

Series Number Twenty

unplanned & unforeseen

San Cristobal de las Casas - 1994

Nine Photographs

Michael Nye

October, 2024

unplanned & unforeseen:

nine photographs

Is it ever possible to see what is directly in front of us? How do spaces between moments change? The photographer of the photograph eventually becomes the viewer of the photograph. The viewer can find aspects of the photograph the photographer never knew was there. For a photograph to become a complete thought, the viewer must fill in the missing moments.

319 Glenmore Drive was one house on one street in a new subdivision, located only a block from the Corpus Chris bay. There was a mysterious wooded area across the street shielded by a row of South Texas rusty cedar trees. We had neighborhood baseball games and I was once bitten by a scorpion when I stuck my finger into an abandoned metal pipe. We didn't know it then, but as children we were free. No one needed permission to wander and explore. No mother or father said, "Be careful." We knew somehow by instinct not to cross Ocean Drive to the north or Alameda Street to the south.

It was in our Glenmore house that I first experienced altered air. During the hot sticky summers my parents would only turn on the window air conditioner at night. The hum sounded expensive. My brother Bill, sister Sally and I would bring blankets and curl up beside our black and white television in our parent's bedroom. One TV special – a movie - changed me even as I think of it now. It changed the way I thought of the world outside myself. It may have occurred in some South American country and in some earlier century. I can't be sure. The story revolved around a number of separate stories. Each person or persons were going somewhere. A priest going to visit someone. A father returning home from somewhere. A mother taking her son somewhere. A young woman was searching for someone. An explorer was traveling the world. There may have been others. The movie moved from one life story to another rapidly. Then in one surprising instant, all the separate stories merged. There they were, all these familiar faces holding their fragility in their hands, walking on a pedestrian rope bridge hanging over a deep dangerous gorge at the same moment. Some were coming from one side, others from the opposite side. Then, before I could blink or breath, the walking bridge collapsed and all these brave souls fell to their deaths. The movie ended.

As a child watching, I had no anticipation that a disaster was about to occur. It surprised me as much as it surprised the fallen unfortunates. As I grew older, reality carried a sharper edge. Asking questions seemed honorable. Randomness became taller. I thought of the hundreds that crossed the bridge safely the day before or seconds before the collapse. Series # Twenty is not about disasters or fear but rather the heavy heart of randomness and the benevolence of abstraction.

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“Watching” and listening” are both about being present.

Photographing in the streets of San Cristobal was an exercise of exhilaration and tolerance. Sometimes it felt like a movie scene, all of us were paid extras. Cars, animals, smoke, indigenous families walking, rain, movement, shopkeepers and darkness all competing for space.

I photographed this series with my camera resting on top of a tripod. Many, many, many times at the very moment I wanted to take a photograph, someone would walk directly in front of my camera or stick their head into the lens to ask a question. I would think silently, “PLEASE, not now, PLEASE!” but understood I was an uninvited guest on these sideways sidewalks.

This series is about randomness and the chance encounters on a city street. I decided to include these random interruptions as the essential element in this series. Now, I waited for the random break of visual continuity. Intrusions become a desire and the impassioned shadows of abstraction. What changed in these photographs is not the camera position but the field of vision. These images are less about departures and more about arrivals. There is no obstruction in either of these images, only moments extracted and held. These diptychs, two photographs placed side by side, are the shortest of stories. A person moves through the frame of the camera. Moments later they are gone and we see the same scene differently.

The fabric in these photographs is everydayness and randomness. These moments are unplanned and unforeseen. The weight of this series is abbreviated human contact. The hypnotist had no control over what happens on the streets of San Cristobal de las Casas. Randomness has many moods. At one end is calamity, and at the other end is delight.

Essay - October, 2024

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Unforeseen - One



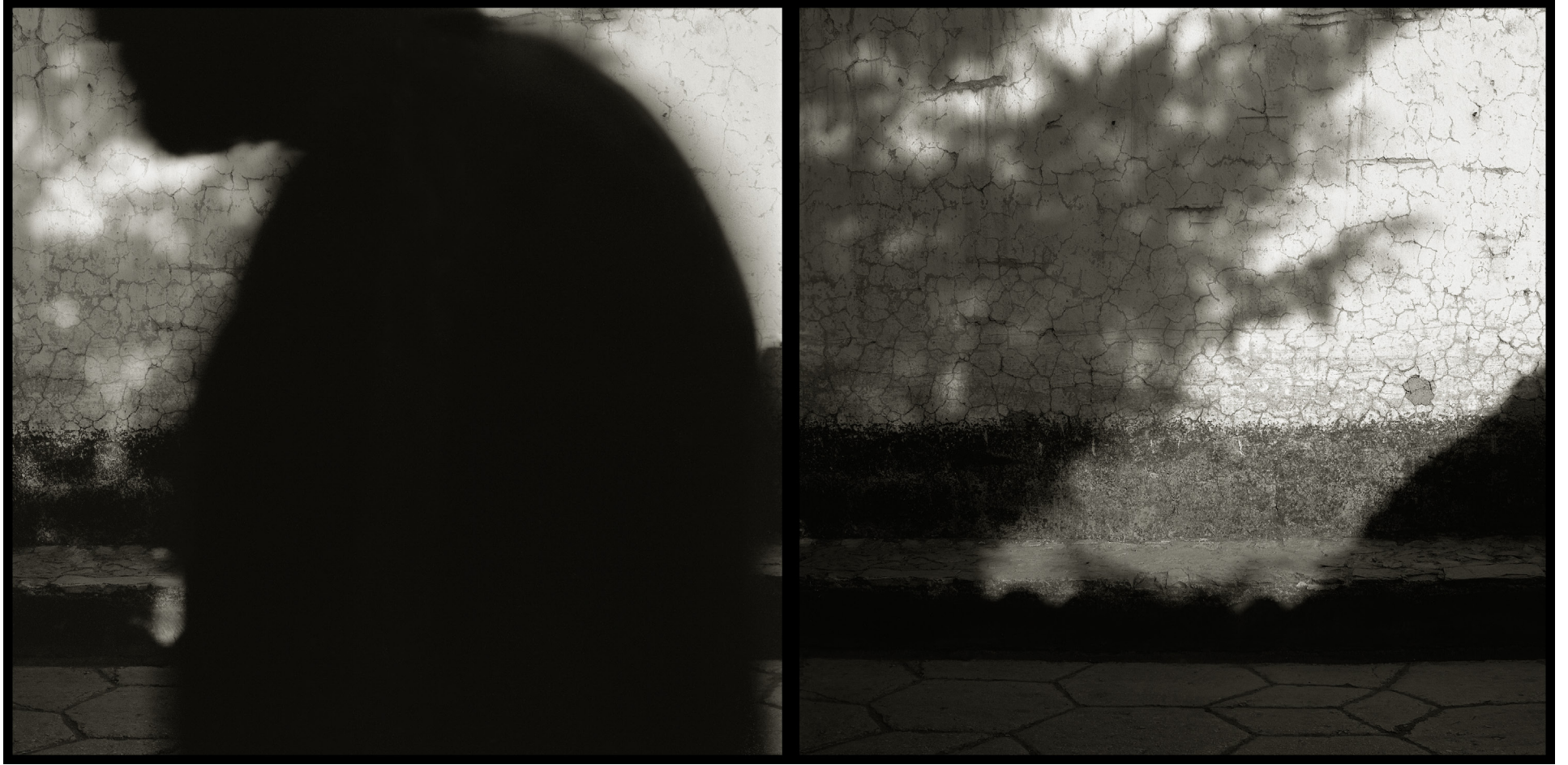
Unforeseen - Two



Unforeseen - Three



Unforeseen - Four *



Unforeseen - Five



Unforseen - Six



Unforseen - Seven



Unforeseen - Eight



Unforseen - Nine