

Series Number Twenty-Four

Morocco - Against the Glass, 1996

Twenty-Three Photographs

Essay - April, 2024

Michael Nye

Morocco - Against the Glass:

I started photographing in the deserts of south-eastern Morocco and then stopped and returned home.

In the spring of 1996, I was invited to exhibit photographs and speak with groups of local photographers in Marrakesh and Casablanca, Morocco through the United States Information Arts America exchange program.

The photographers I met talked about the long reach of their ancient landscape, wars and conflicts, family and home and history. I looked at many of their photographs. A family standing against a wall of sunlight and shadows – A brother with his eyes shut – a father swinging his child into the air — - a shadow of a palm tree against an glowing orange wall – A young man crossing the street in full sun with one hand swinging forward -- a school girl wearing rings of golden necklaces - the deep silent stare of a young girl; a man pointing to his right glass eye - a family sitting on a stone wall looking out into a silent desert. These photographs need no translation. Every person seen in these photographs was carrying a simple desire. Where are they now? The world spins and twirls forward.

Afterwards, I traveled to Zagora, in south-eastern Morocco, and then to the border of Algeria. Dots and twisted lines on a folded map have a magnetic pull. The Zagora region is inextricably linked with the Sahara Desert and possibly the origin of deep, dreamlike shades of orange.

Morocco felt edgy traveling alone into these remote areas. At the end of one dirt road, Moroccan women and men danced to incense. Striped blankets billowed in the wind. A man holding a prayer book had a tattoo on the back of one hand. Rounded archways held up softer colors on rooftops. Here, in this crowded market was a feeling of a liberal underworld, wild with tilted eyes. The color of heat is buried into the desert sand along with pieces of broken tile. The light is dramatic in the Moroccan desert. Yellow stutters in simple full sunlight.

Worry has a way with memory. Along the way I became extremely ill, with a very high fever, chills that lasted for many days. I stayed in an uncomplicated room with one small window to the outside. The shimmering colors on the walls turned dark grays at nighttime. Time slows and attention returns to smaller details when sick - counting footsteps from a nearby hallway - watching sunlight traveling

across the ceiling - listening to voices passing by my door. Later, as I was traveling through the desert, I was almost shot and robbed, except for the remarkable help of two kind strangers. What charts help us measure risk and pleasure?

On my way back to Casablanca my head and hands were pressed up against a glass window of the train. It was comforting moving toward a wanted destination. It was consoling watching the desert from the safety of a moving train. The steely train wheels were singing a lullaby. A young couple in front of me was eating flatbread, speaking in soft Berber. I thought about fragility's crooked line.

Daydreaming while traveling on the train:

In grade school, I woke up in the middle of the night with a raging fever. My mother got up and rubbed my head with a cool washcloth. The air conditioner hummed. We sat on a couch looking out our living room glass window, an opening to the outside world. My mother was so sleepy but still sang and talked to me all through the night.

Daydreaming while traveling on the train:

One summer our family traveled to Monterrey, Mexico. We left at night, all tucked into the backseat of our station wagon. My father drove and drove until the dark landscape grew taller. It was a wonder to wake up in a different country, the vast winding hotel staircase guiding us into an unfamiliar world. Music and language from the streets had a smell and taste. We drove up a mountain and finally reached Horseshoe Falls. In the restaurant, a huge glass window was situated on the very edge of a cliff. We leaned our hands and foreheads against the glass window, looking down, down, down into the deep canyon of clouds holding our simple questions safe.

Back home in San Antonio, in the warmth of family, I thought about the train's glass window and the indeterminacy of daydreaming. Fragmented visual memories eventually rise and surface for air. This series of photographs are about REVERIE and UNCERTAINTY, a state of dreamy reflection without a clear state of understanding or destination.

I purchased a large sheet of glass – (seven feet by five feet). I built a steady plywood brace. I photographed individuals leaning against glass in lobbies of apartment buildings, my studio and an old hotel lobby. I asked each person: *"Focus on a memory of yourself when you were younger or a family member or a far-away moment"*. (Some people brought photographs with them, others did not.)

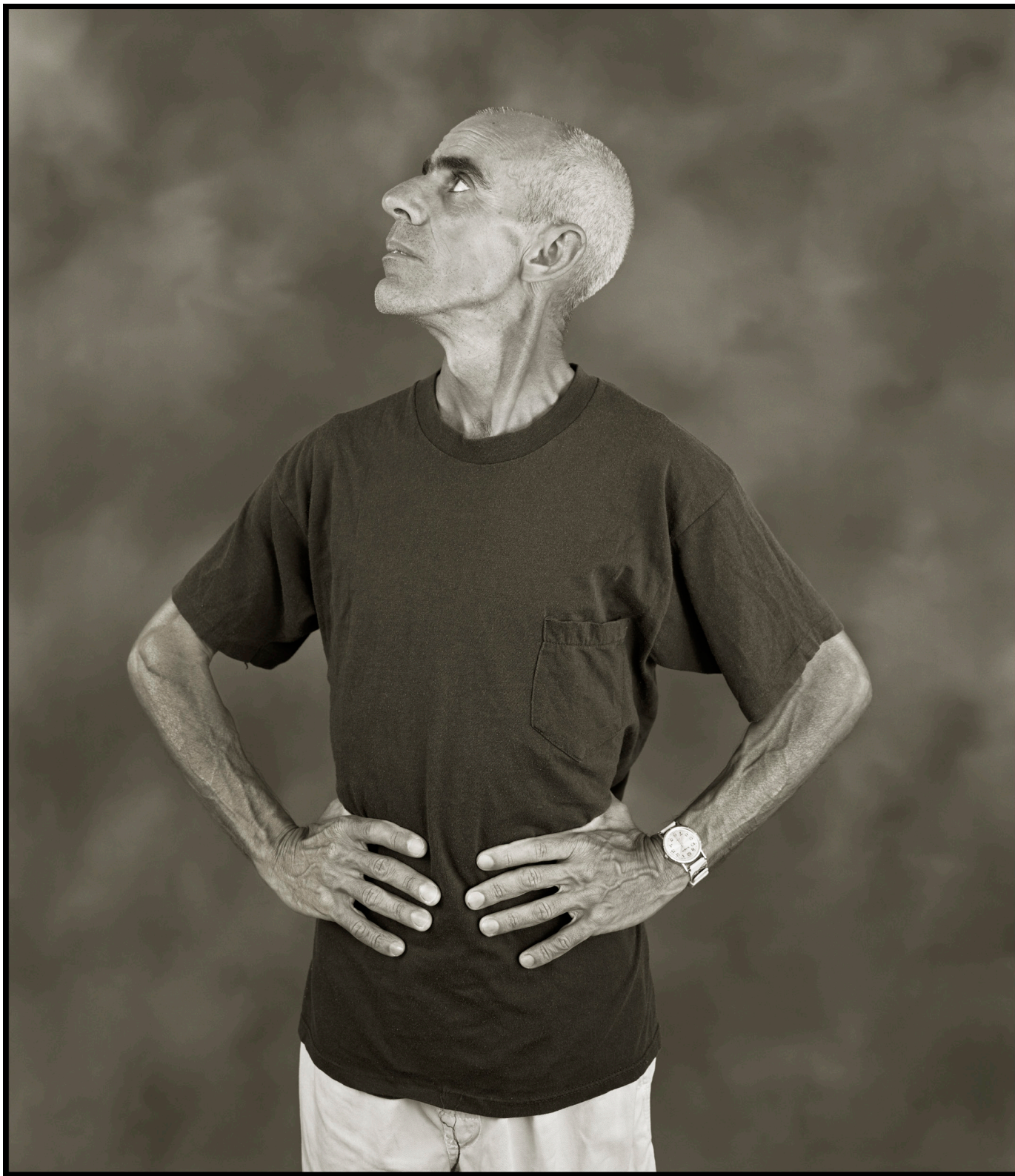
Touching glass leaves fingerprints. Each person in this series is a train traveler. Their focus is not on the present but on somewhere else. Many people expressed comfort, having the glass to lean against. The individuals in these portraits are not being looked at -- by us. Rather, they are the ones doing the looking.

Over a five-month period I photographed individuals leaning against the glass. We mostly talked about *"Now and Then"* and about, *"All the others."*

Essay: April, 2024



Against the Glass - One



Against the Glass - Two



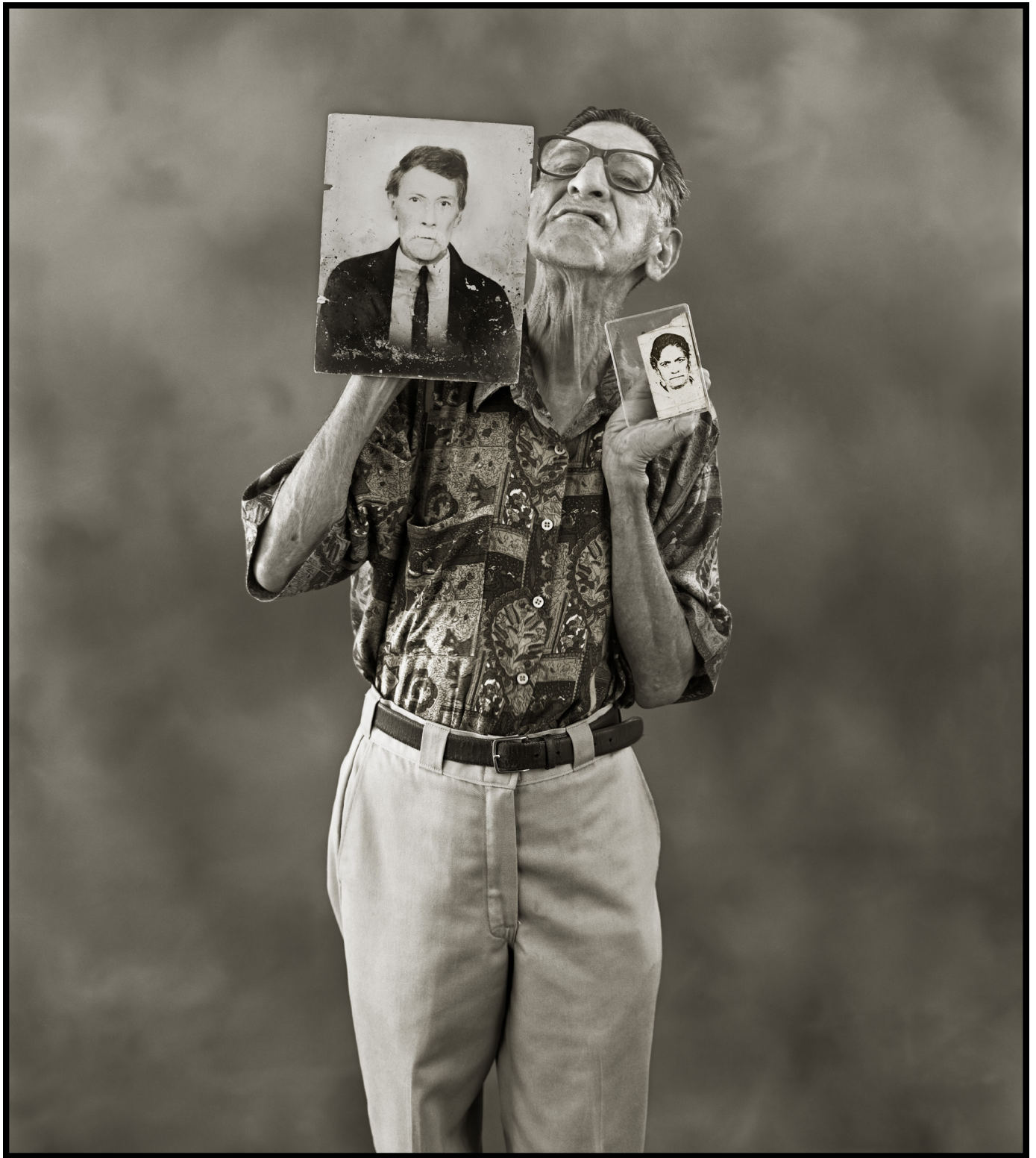
Against the Glass - Three



Against the Glass - Four



Against the Glass - Five



Against the Glass - Six



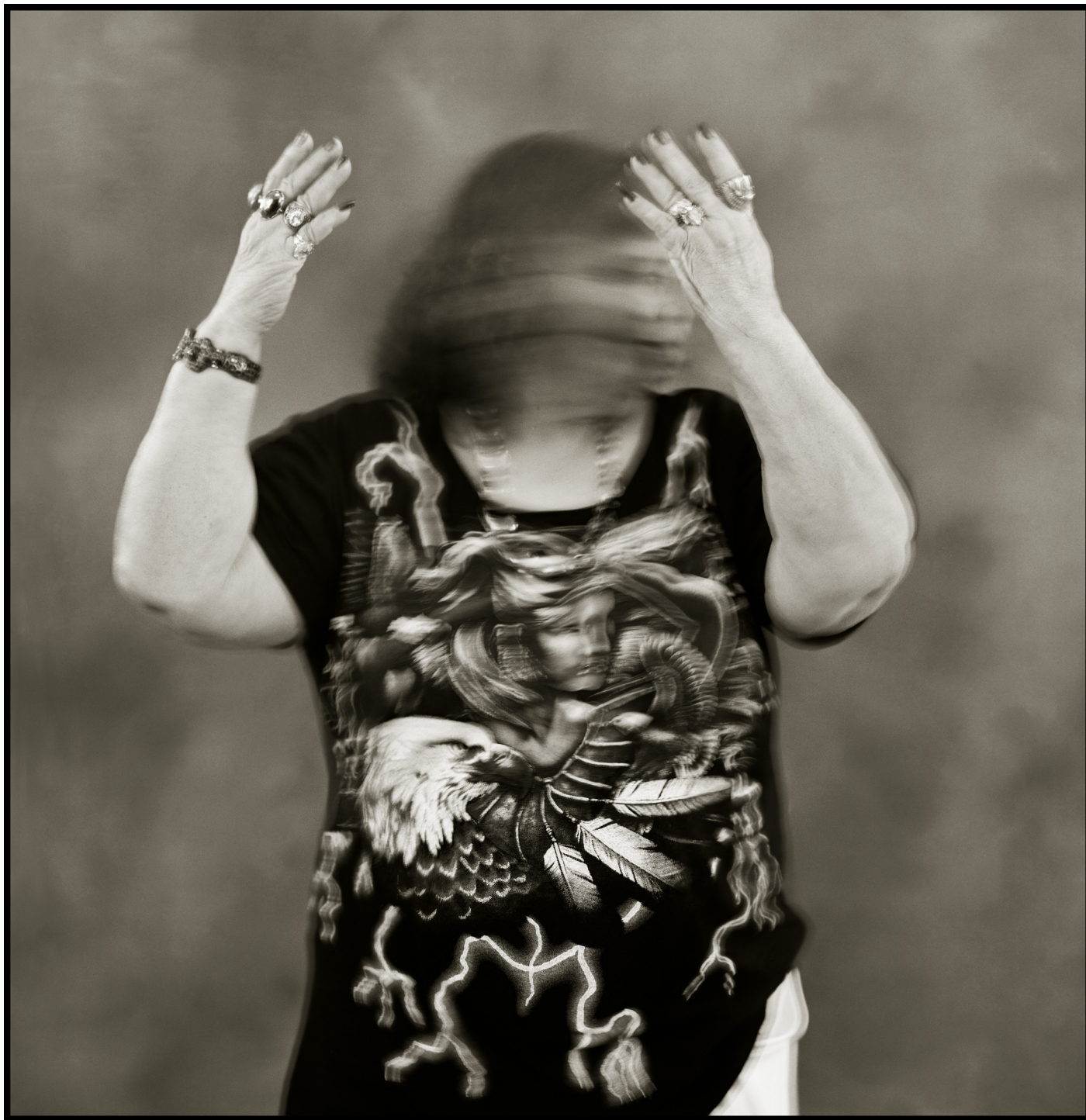
Against the Glass - Seven



Against the Glass - Eight



Against the Glass - Nine



Against the Glass - Ten



Against the Glass - Eleven



Against the Glass - Twelve



Against the Glass - Thirteen



Against the Glass - Fourteen



Against the Glass - Fifteen



Against the Glass - Sixteen



Against the Glass - Seventeen



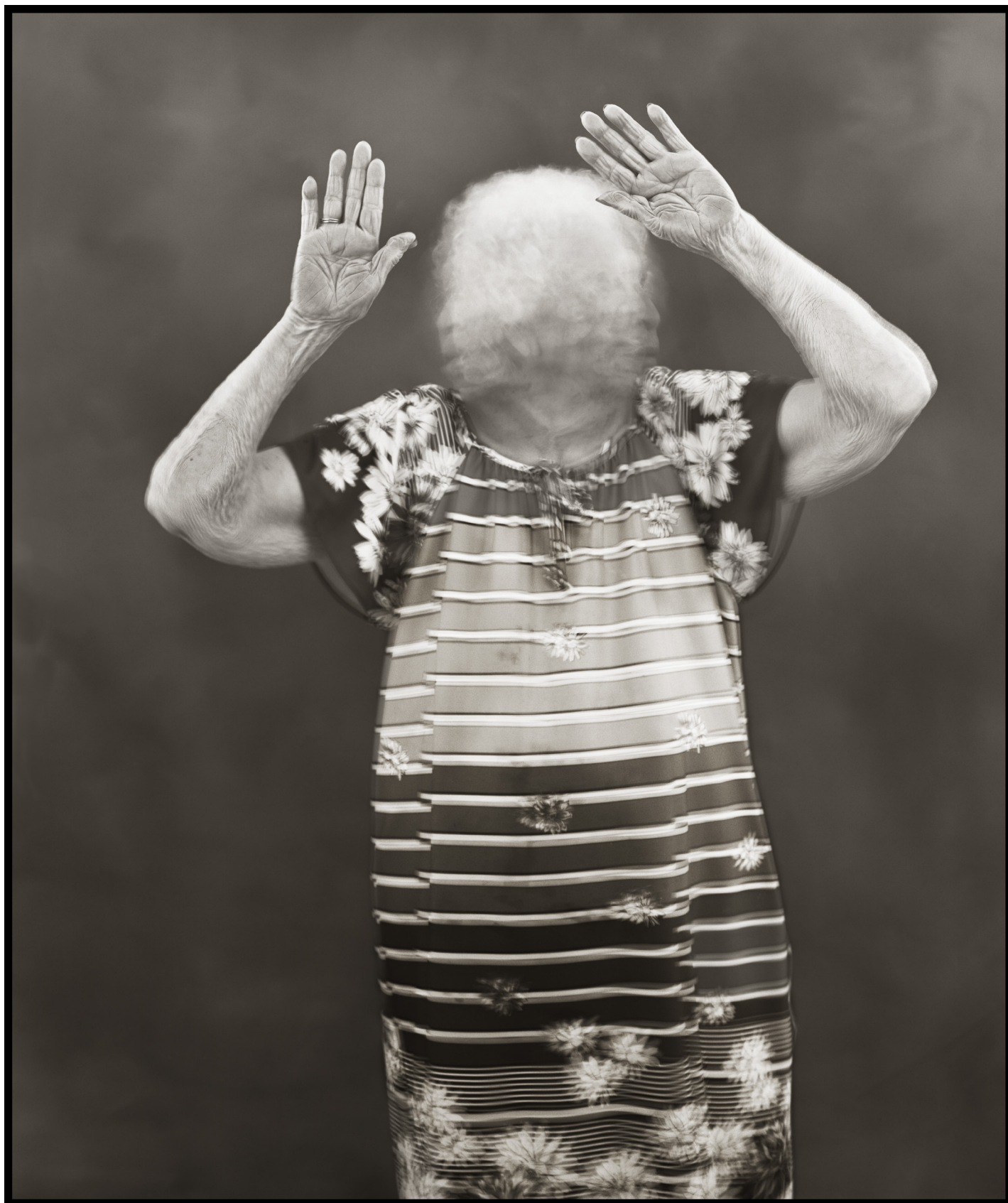
Against the Glass - Eightteen



Against the Glass - Nineteen



Against the Glass -Twenty



Against the Glass - Twentry-One



Against the Glass - Twenty-Two



Against the Glass - Twenty-Three