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100 Suns: 1945-1962

Michael Light

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"100 Suns" refers to J. Robert Oppenheimer's response to the first Los Alamos test of the atomic bomb, at which he famously quoted a description from the Bhagavad Gita - 'a sun brighter than a thousand suns'. This extraordinary book photographically documents one hundred US nuclear detonations from the 215 declared atmospheric nuclear tests conducted by the US between July 1945 and November 1962. After that date the tests were carried out underground. Within that period a total of 1030 tests in total are known to have been executed. The atmospheric tests were conducted in the Nevada desert and on various islands in the Pacific. The book is divided between the desert and the ocean. The photographs have been gathered by Michael Light, who previously collected the material from NASA for "Full Moon", published by Jonathan Cape in the UK and worldwide for the millennium. He has drawn the material from the archives at Los Alamos and from the US National Archives in Maryland. This material was formerly classified but is now in the public domain. It includes photographs taken by the clandestine Lookout Mountain squad based in Hollywood, whose 250 producers, directors and cameramen together with thirty to forty still photographers were sworn to secrecy. The photographs are presented with no embellishment. There is no introductory essay with the voice of a moral authority, but simply the presentation of the evidence. Each photograph is presented with the name of the test, its size in mega or kilotons, the date and the location. At the back of the book, there will be detailed captions, a chronology of the development of nuclear weapons, a list of the names of the declared 1030 tests, and an extensive bibliography. One of the virtues of the book is its emphasis on data not on argument. Every reader will bring to the book their own imagination of the consequences and implications of such weaponry. The pictures are all taken at the moment of detonation, not during the aftermath. The pictures of explosions are accompanied by pictures of the witnesses - the onlookers from what has been described as the 'US imperial verandah'. The book will be published worldwide and given the global political situation, the timing of its publication unfortunately could not be more apt.

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