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From "The Twilight Zone" to "Star Wars," the California desert has often provided a backdrop for sci-fi imaginations, both apocalyptic and sublime. The exhibition "Desertshore" at Cal State L.A.'s Luckman Gallery holds up a prism to this fantasy, fracturing the romance of wide-open spaces in myriad, far-flung directions. With works by 15 L.A. artists, including **Andrea Zittel**, **Mungo Thomson** and **Harry Dodge & Stanya Kahn**, the show is loosely organized around the tension between progress and entropy.

The most successful works treat the subject with a light hand. You might almost miss **Mark Hagen's** installation: a drop ceiling of white institutional tiles dotted with neon-colored water stains. Both pretty and sad, its bright, perhaps toxic decay also evokes abstract painting. Similarly understated, **Euan Macdonald's** tightly focused video of a snail's progress from one edge of the screen to the other is a 6 1/2 - minute epic that both mocks and celebrates efforts to advance. **David Hullfish Bailey's** grainy black-and-white digital prints document the circumference of the Free Library in Slab City, an RV park near Palm Springs. The sequential views of brush, makeshift walls and open-air bookshelves quietly reveal an idiosyncratic cultural outpost on the edge of dissolution.

At times, the show ranges a bit too far afield. The inclusion of **Mario Ybarra Jr.'s** wall of dance club fliers is mystifying, and **Christopher Michlig's** abstract interpretations of street kiosks and posters seem less like comments on dystopia than formal experiments with space and language. But in a show that celebrates entropy and decay, perhaps a little unruliness is to be expected.

*Luckman Gallery, Cal State L.A., 5151 State University Drive, (323) 343-6604, through Oct. 18. Closed Fridays. www.luckmanarts.org. **Communication can be so abstract***