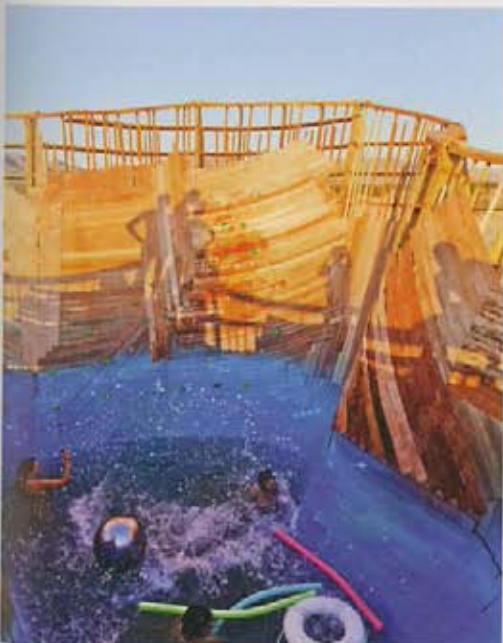
IWAN BAAN'S YEAR IN BUILDINGS



NEW

Yucca Crater

Ball-Nogues Studio has created a hidden oasis in California's Mojave Desert, which doubled as a mould for an artwork made of shiny steel balls



Heading east out of the tiny town of 29 Palms, in southern California's Mojave Desert, the two-lane road cuts through miles of flat land. After a 20-minute drive through this monotonous landscape, a dirt road turns off to the left. There, looming incongruously, is a large wooden cone with a skin of scaffolding rising out of the earth. Climbing one of the ladders that lean against the slanted rim, some 30ft high, reveals a pool full of cool water. The water can be reached by an interior ladder, ropes, rock-climbing holds or by jumping in from the rim.

The project, titled Yucca Crater, is by Los Angeles-based Ball-Nogues Studio (Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues) and was commissioned as part of the annual art festival High Desert Test Sites. Described as a "synthetic earthwork that doubles as a recreational amenity", Yucca Crater drew dozens of curious revellers on its opening weekend, who happily stripped down to climb over the steep sides and soak in the water. Ball explained that the duo "wanted to defy people's expectations" of what they would find in the desert.

Yucca Crater is only half the story. The structure served as a mould for another project – a net of large, shiny, steel balls called Talus Dome, which will be turned upside-down to form a hill and installed as a public sculpture in Canada this autumn. Ball-Nogues uses the term "cross design" to describe their process of repurposing production materials. Both projects were developed simultaneously, so

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they knew the mould for Talus Dome had to be modular, thick enough to hold the weight of water (the inside is waterproofed with a coat of blue urethane foam) and shaped like a pool. Talus Dome's metal spheres rise up like a mound of bubbles, while Yucca Crater's hidden pool takes the same form, upended and situated 2,700km away.

Yucca Crater was inspired by the Land Art monuments in the south-west desert and the empty swimming pools that dot the Mojave. Like other earthworks – for example James Turrell's Roden Crater in Arizona – the edges of the work create a frame for the sky. Looking up from the pool, Ball notes: "The sides of the basin eliminate the landscape – all you see is sky and water. You can forget where you are."

Ball-Nogues plans to leave the structure there indefinitely. The water will evaporate and the wood will deteriorate until the Crater becomes a mysterious ruin, like a shipwreck sunk into the desert floor.

Above
The pool's
slanted,
wooden rim
is 30ft tall