

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Amir Zaki photographs California skateboard parks as Brutalist architecture



"Concrete Vessel 38" by Amir Zaki is part of the "Empty Vessel" exhibition at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa. (Amir Zaki)

BY LIESL BRADNER

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California's 1976-77 drought left lawns brown, showers short and backyard pools drained dry. But it also gave rise to a new wave of skateboarding, a time when the Z-Boys from Venice and Santa Monica jumped fences and skated in those empty concrete pools, in the process creating a radical new style of vertical sport.

"People got the idea to re-create pools into all sorts of iterations," noted photographer and former skater Amir Zaki said. "Skateboard parks were popping up all around the Southland."

Zaki was 12 when he got his first skateboard in the 1980s. Growing up in Beaumont, he'd skate on the streets and in his friend's backyard halfpipe. Zaki eventually took up photography. For two years he photographed skate parks from San Diego to San Jose, and his upcoming exhibit at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, "Empty Vessel — Amir Zaki," combines images of skate parks with visually parallel pictures of broken ceramic objects.



Concrete Vessel 55" by Amir Zaki. (Amir Zaki)



"Broken Vessel 96" by Amir Zaki. (Amir Zaki)



"Concrete Vessel 130" by Amir Zaki. (Amir Zaki)

“Through the intentional absence of skaters and the brokenness of the ceramics, together these empty vessels are pictured as sculptural rather than functional,” said Tyler Stallings, director at the college’s Frank M. Doyle Arts Pavilion. “They become a more spiritual aspect, a concrete landscape scooped out of the earth.”

Zaki’s images are often haunting, the skate parks rendered as Brutalist architecture.

“My previous body of work focused on monumental architecture,” Zaki said. “I always had a love of concrete so it became a natural fit for me. I wanted the photos to be mysterious and contemplative.”

“Empty Vessel” is accompanied by the photographer’s first international monograph, “California Concrete: A Landscape of Skateparks.” His work required him to shoot during a two-hour window before the early skaters began jumping into the swirls of concrete. All 72 photos in the book, and the 33 in the exhibition, show the skate parks devoid of humans. Birds, however, are visible in every shot.

'Empty Vessel — Amir Zaki'

Where: Frank M. Doyle Arts Pavilion, Orange Coast College, Costa Mesa (see website for parking instructions)

When: Book signing and artist-led exhibition tour 2-3 p.m. and reception 3-5 p.m. Saturday. Regular gallery hours 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Thursday, noon-4 p.m. first Saturday of every month.

Admission: Free

Info: (714) 432-5738, orangecoastcollege.edu