

Series Number Thirteen

Words Pretending to be Photographs
words & photographs

Photographs 1988/91 - Essay 2025

Nine Photographs

Michael Nye

Words Pretending to be Photographs

words & photographs:

inside can be outside depending on perspective - words and letters twirled and looped like paper airplanes - what is NOT seen but present - words and photographs are different moons circling the same planet - wearing disguises - what was living outside the rectangle edges

Listening to a word or string of words is another way of seeing.

When I was in grade school, my grandfather on my father's side – J. Sidney Nye - would write me four or five page letters each year on my birthday. They were tattooed with heavy complicated words. He wrote in deep flowing blue ink, his words and letters twirled and looped like paper airplanes. Exclamations points, question marks guarded the edges of sentences. There were quotes from sorrowful soldiers, forgotten historians, melancholy religious leaders and Shakespeare. I never really understood the depth of his letters, but loved the way they looked. I admired all they represented. I treasured them because he respected me as a thinking individual.

In the third and fourth grades my teachers told my parents that I struggled with words - reading and spelling, as well as writing words. My eyes would jump around on the page – up two lines or four lines down. Reading would cause me to become dizzy. In grade school my teacher asked me to read a page from our English literature textbook out loud to the class. I remember losing my breath and stumbling and stuttering. It wasn't until much later that I discovered I had symptoms of dyslexia.

There is a thin gray line separating human qualities labeled as burdens from those labeled as blessings. I never felt those early struggles were burdens. When I was a practicing attorney, I felt confident looking at larger puzzles of legal theory mixed with real life events and finding practical ways forward. Outskirts can be entryways to somewhere else. Inside can be outside depending on perspective.

words pretending to be photographs

The photographs in Series Eight are from different times, different places and different moods. What they have in common is what is NOT seen but present.

This Series of photographs is an attempt to wander outside the rectangle borders of photographs using language, (words and sentences) and not secondary images to describe what was present, but not seen at the very moment the photograph was taken.

The words under the photographs represent and occupy the exact moment in time. Like photographs, the words and sentences in this series are objective. They are trying their best to avoid interpretation, reflection, subjectivity or embellishment.

When I look at photographs, I often wonder about what was living outside the rectangle edges when the photograph was made: people passing by - sounds from buses - the color of light - the smell of coldness - what was behind or above the camera – the presence of trees - words flying through the air. A photograph lives with a knowledge that there are many other larger, extended shared experiences that occur in the same moment in time.

Words and visual images are different moons circling the same planet. They share peripheral places representing shared ideas and continuity.

The words at the bottom of each photograph in this series want to become photographs. They are wearing disguises. The photographs are photographs, however, the words are pretending to be photographs.

Essay - March, 2025

one



in the east, the sky is clear.

two



the procession of virgen de guadalupe is passing by.

three



the boy is holding a blue candle.



*Directly in front of the woman walking is a wooden foot
bridge crossing a loud creek rushing rapids.*

five



To the right, one truck and a bicycle are waiting for the train to pass. Above and around is the deepest blueest sky.



a large crowd watches as the man is being photographed.



to the left and out the stone window is a magnolia tree.

eight



*on the wall on the right side is a painting. a winter scene,
dark and foreboding.*



to the left of the photograph, the road moves sharply uphill and curves right.