



Nick Brandt, *Wasteland with Elephant*, 2015

The Picture / The Story

An elephant strides across the savannah towards camera. But where a sea of grass once was, all is human garbage. The original photo of the elephant is a previously unreleased shot taken in 2008. A beautiful bull with the unlikely name of Little Male. He was speared the year after this photo was taken, but survived, and is hopefully still alive in the Amboseli ecosystem in southern Kenya.

A few hundred kilometers to the north is this dumpsite on the edge of the city of Nakuru. Elephants would have walked these hills several decades ago, walked across these plains and hills now strewn with garbage.

As with all the photos in this series, the life size photo of the elephant was printed in strips at my studio in California, and then the strips were glued to a giant aluminum and plywood assembled on location. Multiple sandbags had to be used to raise up the panel so that the horizon line in the original photo lined up with the horizon line on the location.

The people in the photo all live on the edges of the dumpsite, and spend their days scouring through the garbage for anything that they can use or sell. When the garbage trucks arrive, many will search through the garbage for food they can eat right there. It's not just the animals that are the victims of environmental degradation and devastation, but humans also.

I shot this and a few other panels close by over the course of a week, waiting for the right stormy clouds and accompanying light. One advantage of being there so long is that the local people became completely used to us being there, and just got on with their lives. I wanted it that way - for the people to be oblivious to the presence of the panels and the animals featured in them, who are now no more than ghosts in the landscape.

But not all is doom and gloom. Once upon a time, we in the West had animals such as these where we lived. We blew it, wiped them out, but we still have a chance to protect and preserve the places and those animals where they still live, and at the same time help support local communities, through wide scale employment in nature tourism and wildlife preservation.

Go to biglife.org to learn about the work that Big Life Foundation, the organization I co-founded in 2010, is doing in this regard.

- Nick Brandt, 2018