

Series Number Ten
Between Water & Sky - 1990

Six Photographs

Michael Nye

Between Water & Sky - 1990

Part One: Photographs

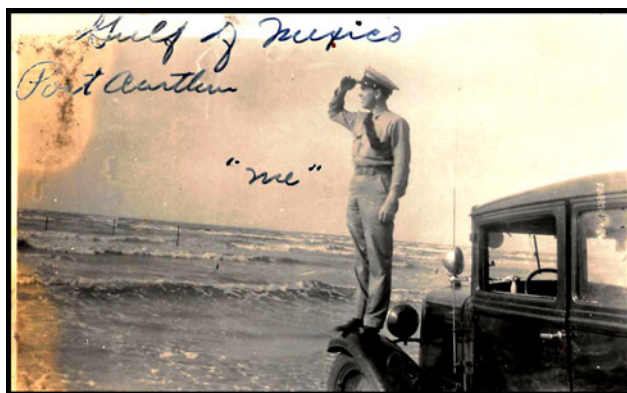
Part Two: Interviews

Thales was the first Pre-Socratic Greek philosopher. He cared and thought about *Water & Sky*. He was born 150 years before Socrates. (625-546 BC) He was known for solving difficult engineering problems. He diverted a river for an army. He predicted the height of the pyramids by measuring shadows of different objects and distances of ships in the ocean. A story was told that once he fell in a well because he was always looking at what was above him, not in front of him. He asked: "What is everything made of?" Thales understood the fragile balance between water, sky, fire and earth. He concluded that all things originated from water. No one knows how he arrived at his answer.

I grew up on Ocean Drive, across the street from *Water and Sky*. When I was six, my father read a story to me from the Corpus Christi newspaper. The headline read, "*Family sees ocean for first time.*" The story was about a father and mother and their five children who lived on a farm near Robstown located just 40 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. They decided to drive and see the ocean for the first time in their lives. The photograph in the newspaper showed the family lined up in front of their long black car staring. The parents were smiling but the children each had serious faces. I could see that the wind was blowing and imagine the warm wild breath of the Gulf of Mexico holding them close. I kept the picture on my bedroom wall for a long time. Why did it take the family so long to visit the ocean? What were they thinking about? That childhood memory sparked such a strong curiosity. Like that family from Robstown maybe all of us are very far and very close - at the same time - to the things that matter most.

My father had dementia during the last years of his life. Our ritual was an imperative. We would drive to Padre Island beach on the Gulf of Mexico, then to dinner with a beer and back home just before the sky turned dark. I read poetry and stories from the newspaper before

bed. At the beach we would park and stare outside into the wildness of waves and wind-blown sky. My father changed when we were at the beach. A force and clarity of mind took over – something, somewhere shifted. His stories were fresh – nuanced – far-reaching and sad. Mostly he would talk about his parents Grace and Sidney, names of grade school teachers, and various Navy airplanes he flew in 1940s. It was the *Water & Sky* that untied imagination - opened up cans and bottles in the brain that had been sealed resting in dark, damp places.



My father, standing on car - looking out into the Gulf of Mexico, 1941

Part One Photographs - Between Water & Sky

Black and white photographs are mostly about colors. Photographs are neither questions nor problems. They reside somewhere *In Between*.

The word "*Between*" is a tale of unending implications. It can connect us to the world of experience or it can amplify distrust and separation. The ways we use and think about imaginary lines and borders is significant. *In-Between* childhood and adulthood is only a moment. *In-Between* abstraction and reality is relevance and understanding. *In-Between* wartime and peacetime is everything that matters.

Water & Sky are always in the state of becoming something else depending on wind, temperature, humidity, condensation and the ethereal moody molecules of liquids and gases. Water is bathed and cleaned by cool rain showers from the sky. Water borrows color from the sky. The sky creates clouds and mists and fog from Water. Their unsettled desires never suffer fatigue.

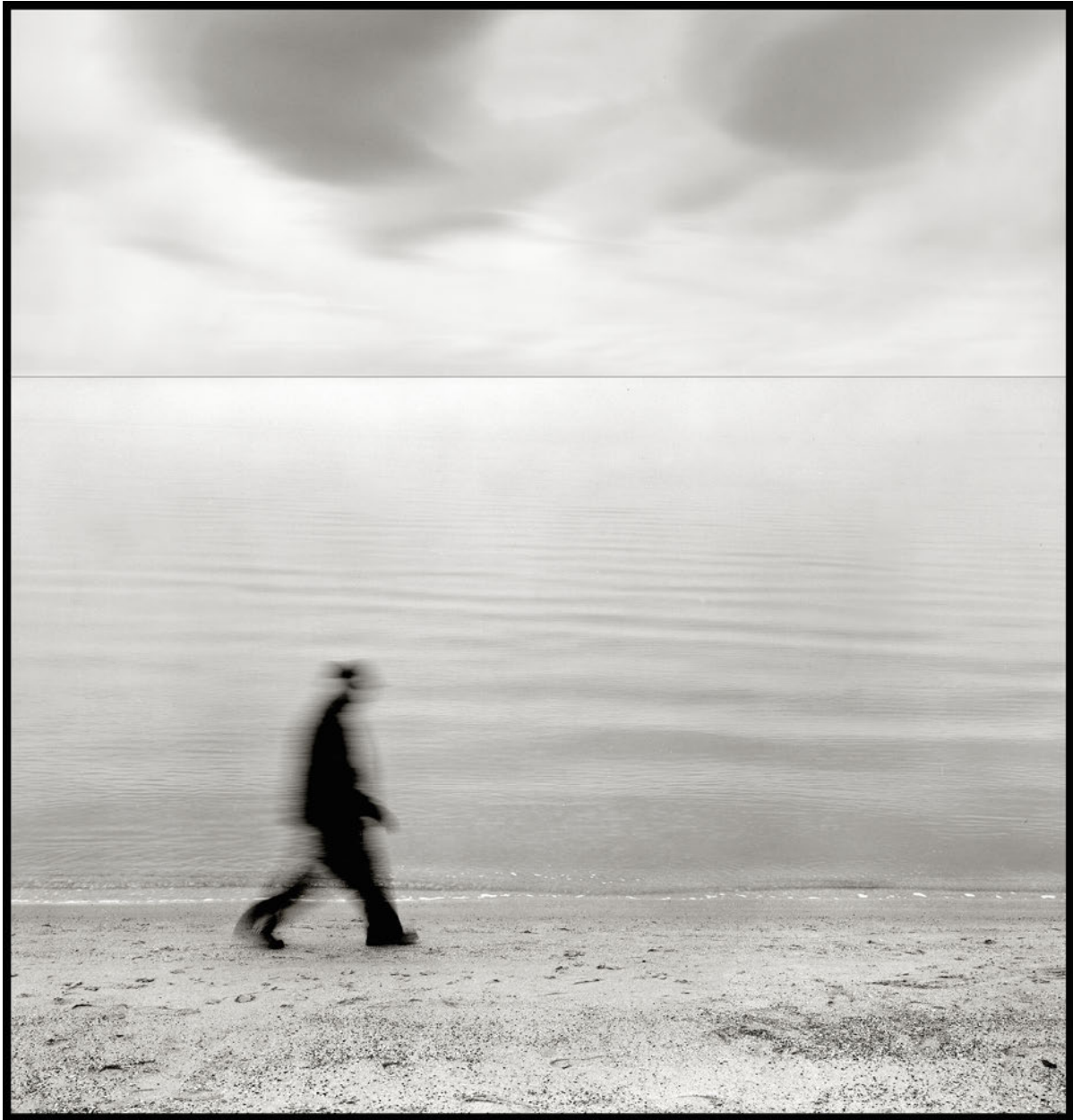
Each photograph in Series Number Ten – *Between Water & Sky* is actually two separate photographs. The first photograph is a sky and the second photograph is water. They fit together as companions or sometimes as uncooperative cousins. I merged and connected the two photographs into one single image. In my chemical darkroom – the sky is printed slightly on top of the water thereby creating a line "*In-Between*".

It is the nature of the world to change. Outside Pinedale, Wyoming I followed a narrow dirt road that finally ended at Half Moon Lake. I walked to the edge of the water and took an inventory of light. The lake was an ocean. There in front of me I watched a silver ring of sunlight dissolving along the creases of water and sky. The space between water and sky is only a thin fine line separating and connecting the two. Like our skin, it is the borderline between us and everything else.

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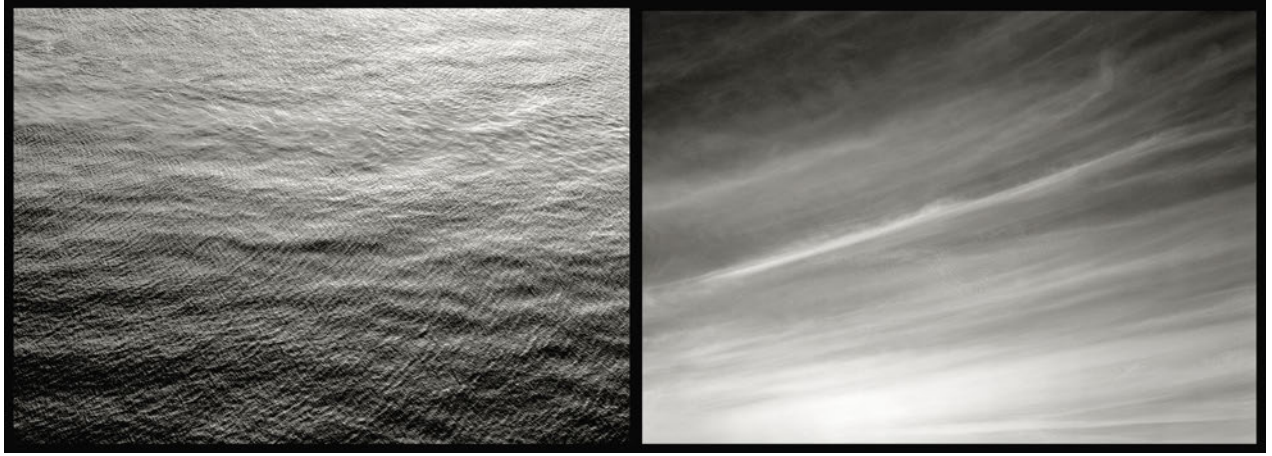
Water & Sky #1



Water & Sky #2



Water & Sky #3



Water & Sky #4



Water & Sky #5



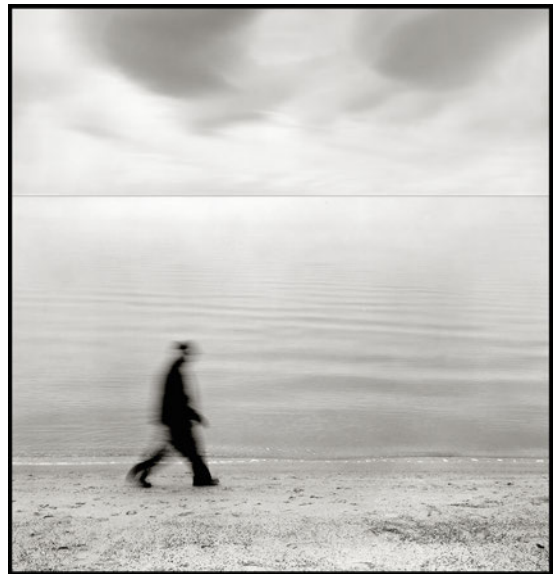
Water & Sky #6

Part Two – Between Water & Sky: Interviews

Can language describe what we see? How is our vision the same or different from everyone else's? I interviewed six individuals and asked each person to describe one of the *Water/Sky* images. (Man walking on a beach) I gave each person two instructions.

Instructions:

1. Describe this photograph as if you were describing it to someone who was blind?
2. Describe this photograph as objectively as possible – what you actually see in the photograph leaving out opinions and emotional judgments.



Naomi - Poet - Age 35

I see a wonderful blur of cloud and water images. Clouds are on the top and water is below. They almost seem to marry one another. There is a very strong identification between them. The ripples are the swirls and mist of each. There are no hard lines in this photograph. There is the hazy, cloudy misty sky. Passing in front of the water there is a human figure, a man walking. He is also in motion and appears as ripples, a blur against the water. His body joins the body of water which itself joins the sky. There is a wonderful sense of commingling of motion, nothing absolutely steadfast. Everything is in a flux. The only thing that is absolutely clear in this photograph is the sand. The very bottom of the image is where the man is walking. This photograph makes me hear wind and water sounds – that whoosh, that rush of motion. The man's hand is forward in a blur. He is going by. We are all going by.

Lucky Medina - former boxer now bakes pies for a hotel – Age 84

A man is walking on a beach. He has something in his hand. I think it is a paper sack. The man cannot swim here because if he leaves his bag on the beach, some people might come and take it. The man could be going to leave his bag somewhere. The water is on the edge of the sand. I can see the small waves being blown in by the wind. I used to go to Tampico and buy fish and poultry to bring to Laredo, Texas to sell. On the American side there was no fishing at that time. The clouds are near the ocean. I like the way it looks. This is no rain in these clouds. The man is not clear in this picture. I think that the steam from the water causes the man to be blurry. That's all you can see. The sea, the sand, the clouds and the sky. That's all.

Larissa - Student - Age 8

This is a photograph of an older man walking on the beach. I cannot see many features on his face, but I can see that his skin looks weathered. He may not have a chin anymore. He has a long pointed nose. He is wearing house shoes, which were not very expensive and long pants. The clothes are much too good for him. There are footprints in the sand. I see ripples in the water. There are clouds in the sky, it is overcast and may rain. There are seashells all over the beach. It would be a pain to walk on the shells without hurting your feet. I like this picture. It is not a good day to get a tan. The man in the picture probably lives in a small house on the beach alone.



He doesn't look like he has a professional job. Maybe he is a fisherman. He is wearing a dark cap.

Jim - Photographer - Age 31

This photograph shows the side view of a man in the lower portion of the image. He is walking across the photograph like he is walking across the stage. The image is in three horizontal stripes. The bottom stripe is the beach, the middle stripe is the water and top strip is the sky. The sky is cloudy with broad boomerang shapes all pointing to the left. The bottom of the photograph is real with sand and shoes but the sky above becomes ghost-like, almost surreal.

Mark - Artist - Age 21

Everything is cold and flat like running your hand across concrete, except the concrete is straight ahead and stretches on forever. Someone is walking by, his left foot is still but the rest of his body is moving. The man is on a beach. You can hear the waves far off in the distance. There is so much moisture in the photograph. The clouds are like hot steam coming off a bath. The front edge of the photograph is sand. I want to move my feet in this sand.

Della - Never married lives alone - Age 92

A man is walking along the ocean. The man is going somewhere but I don't know where. The man doesn't have any fishing equipment so I guess he is going home. The water is very smooth. Parts of the water are dark and other parts are light. There is a storm approaching. The clouds are in turmoil. I keep thinking about the man and why he is blurred. I guess he is going against the wind. I remember the first time I saw the ocean it was beautiful. The beach was not cluttered. I was 18 or 20 years old. We would sit and watch the ocean at 4:00 am in the morning. Now here I am and can't do anything.



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