

Series Number Nine

Downtown City Spaces - 1988/89

Eight Photographs

Michael Nye

Downtown City Spaces - 1988-89

A photographer polishes and holds both bright restless light and darker quieter light. A photograph freezes all things in motion.

Downtown City Spaces:

My first memory of being in a downtown city space was walking down Chaparral Street in Corpus Christi in 1954. I was five years old. Downtown businesses were booming – crowds of people were walking in and out of Lichtenstein’s department store. Men wore suits with fashionable hats, women dressed in long flowing flowery dresses and neck scarves blowing in December’s windy chill. In 1954 there were no malls – no competing shopping centers – downtown was the only heartbeat that mattered. It was a big deal to be a part of the rush of serious shoppers. I remember a moment on a street corner. I was holding my mother’s hand and in the next instant I was holding the hand of a strange older woman, who smiled looking down at me. I still don’t know how this could have happened.

When I was a practicing attorney and had a jury trial approaching, I would walk the downtown streets of San Antonio rehearsing my Voir Dire examination. (General statement of facts and selection of a jury.) I remember wanting to be somewhere else. Inside, I felt water boiling on the stove. I watched the light moving on buildings – suitcases lined on curbs and the many ways people held themselves in lines – walked through office doors – waited for buses. I was leaning everywhere except where I was. Every street corner was a black and white photograph.

In neighborhoods, residents become apart of the narrative, but not in downtown city spaces. There are too many moving parts. Experience is heightened; humanity is compressed. In these unusual places we must pay attention to our senses. Sight and sound merge into a single experience. Burning sunlight appearing between buildings can be sound-like -- screeching tires stopping. The common experience in these spaces is anonymity and a feeling of *passing through*.

Downtown City Spaces – Photographs/Diptychs

Two aspects of downtown city spaces dominate attention. The first is the “*Streets/Ground Level*”. The second are the “*Buildings and Skyscrapers*” reaching above. Each can be seen as a horizontal strip.

The FIRST - “*Ground/Street Level*” - is an ambiguous essay in human activity. Mostly people are going somewhere, waiting for something or leaving some place.

The SECOND aspect is the “*Buildings and Skyscrapers*” themselves – the many floors of heavy concrete and metal secured and planted in their iron-ery roots. What moves is only light passing. At midday, the harsh light on building walls is a constellation of perpendicular lines and complementary angles. It is in these moments, the range of bright light mixed with deep shadows reveals the limitation of seeing. Light lifts and streaks, then falls and disappears into dark grays and blue blacks.

In the *Downtown City Spaces - Series Nine*, this short group of photographs is a continuation of the “*Water/Sky*” series. The notion of bringing together and what it means to be in-between. Each photograph is really two images, these are diptychs. The ground level (first image) and building space above (second image) are connected with a black line. Each diptychs/ photograph is not pretending to be one moment in time.

I found that if I photographed the buildings from a distance, the ground level would be tiny. If I photographed the ground/street level closer up - the range of the lens optics and perspective would not reach the top building spaces.

I wanted to photograph the city spaces in the ways I experienced them, “*Being There*” -- looking upward sometimes, other times looking down. The higher building spaces were photographed from a distance and the street ground levels were photographed closer up.

Why do downtown city spaces look the way they do? Every downtown building has an entryway and inside exists a whole city of its own. All the private conversations and sideways glances measure moods. Morning light does not rise on buildings but it falls as the sun rises. Wind

does not blow, but swirls. In winter, downtowns are warmer than the suburbs or farmlands. Downtown city spaces are a study of invisibility, self-interest and utility.

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City Spaces 1



City Spaces 2



City Spaces 3



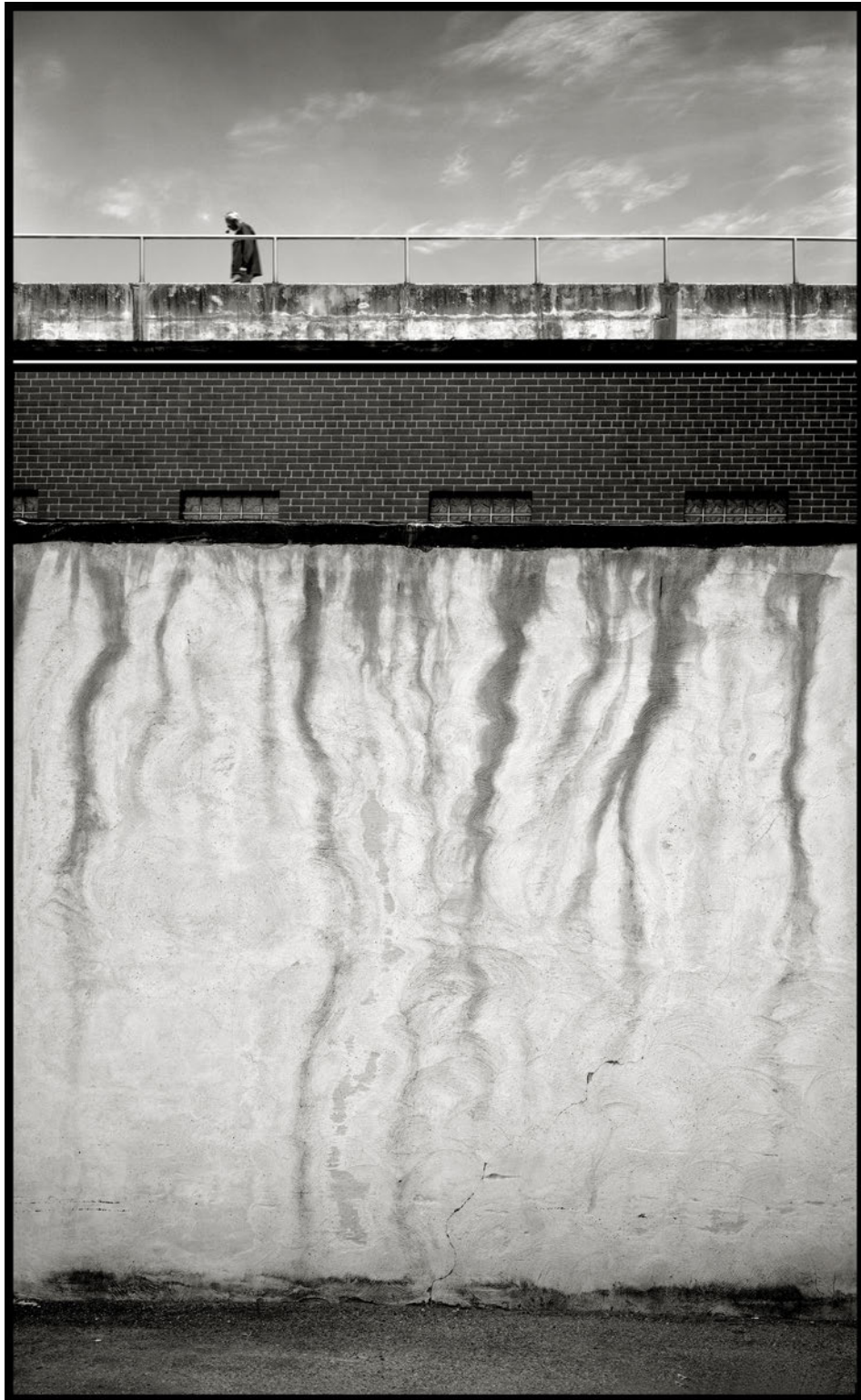
City Spaces 4



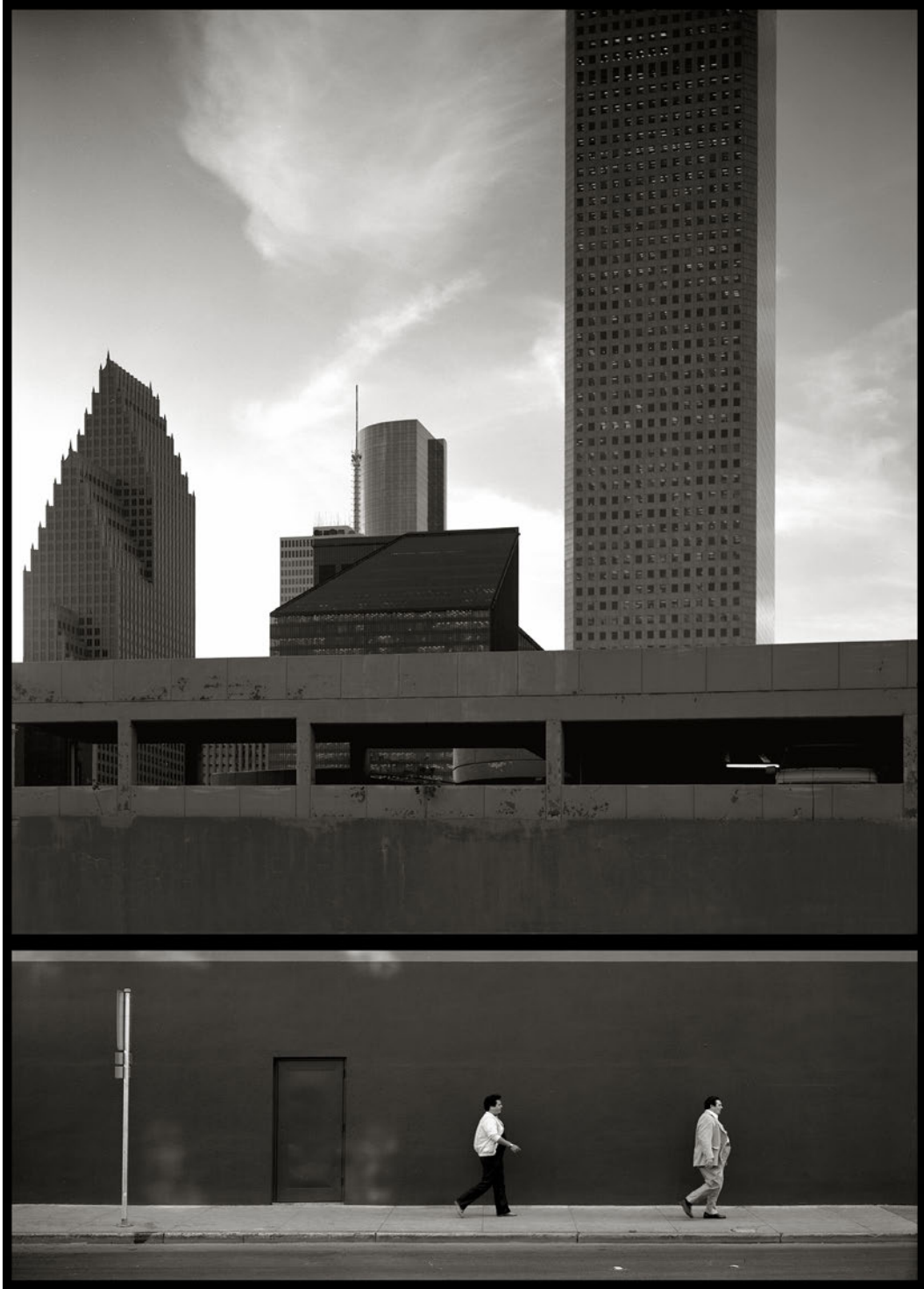
City Spaces 5



City Spaces 6



City Spaces 7



City Spaces 8

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