

Carly Steinbrunn's *The Voyage of Discovery* begins with a reproduced reproduction of a photograph that shows two brightly lit rocks propped up against a wall. One is a deep gray tending toward black, the other a light gray tending toward creamy white. The two together form a broken compound of separate elements, or represent diametric extremes of light and dark: they are both opposite and integrally related objects under the scrutiny of the camera's lens.

The Voyage of Discovery, published in 2015, comprises appropriated and authored images that deal with the interlinking uses of photography as a means to construct knowledge and as a vehicle for the thrill of escape and discovery. The photographs address photography's historic utility to an exploration of the present that excites changing notions of the future. Thus *Cliffs* depicts the White Cliffs of Dover cropped into the shape of an oval, which figuratively recalls magic lantern slides and stereographs, as well as the relationship of imagery to the expansionism of nineteenth-century Europe. Other photographs have been colorized, or flaunt the pixelation that results from their appropriation; these show stormy tropical scenes, ancient flint heads, traditional costumes, exotic flowers, and the scarred profile of a Bobo tribesman.

Notably, Steinbrunn depicts the English landscape as a site of discovery. This subtle gesture inverts the hierarchy of imperialism and exploration, so that the appetitive gaze of colonial Britain is turned back upon its homeland, suggesting that the photographs might study the centers of power as producers of the exoticism of the periphery.

Steinbrunn develops a subtle critique in measured gestures, titling a landscape of thick foliage *Jungle*, despite the clearly visible grate and tall perimeter fence in the back of the frame. The whiteness of the hand that grasps the tiny foot of a baby gorilla in *Gorilla Foot* intimates the problem of control, the decontextualized nature of observation, and the differentiating function of race as integral to the production of anthropological knowledge. *Iguazu Falls* relays the extraordinary power of natural forces in a dark, compressed landscape view, while its location, at the border between Argentina and Brazil, points toward European imperial history and the Guarani tribespeople who first discovered and named the falls.

With the exception of the caption list and colophon, the only text in the book is a quotation from *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), by the French anthropologist and ethnographer Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his seminal travelogue, Lévi-Strauss laments his historically circumscribed inability to see with sufficient capaciousness, and reproaches himself for that failure while confessing to the pain he is caused "by everything I see." In Steinbrunn's images, each provided with a brief nomenclature, we see specimens of natural history (*Okapi*), ancient scrolls riddled with lost languages (*Parchment*), visionary modernist architecture (*Brasilia*), and moments of interplanetary travel (*Rocket*). Such images celebrate the complex beauty of the natural world, while also invoking the hubris of grand ambitions.

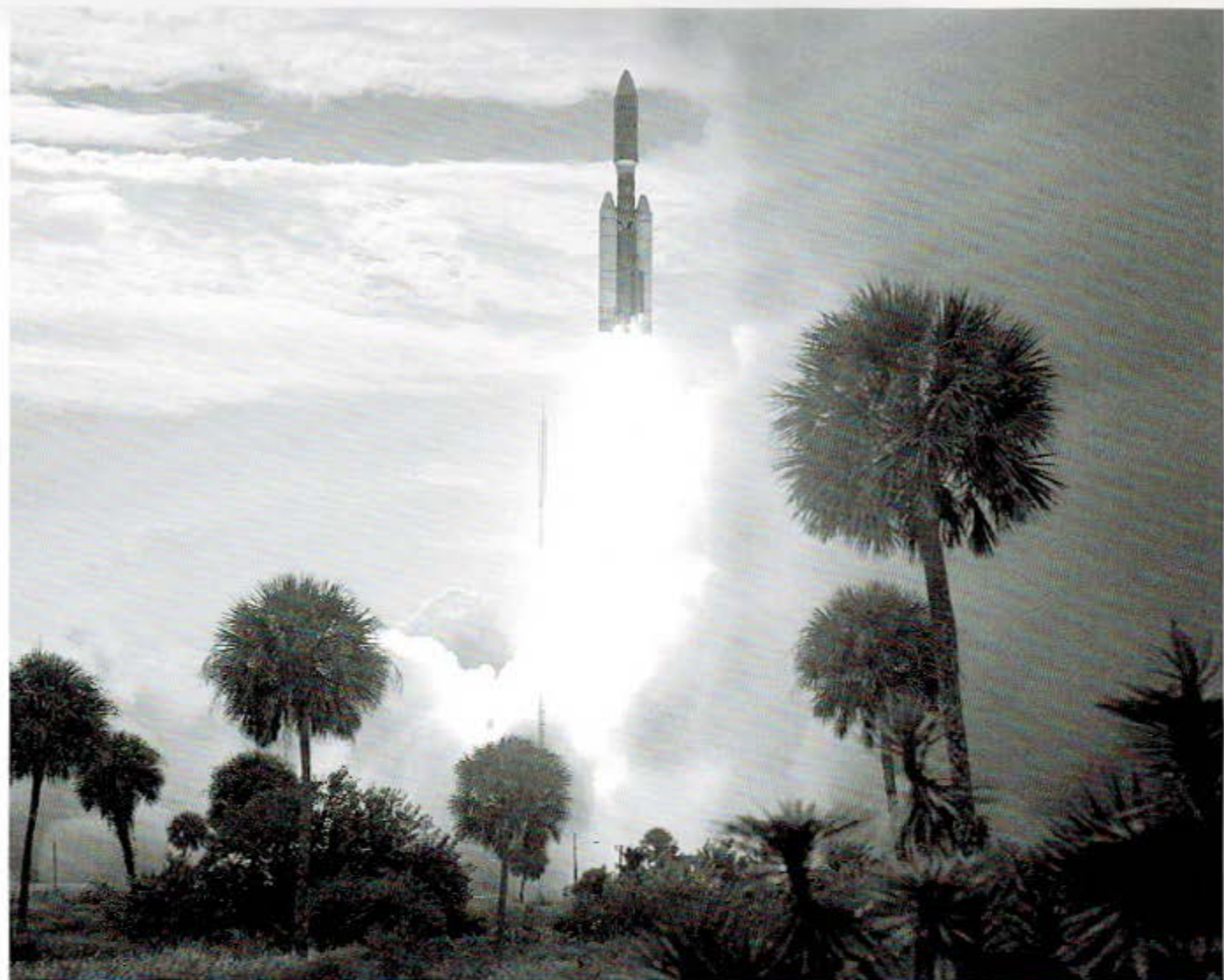
These pictures interrogate Eurocentric exploration, pointing up the excision of conquest and slavery from the Western narrative of discovery. This approach brings pivotal erasures into view, but in a tempered fashion that depends (perhaps precariously) on the rigorous attentiveness of the viewer. Steinbrunn's reflexive examination of photography's role in the contested history of exploration requires a willingness to read caption against image, in order to separate implicit metaphor from apparent subject, and address oneself to the underlying critique. In the absence of such effort, *The Voyage of Discovery* risks a repetition of the history it interrogates. We must work to see the gaps pictured in this history of discovery in order to envision a future that includes those who have been historically dispossessed.

Carly Steinbrunn The Voyage of Discovery

Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa

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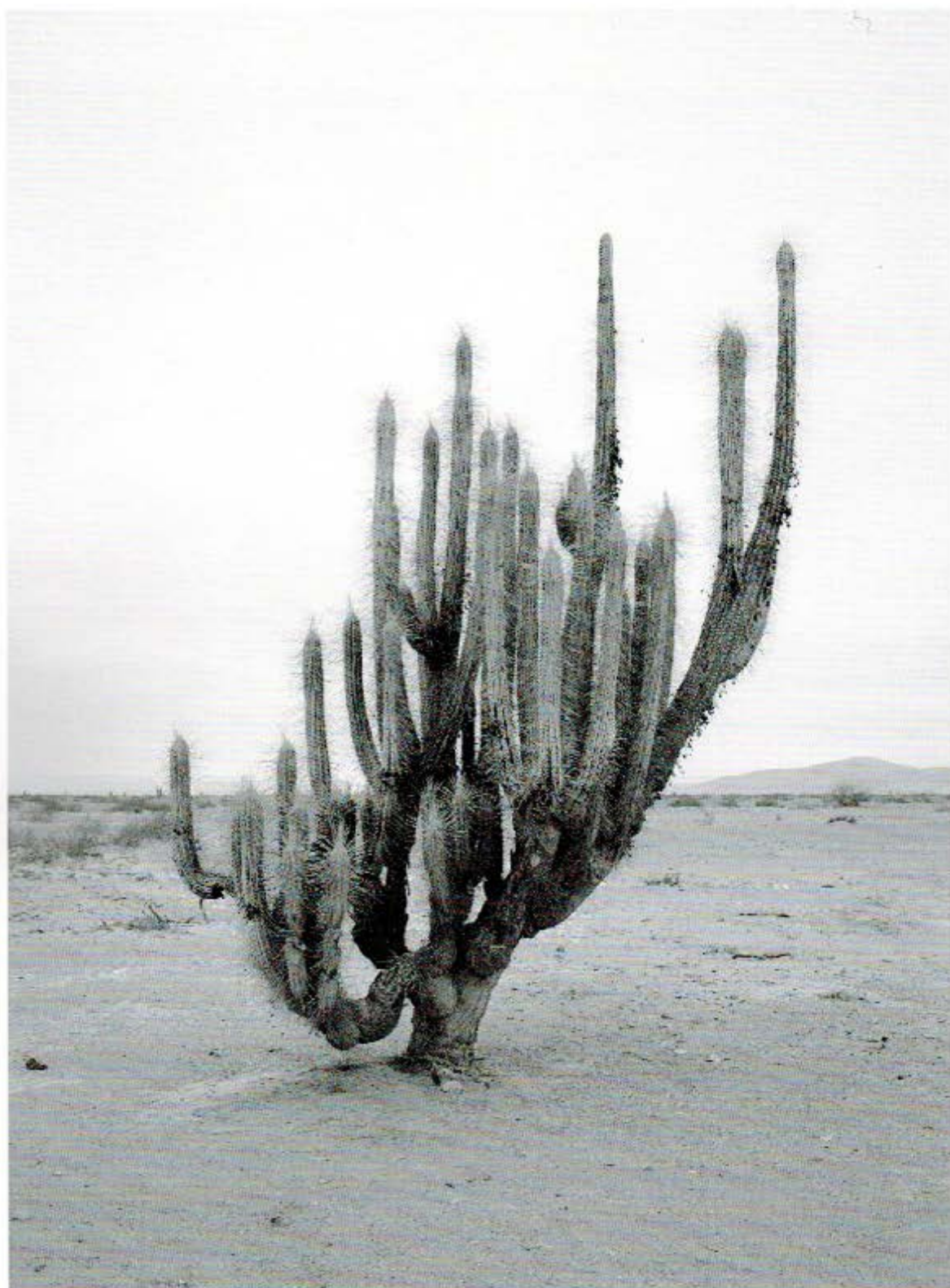


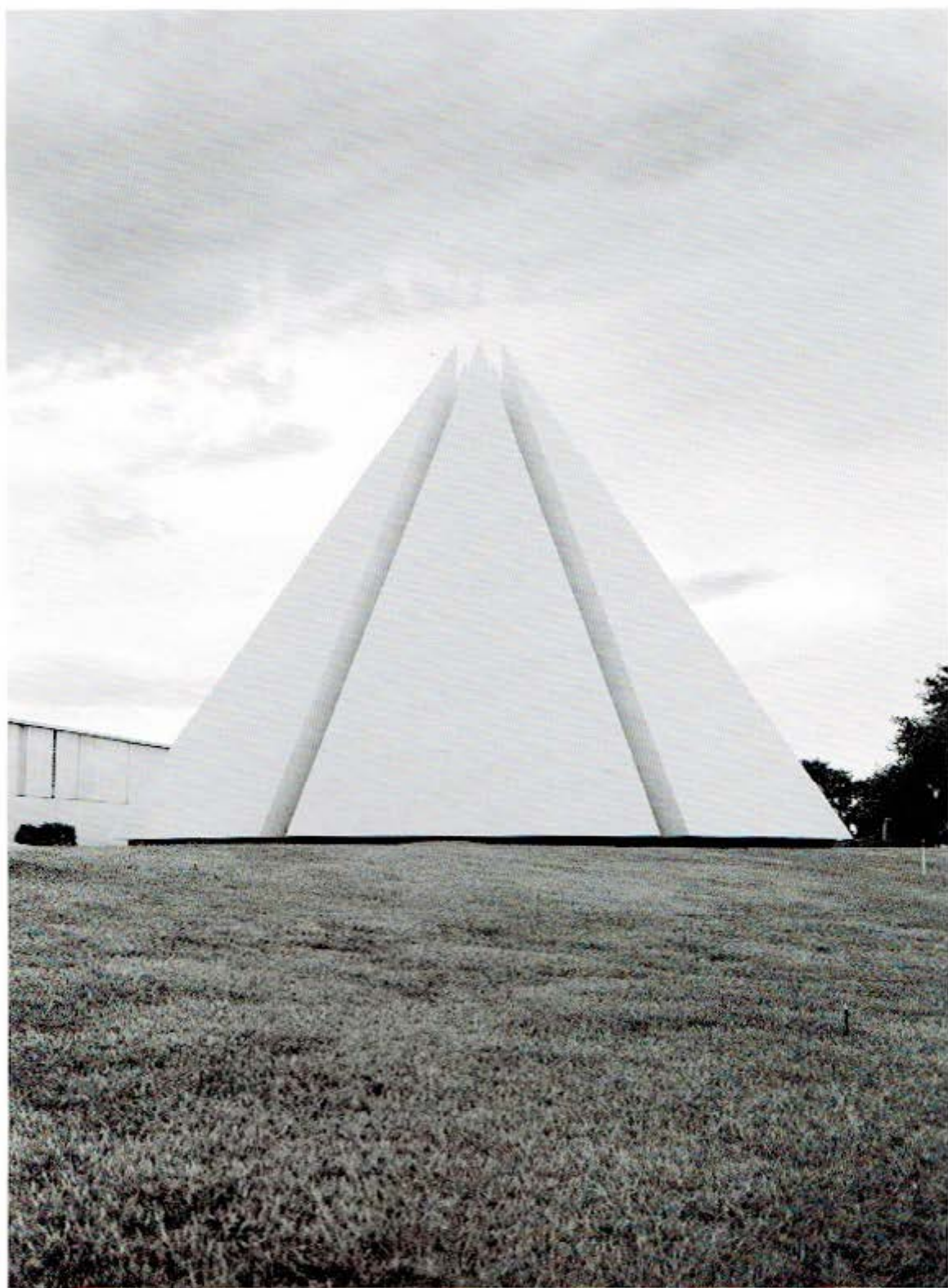
Opposite, top:
Rocket, 2011

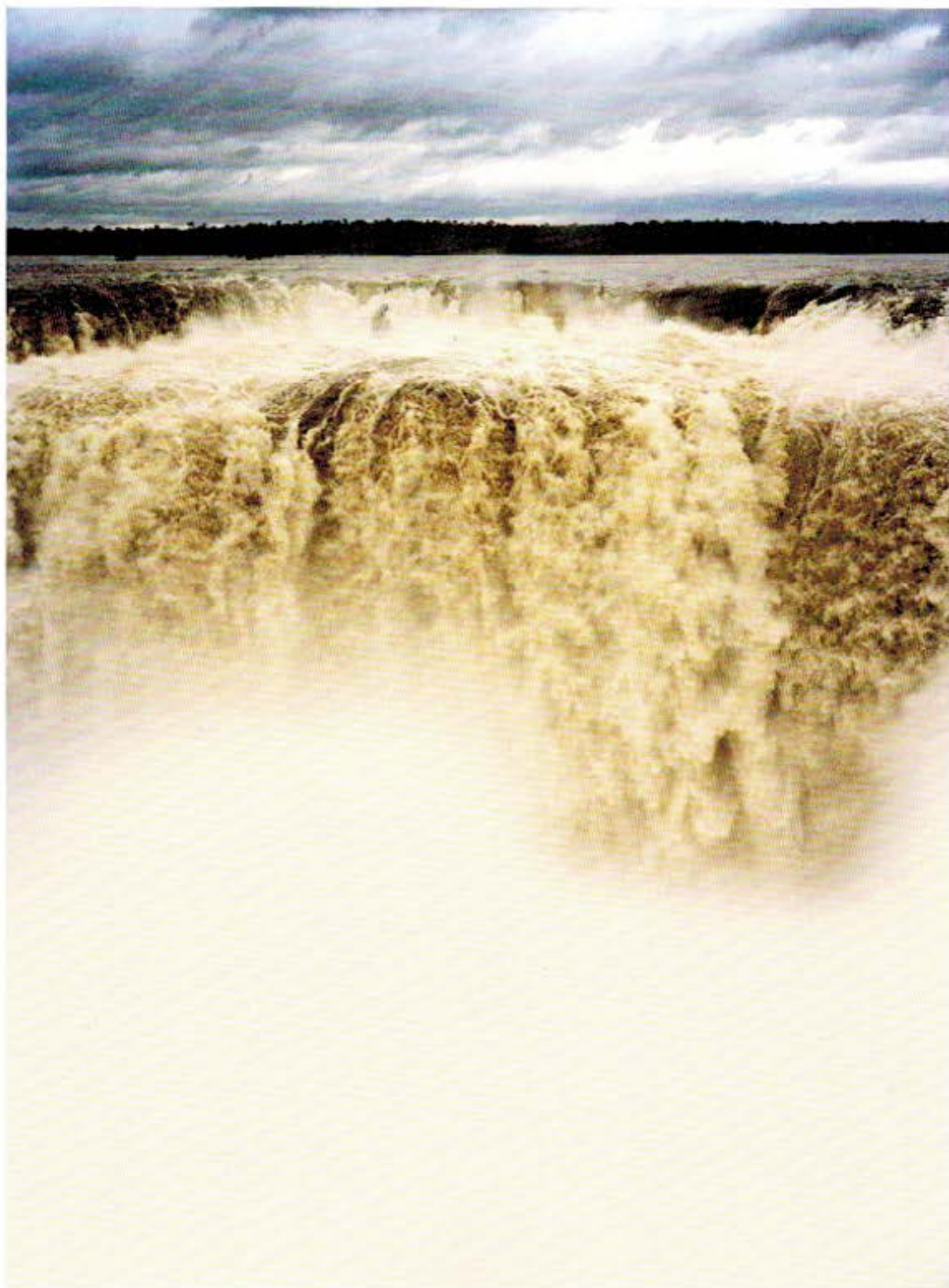
This page:
Butterfly, 2013

Opposite, bottom:
Gorilla Foot, 2013









Opposite:
Iguazu Falls, 2013

This page:
Boeing, 2011
All photographs from
the series *The Voyage
of Discovery, 2015*
Courtesy the artist
and MACK

