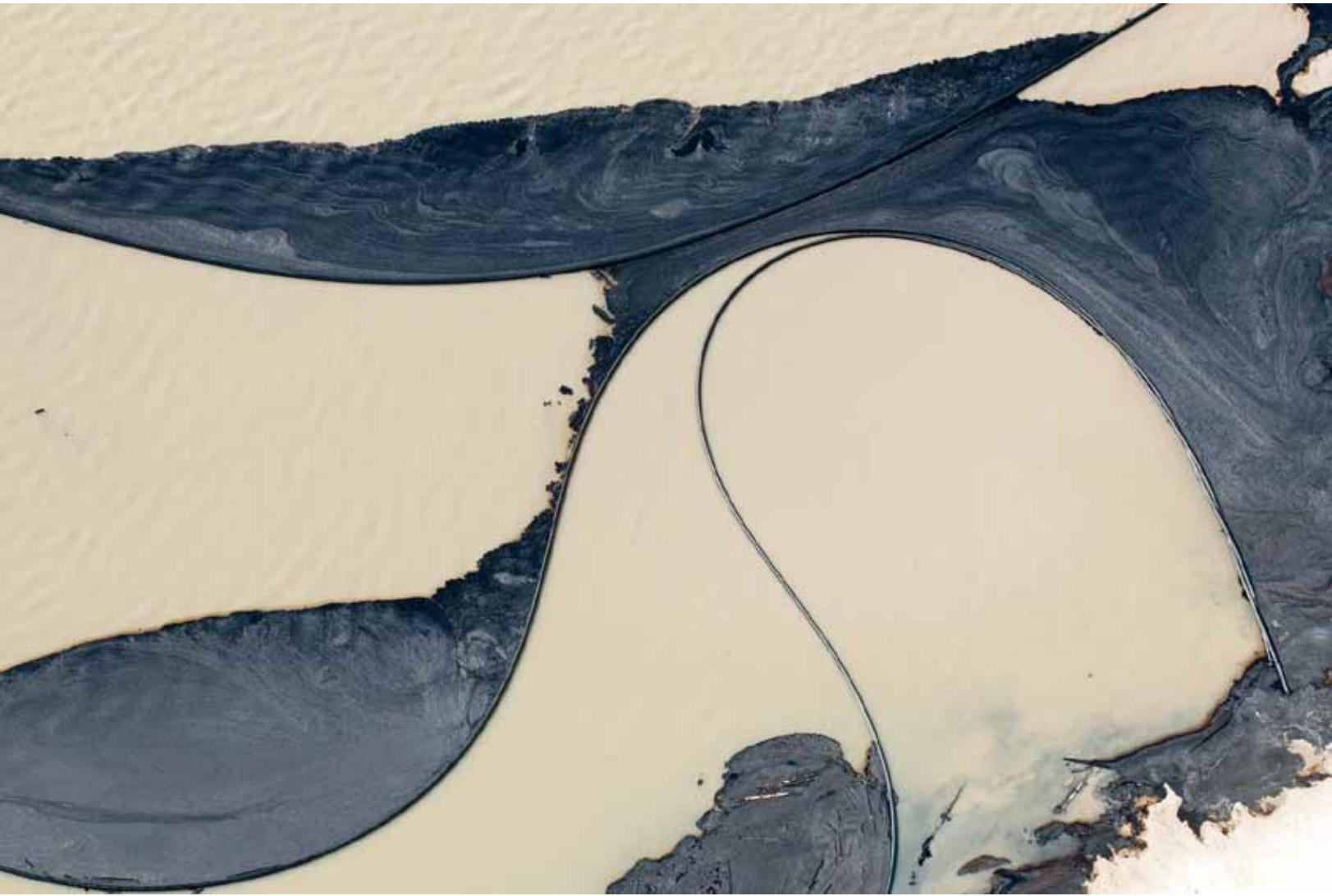




Beautiful Destruction

Photography by Louis Helbig



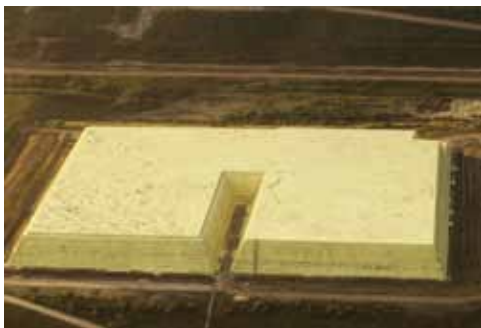
(Above clockwise)
Surface detail of bitumen residue boomed by floating pipes on toxic water. In 2008 it was revealed that 1,600 ducks were poisoned to death after landing on the water.

Multi-coloured piles of slag, each mound a dump truck load. Slag is the coked residue remaining after bitumen is upgraded to synthetic crude.

The Syncrude Mildred Lake Upgrader.

Sulfur, a byproduct of oil refining, is stored in block structures reminiscent of ziggurats.

Open pit bitumen mine: unlike conventional, hard rock mining with a fairly limited footprint, the shallow tar mining operations spread across the landscape.



IN THE SUMMER OF 2008, Ottawa photographer Louis Helbig and his partner traced the skies above the Alberta Tar Sands in their 1946 Luscombe airplane as he took thousands of shots of the beauty and devastation found in the immense landscapes beneath. He compiled the photos for a major exhibition, "Beautiful Destruction", and has since been working to place them before the eyes of the public and policymakers. Helbig seeks to encourage discussion and debate on tar sands issues. The images have graced the covers of *Environmental Health Perspectives*, *FutuRéale* and the *United Church Observer*, and exhibited at places like the Contact Toronto Photography Festival, and Ottawa's arts & architecture gallery. There are limited-edition prints for sale on his website, Louishelbig.com. 🌱

(Top left clockwise) Open pit bitumen mining at the Syncrude Aurora North Mine.

Stripping the first layer of 'overburden,' a layer of earth, sand and gravel up to 100 feet deep covering the bitumen ore or tar sand.

Fort McMurray's industrial supply yards cut into the surrounding wilderness.

An alluvial fan formed by effluent pouring into the Muskeg River Mine's tar pond.

