

Series Number Fourteen
Simplest of Stories

Chiapas Streets 1988-1990

Nine Photographs
Essay, July 2024
Michael Nye

Simplest of Stories - Chiapas Streets

Photographs can remind us of what we have forgotten, they brighten the edges of memory. It's more like journal writing mixed with incandescence and impermanence and grays. The first thing that struck me about photography was the absolute freedom to work. No rules. No closed doors. One simple alphabet.



Simplest of Stories: One

Just out of high school I had a summer job at the World's fair in Montreal, Canada. I was a Pedi-Cab driver. It was a three-wheeled bicycle with two seats for passengers in the front. I wore a safari hat and kakis. I weighed 129 pounds so looked for the thinnest, lightest possible passengers. Toward the end of the summer, I was peddling two very heavy tourists, speeding down a steep pathway with improbable confidence. My eyes were wide open, aware of everything and except for what was DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF ME. I struck and ran over an older man crossing the pathway. My passengers flew out of the Pedicab onto the pavement. Blood was on elbows and knees. The unfortunate older man lay unconscious. A large crowd gathered, staring and pointing. I did not lose my job and the older man did recover, but the accident left an acute visual imprint in my memory. I can still visualize at this very moment, in my mind's eye, the expression of the older man's face, like a flash of a photograph, just before impact.

Simplest of Stories - photographs

The act of photographing is the act of choosing, photographing something that is seen and **Not Something Else**. This series of photographs is about awareness. It focuses not only on a particular moment or scene, (the Pedi-Cab accident) but also on, (**Not Something Else**) the empty spaces (steep pathway) leading into these moments.

These are vertical narrative photographs. Each photograph consists of two separate photographs stitched and blended together in the darkroom to become one final photograph. The top half of each photograph are city street moments while the bottom half are empty pavement, stone walkways or the earth's shadowy ground leading into the first. The empty spaces at the bottom of the photographs are an integral part of these simple stories.

After making the first photograph (city street moments) I then backed up and photographed the spaces flowing into first images. I found that I chose the first street scenes but the second images of the empty spaces chose me.

These photographs are the simplest of stories: A man stepping off a curb - a crowd gathering and waiting for nothing – A Tzotzil-Maya woman carrying something valuable on her back - Shadows of faces moving across a stone wall – a group of men looking worried at 10:04 am. These uncomplicated photographs are about waiting or hurrying. The most dramatic moment in this series is the woman standing in a pool of shadows. (Simplest of Stories – #4) .

From the sky, men, women, children, dogs, cats, horses, donkeys, cars and bicycles in markets and city streets move in patterns of necessity. Everyone carries a desire. Each empty pathway I met flowed from earth to stone to brick and eventually back to dirt. Sidewalks and streets are aware of their cracks. On Guadalupe Victoria Avenue time passes not by hours but by how many apples or tablecloths or flowers or car parts or tomatoes were sold. It is a testimony to entangled intricacy. City street-life consists of a series of chance encounters.

The blue of noon is different than the blue of early morning and at night the same blue turns dark gray. The most striking feature of street life is its unnavigable strangeness and vastness of unmapped moments.

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Simplest of Stories: Two



Simplest of Stories: Three



Simplest of Stories: Four



Simplest of Stories: Five



Simplest of Stories: Six



Simplest of Stories: Seven



Simplest of Stories: Eight



Simplest of Stories: Nine