Introduction

Twenty-Four Series

Essays & Photographs

January, 2025

Introduction

Twenty-Four Series - Photographs & Essays

Every photograph holds a secret. The twenty-four series of photographs in this collection were made between 1983-2001 and the essays were written in 2023-25.

IN the second grade, while waiting for my mother to pick me up from St. Patrick's elementary school in Corpus Christi, Texas, I buried a penny, deep along the edge of a sidewalk. It had something to do with not forgetting and all the questions that surface during childhood. Today, the coin still buried, still waiting in the dark on the side of the aging pathway. A child's hand was the last to hold it. Abraham Lincoln was on one side, on the other, "*One Cent - E. Pluribus Unum*".

Photography is not just about Photographs.
A photograph is also about what is experienced, imagined, learned and remembered inside and outside the borders of the photograph. Mood rearranges understanding. Care attaches weight and gravity. Experience is often amplified and wraps its arms around a moment. Perception rises like bread and is rarely limited to what is directly in front of us. Photographs specialize in time travel, moving from now to then. The language of "looking" goes deeper than surfaces. My fingerprint on the buried penny was a topographical map, but it offered no clear guidance on how to live.

All of my photographic series (including the many portrait series and documentaries projects) are connected to wanting be somewhere. Wanting to understand individuals, communities and places and ideas unlike my own. I fell in love with the medium of Photography with all of its limitations and surprises. Photography teaches that experience is best understood by taking risk, paying attention and waiting. I think of a camera not as a barrier that separates the photographer from what was seen, but more like a passageway, like stopping while walking to have a conversation. Randomness and intentionality stroll hand in hand.

I used photographic film, processed and printed in my darkroom. Most of the photographs were made using a large format 8x10" Deardorff View Camera. I might carry only 14/18 sheets of film because of the weight of the camera and film plates. Film takes time. When loading unexposed film in the darkroom into the film plates, I wondered, what focused light would land on these sheets of film?

Every photograph is ambiguous, susceptible to multiple meanings. That seems to be both a limitation and a strength. Photographs are not quiet nor are they untroubled. So much is missing from a still photograph. It could be the bite of cold air in the early mornings - the moving, murmuring of voices - all the questions floating in air. It might be the smell of smoke, dried leaves or the memory of rain. How does anyone photograph the serious remoteness of landscapes or the emotional longing many feel and share? Emotions and desires and "a look" are illusive. Even with all of a photograph's uncertainties, a photograph can be so mysteriously powerful. The act of photographing is also the act of holding onto something. In the middle of the night, in the darkroom with a soft orange glow of the safelight, photographs resting in running water are owners of their own light.

Working as a photographer has always been about setting an idea or question or attention into motion to discover what photographs – experiences - revelations might emerge from that hopeful endeavor. Like rain-water swirling down a valley, where will it end up? "Light and dark" are invitations to critical thinking. "A flash of light" in our peripheral vision is an exclamation mark. Uncertainty and failure are symbols in the same way as satisfaction or delight. What images should we tattoo on the surface of our skin? A face - a single tree or maybe a wish? Every person, every place is a map to somewhere else.

Four long-term Audio & Photography traveling exhibitions made between 2000-2023 are not a part of this collection. (Children of Children- Teenage pregnancy) - (Fine Line – Mental Health/Mental Illness) - (About Hunger & Resilience) and (My Heart Is Not Blind - On Blindness & Perception)

January, 2025

Series Number One

A Desert

Big Bend National Park: 1983-1986

Thirteen Photographs

Essay, March 2024

A Desert
Big Bend National Park: 1983-1986
Series Number One

paradoxically - dramatic contrast – lack of water – absence of soil - subfreezing temperatures – persimmon gap - jurassic age rocks - erosion dormancy - arroyo - badlands – semiarid - caldera - clays - edge effect - petrified palmwood – uplift - twisted - metamorphosed - dense limestone - maverick mountain - grapevine hills – perseverance – humility - stratigraphy fossil- millennia - extreme wind and cold and heat – imbedded horizonal limestone – lajitas and marathon - - dinosaur bones – non-anthropocentric vision

A desert's history is mostly invisible, even to the desert itself. The calligraphy on the desert floor is the cracking earth and erosion. The orange and black millipedes with their 750 legs make a slow walk from shadow to shade.

What stands out to most people visiting a wild desert is the vastness of land, untouched by human hands. A single cloud passing serves as a stop light. The nights are never black, even in moonless hours. At Persimmon Gap the sky has a rounded tilt. Our circling galaxy at midnight takes your breath away. Ask a desert what she is thinking about? The answers are about the weight of deep time.

Big Bend National Park is located along the Texas-Mexico border. The Rio Grande River defines its southern boundary. It was established as a national park in 1935, preserving the largest tract of desert topography in the United States. The Park is larger than the state of Rhode Island. Over 90 dinosaur species have been found to have lived in this area: Plant eating "duckbilled hadrosaurs" - "thunder lizards" weighing up to 30 tons - large flying creatures. Geologists have suggested that, "for a period of some 300 million years, a deep-ocean extended into the Big Bend region".

It's stunning to drive west from San Antonio and watch the slow spinning and rising of landscape. In a blink of a moment, eight hours, you are in a wild place. Big Bend National Park. This desert has a reputation of not needing water or shade to survive. In every treeless hill and stone and melting cactus there is evidence of deepest patience.

Driving into Big Bend National Park for the first-time, just over the border on highway 118, I saw tucked away in the east a glowing clay hill with stripes of purple and reddish bands in full sunlight. I pulled the car over and begin walking. A large view camera and tripod was on one shoulder and on the other, a bag of film plates and water. I hiked to the top of a small hill overlooking the clay dune and waited.

Within an hour the clay dune changed in intensity from a light brown to a glowing fiery creamy white. Then within a minute, as if it never happened, it suddenly changed back to darker grays and delicate blacks. (See photograph #1 - Near the entrance of the Park on Highway 118 near Maverick Junction.)

In Series Number One, “A Desert” I wanted to experience the desert in all its seasons. I wanted to be there. I photographed the shifting light of the Javelina and Bentonite clay hills and mounds. Shadows on these hills bend with the moving clouds. These hills were the first chameleons, absorbing and reflecting light at the same time. Over the next three years, I returned to the exact same place alone, camping, hiking and photographing the light embedded in these melting hills. Can the temptation of light serve as nourishment?

Journal; Nov. 17, 1984
Sunday – 6:45am: Pancho’s café. Cold wind blows along the edges. How cruel and beautiful and unre lenting the desert can be. Even quietness out here has a serious side. One man is eating alone. A prospector. The tips of his fingers look like flat coins on the table. His elbow sleeve is bloody. He is moving his fork to his mouth in slow motion.

February 2, 1986
It was a very difficult night. First time my tent blew over. I thought I was a tumbleweed. The tent stakes were not strong enough so I placed large stones around the edges. All night my tent was breathing, shaking and coughing. Around 3:00 am it started raining and a few hours later it was quiet. Light dusting of snow was on the ground in the morning.

July 14, 1986
Revisited the clay dunes on the eastern side yesterday. Clay and sandstone stripes of brown and purple and red bands on top. Ancient seashells and petrified wood rested on the surface. Very little sound anywhere. As I was returning to the car at sunset, two feral dogs approached tried to attack. They growled and circled around me. I took my camera off my tripod and began swinging it over my head, and threw some rocks. They backed off, but followed me to the car. It was almost dark when I drove away.

March 27, 1987

Photographed around the erosion area and then hiked out two more miles, carrying tripod and camera beyond the stacked stones southwest of the highway. Camera fell twice on a steep hill but no damage. All exposures were 2 to 3 seconds and now I worry about camera movement. Last night the moonlight was too bright to change my sheet film, so I covered my tent with blankets, sleeping bag, shirts and my dark cloth.

These photographs say very little about my experience in the desert. How can they? The desert has a habit of aloofness. Light waits, arrives, returns, departs, softens, yields and colors lighten when they merge with heat and dust. This desert in all its disguises shimmers and flashes before dark. I would hike several miles off the highway and camp alone among these friendly hills. I felt nervous at night when I heard strange noises. I thought the wind flapping against the tent might be a mountain lion. The boundary lines in the desert are not found on a map or survey, but have to do with risk.

In late spring, the hawks fly low over the ground searching for tarantulas. Beneath a darkening sky in early night, there is a desperate deep thirst and ache rising up from the cracks on the desert floor. Heat and distance seem related. Days and nights are not a measurement of time but by mood and temperament. The light from the sun and moon don't go unnoticed in these lonely spaces.

Essay March 2024

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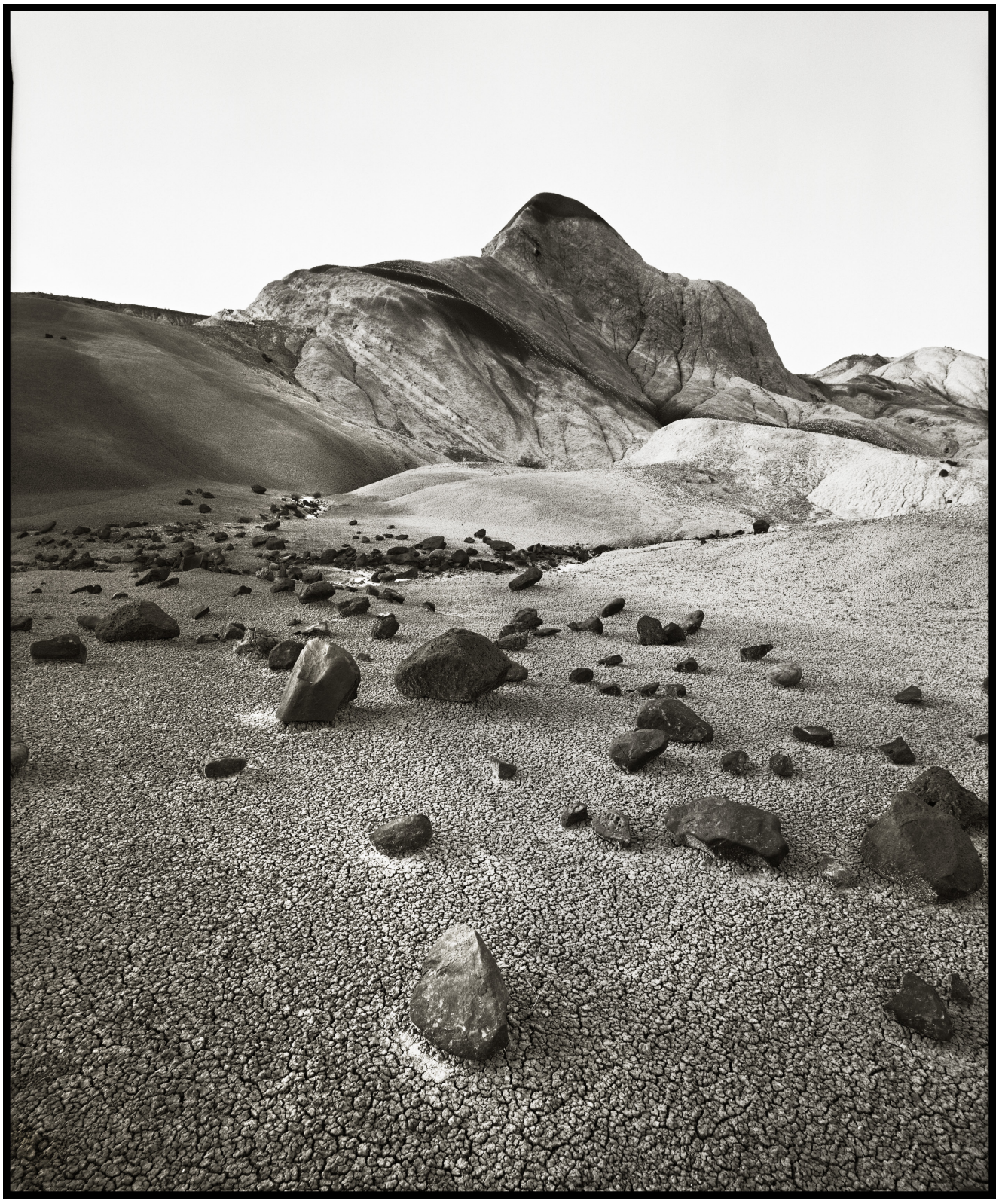
Desert One



Desert Two



Desert Three



Desert Four



Desert Five



Desert Six



Desert Seven



Desert Eight



Desert Nine



Desert Ten



Desert Eleven



Desert Twelve



Desert Thirteen

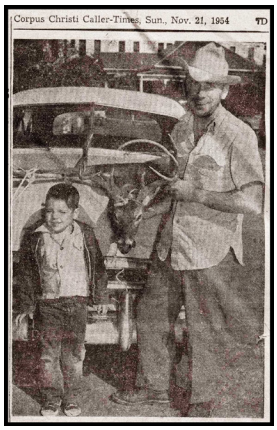
Series Number Two
Cattle Auctions - 1987

Fourteen Photographs

Essay - July, 2024

Cattle Auctions:

Butchers can be kind and gentle people. My German grandfather Fred Hobrecht was a butcher. He owned a small one-room grocery store on Bowie Street in Beeville, Texas. Fresh meat hung from hooks. I never saw him kill a cow or hog but did see him chop off the head of a rooster who lost his voice at that very moment. After my father died, I found an old newspaper clipping of us standing next to his 1950 Chevrolet. A dead deer was strapped to the hood. The article read, *"Paul Nye shows the nine-point buck he killed . . . north of Utopia. The Lad on the left is his son, Judge 5."* They called me Judge when I was small because I was serious. I remember never liking the idea or act of hunting and killing.


Corpus Christi Caller-Times, Sun., Nov. 21, 1954 TD

I grew up around cattle. My father leased some ranch land in South Texas and on weekends we built fences, vaccinated, and counted baby calves along dry creek beds. The cows were Herefords, brown and white with thick necks and curly hair. They were mostly friendly. They originally came from Herefordshire, England and were admired for their adaptability in harsh climates.

When we arrived at the ranch my father would yell out, "HeeeYall – HeeeYall!" We threw out Purina Hi- protein Range Cubes known as "Cow candy". The cows came running, chasing us, wagging their tongues, mooing for more. They seemed content in their wide peaceful green pastures. Every nose was pointing east toward soft breezes in late evenings.

The San Antonio Union Stockyards was established in 1889. In 1950, during one year alone, over one million cattle passed through. The stockyards closed in 2001 when the numbers dwindled. My first visit was on a hot summer afternoon in 1987. The walkways were high and circled above the cattle, waiting. I remember staring in disbelief. Tens of thousands of cows were bellowing, their bodies were mixed with heat, sweat and the toxic smell of manure. Everything was in motion.

In the center of the stockyards was an arena where the cattle were bought and sold. Some were sent to local ranches, others were sent to slaughter. Stockyard workers directed the cattle to various pens and into trucks to be shipped out to their final destinations. The auctioneer's high-pitched voice floated and echoed above us all.

I purchased a 4x5" Graflex RB/Super D camera for $45.00 dollars. It was manufactured in the 1920s. This 4x5" view camera was designed to be used without a tripod, hand held. Alfred Stieglitz used this camera model when he made his cloud series of photographs which he called "*Equivalents"*. Stieglitz said, "*The clouds represented clouds but they were also were symbols representing profound human emotions like music, fear or joy."*

From the walkways high above the surrounding stockyards I could bend over the railing, my head inside the camera's dark bellows and legs holding onto the metal bars so as not to fall and tumble below. Every person I encountered asked: "*What are you looking at?*" The act of photographing means that one is paying attention to what is seen. Dr. Welch Diamond, an eccentric collector, photographed his mental patients in England in 1850. He wrote, *"We are surrounded by things which have been lost, some things simply disappeared while others appear not to have existed at all. It is quite possible to look at something without seeing it. Discovery or rediscovery usually results from a change in perspective."*

I don't know what cowboys know. Two of the images were made on a cattle ranch in South Texas. The cowboys I met were hardworking, solitary, and understood the complexity and behavior of cattle and horses. They were committed to the herd's good health. The workers at the Union Stockyards were not cowboys. Some were considerate while others were cruel and efficient. The stockyards reeked with sadness and resistant realism. The cows constantly re-organized themselves for protection. Their instinct was to huddle in groups, bodies tightly pressed together, moving as if they were one larger entity. Some cows were ready to fight, others huddled and waited.

In the darkroom I thought about the invisible impulses of our shared moods and movements. Fear has a sway. Confidence has a twirl. Business men and women, with their heads down, walk to work in the early mornings. Crowds gather into sports arenas, cheering, and waving their arms in the air in unison. Couples walk slowly holding hands. In grocery stores shoppers waiting in checkout lines are lost in their private thoughts. On school play-grounds children run in circles laughing and shouting in their tiny voices.

What is forgotten is lost. This series is about remembering. I have seen abandoned train stations, bus depots, department stores and movie theatres. Each and every one has its own history and fading memories. The Union Stockyards are now torn down. In this same space of land and moving sky, commercial buildings and young neighborhoods are growing their roots. The sounds of mooing are still visible.

Essay - *July, 2024*



Cows # 1



Cows # 2



Cows # 3



Cows # 4



Cows # 5



Cows # 6



Cows # 7



Cows # 8



Cows # 9



Cows # 10



Cows # 11



Cows # 12



Cows # 13



Cows # 14

Series Number Three

Sleep: 1987

Eleven Photographs
Essay - December, 2024

Series Number Three - Sleep



Sleep # 1

Our close friend and artist, Nancy Lowrey drew images of birds in flight over time. In her drawings, there were blurred lines of swirls and loops, shadows of birds soaring. From the perspective of a drawing, their shared journey appeared as a waltz. Each bird carried a desire and a latent map. Are there any accidental destinations?

All parents watch their child twirl and dive in sleep. They listen to baby sounds – feel the rapid heart beating -- watch the soft rise of lungs – their careful fingers twitching. Just before sleep there might be holding and rocking and singing. Responsibility is the air that parents breathe most.

The sleep series came out of this careful and protective watching. My wife Naomi arose at 4 am to write, so at noon, Naomi and baby Madison would take a nap. A baby sleeps for 16 hours a day during the first year.

We put a mattress on the back porch. The soft light floated in air and was filtered through our backyard pecan leaves. In the beginning, the sound of the 5x7" view camera's shutter would cause my wife or son to move or awake. I put on music, Gregorian Chants together with a metronome, clicking at two-second intervals. Finally, the shutter clicking sound went unnoticed.

X. J. Kennedy wrote a poem titled: "The Purpose of Time is to Prevent Everything from Happening at Once." We need places in between other places. We need rest and sleep and reverie, places lost in thought, dreamy states of being. Sometimes there can be strength in darkness. Dreams have airy roots. Remembering and forgetting are connected.

Where do we go when we slip over the edge in sleep? A waltz of sleepers crisscrosses the night. In sleep, Naomi lifted her arm and Madison would lift his arm. Naomi turned to her side, Madison followed. A shadow follows a person in sunlight but also in sleep. I was surprised how they moved together in unconscious moments. A baby understands that his mother is nearby. A mother is cognizant of the presence of her child. Watching someone sleep is an awareness of being awake. What I did not think about while working on this series is how far-away I would be from those moments now.

Essay -December, 2024



Sleep # 2



Sleep # 3



Sleep # 4



Sleep # 5



Sleep # 6



Sleep # 7



Sleep # 8



Sleep # 9



Sleep # 10



Sleep # 11

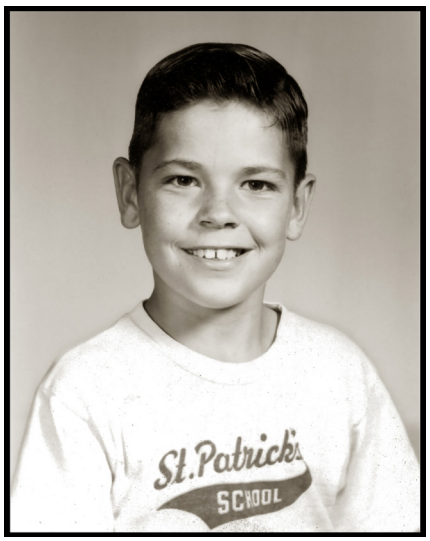
Series Number Four

Portraits: San Cristóbal de las Casas

1986-1988

Nineteen Photographs
Essay - June, 2024

Portraits: San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico



THERE is a difference between having your portrait taken and taking a portrait. In grade school our teacher told us to form a line, our last name determined the order. Nancy Nicholson and I waited for our turn to stand in front of the camera. The school photographer told each child the same thing. "*When I say Corpus Christi, SMILE."* What I remember most was that the school photographer never smiled.

What gives the word "permanence" significance must be change. I read about Julia Margaret Cameron turning her hen house into a dark room in 1863 in England. She photographed Alfred Tennyson, Charles Darwin, neighbors, friends and workers. Most of her photographs are at the Humanities Resource Center in Austin. With white gloves, I held one of her photographs and then another. She wrote in her journal, *"I came running out of my darkroom to show each new photograph with such excitement, each time dripping silver nitrate staining my blouse."*

My wife Naomi and I were invited to be artists-in-residents at Casa Na Bolom in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico. Na Bolom had been the home of anthropologists Frans and Gertrude (Trudi) Blom. Frans was one of the first anthropologists to excavate Palenque, the ancient Mayan City. Trudi was a jungle adventurer and dedicated to the protection of the Lacandon Maya people and the preservation of the rainforest.

We stayed in a tiny cabin hidden in Na Bolom's lush gardener's garden. Rain started and stopped every early morning. Dinner each night was lit by candlelight. Large wavering shadows appearing on painted stucco walls. The long dinner table was covered with red and purple Zinacantan cloth, flowers, hot soups and breads. There were artists and movie actors, visitors and indigenous Tzotzil Maya women, men and children around the table. Trudi Blom was in her mid-eighties and would appear in formal indigenous dresses with heavy jewelry around her neck and fingers.

She would yell at anyone that arrived late. “PorQue’ llegas tarde!” Languages circled, birdcalls and clinking silverware competed for attention.

San Cristóbal sits in a small valley surrounded by hills and tropical jungles. The Tzotzil Maya is the largest indigenous group making up roughly one third of the state’s indigenous population. The wet season runs for six months. After spending time in a desert, it is impressive what water can do to the earth. The Tzotzil, native Maya people from Chamula and Zinacantan arrived into the city in morning darkness. The streets breathed and fireworks exploded. The smells were taller, mint greener, smoke and cold were inseparable. Every shiny, skinny street desired recognition.

Art is devoted to bringing us closer into focus. Portraiture can be more than a handshake or “Buen dia” in passing. Meeting someone for the first time there is an exchange of early words and histories. Light is shrinking and swelling - Then, there is a slow sudden stare. Silver light travels through the air, bouncing, reflecting off a person and then that same light passes thourgh the lens and softly touches the negative. So much is seen. So much is hidden. To bump up against someone can leave a fingerprint.

Augustine the street sweeper was responsible for cleaning the area around Santo Domingo Cathedral. He rarely stopped moving. The streets were littered with street things, pieces of fruit and papers and sicks and blowing dirt and objects falling from people and sky. His broom was made of tree branches, long and tied with strong twine. Augustine said, “My work starts over every day.” There can be a reverence and generosity in a look.
(San Cristobal Brooms #6 & 7)



Returning to Casa Na Bolom in the late evening, feeling both tired and glad, I saw a mother and daughter were waiting for a bus. They had faces and language that they owned. All the lengthening shadows first follow, before dissolving into nothingness toward night time. After dinner, I went to a local bar and drank too many beers. I thought about portraiture. Several weeks earlier in Tuxtla Gutierrez, I watched an itinerant street photographer working with confidence in the city square. He first made a paper negative and then re-photographed the negatives into positive prints. His darkroom with chemicals were inside his camera box. A bucket of water held his finished portraits. He was never in a hurry. What did he understand about faces?

The next morning, I went to the busy city square and set up my 5x7" view camera/tripod, film plates, backdrop and single chair. I had a large hand printed sign in Spanish, announcing: Portraits for 25 cents. (Peso equivalency.) At the beginning, a large crowd circled, watched and waited. No one stepped forward. It was very awkward.

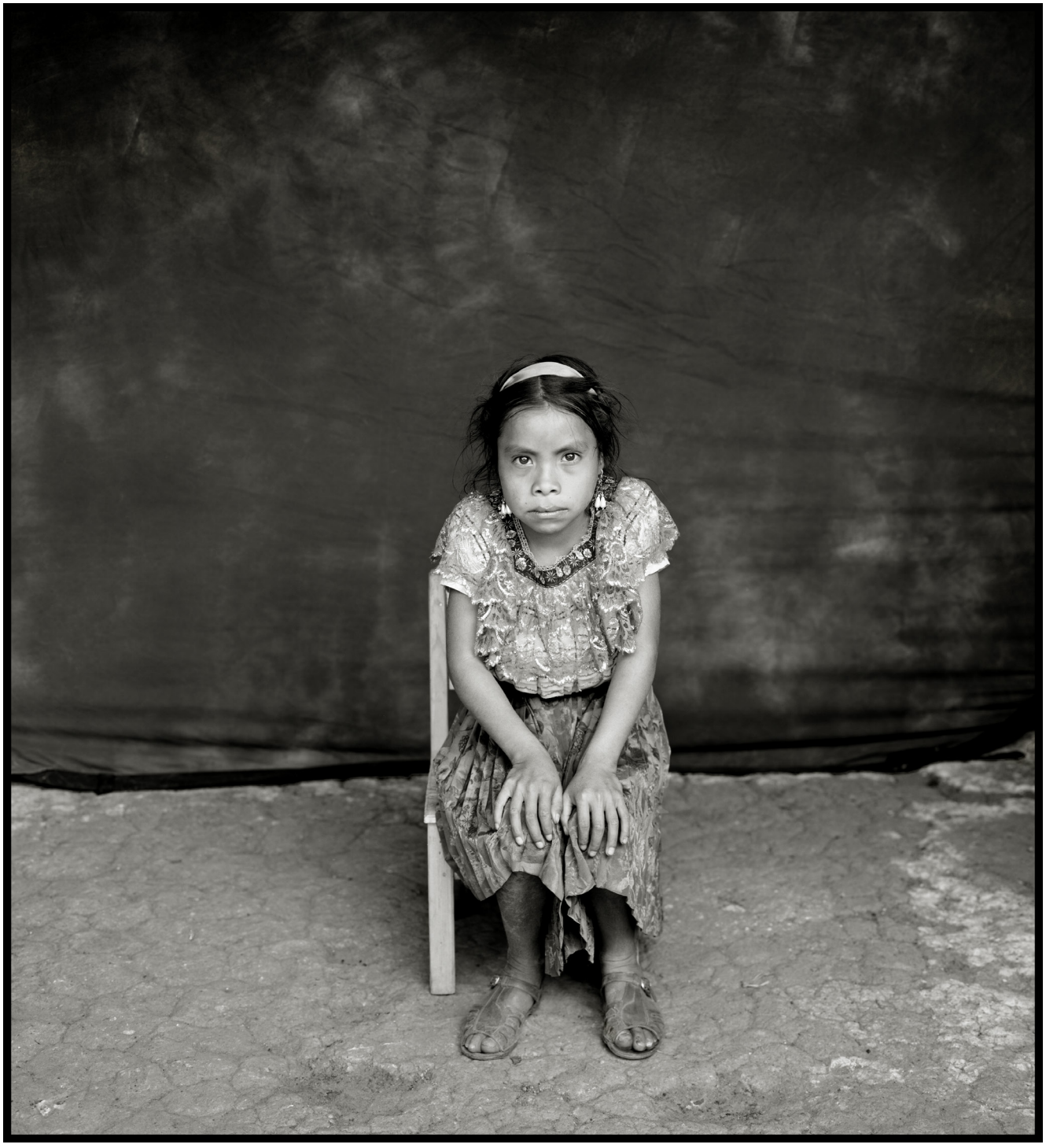
Finally, a father and his son approached the camera and we started talking. We agreed on the price and I told them that I would deliver the portrait in two days. Within 20 minutes, a long line gathered to have their portraits made. Mothers brushed their children' hair, cleaned their faces, pushed shirts into pants. A brother and younger sister held hands. Laughter and questions were exchanged. An old woman with an injured leg stood tall. I was nervous. What if the negatives were over or under exposed? What if the developing chemicals were contaminated? What if the people hated the portraits? My close friend Barry Norris, a photographer working with his wife Joan at Na Bolom had a darkroom that I used.

No one refused their portraits. Some were delighted, while others complained. Some wanted their portraits in color, not black & white. Some were unhappy because I cut off their feet. One man was annoyed because most of his head was missing. (No charge for that one.) I reduced prices for my mistakes in judgment. Reciprocal participation was appealing. The exchange was not just a photographic portrait for currency, but for conversations, human presence, connection and acknowledgment. It was a sideways or tilted kind of knowing. Photographs can increase in value if it becomes part of a family's history.

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In the village Aguacatenango, I photographed a large extended family. Father, mother, aunt, uncle, grandparents, neighbors, older brother and sister. A young girl begged her parents to have her portrait made. (See - Aguacatenango - One) They said, “No, No, No!”. As I was leaving, she ran to a small chair and sat down in front of me. She placed her hands on her knees. Her eyes stared deeply into her future. Her need to be seen was her heart beating.

Essay - June, 2024



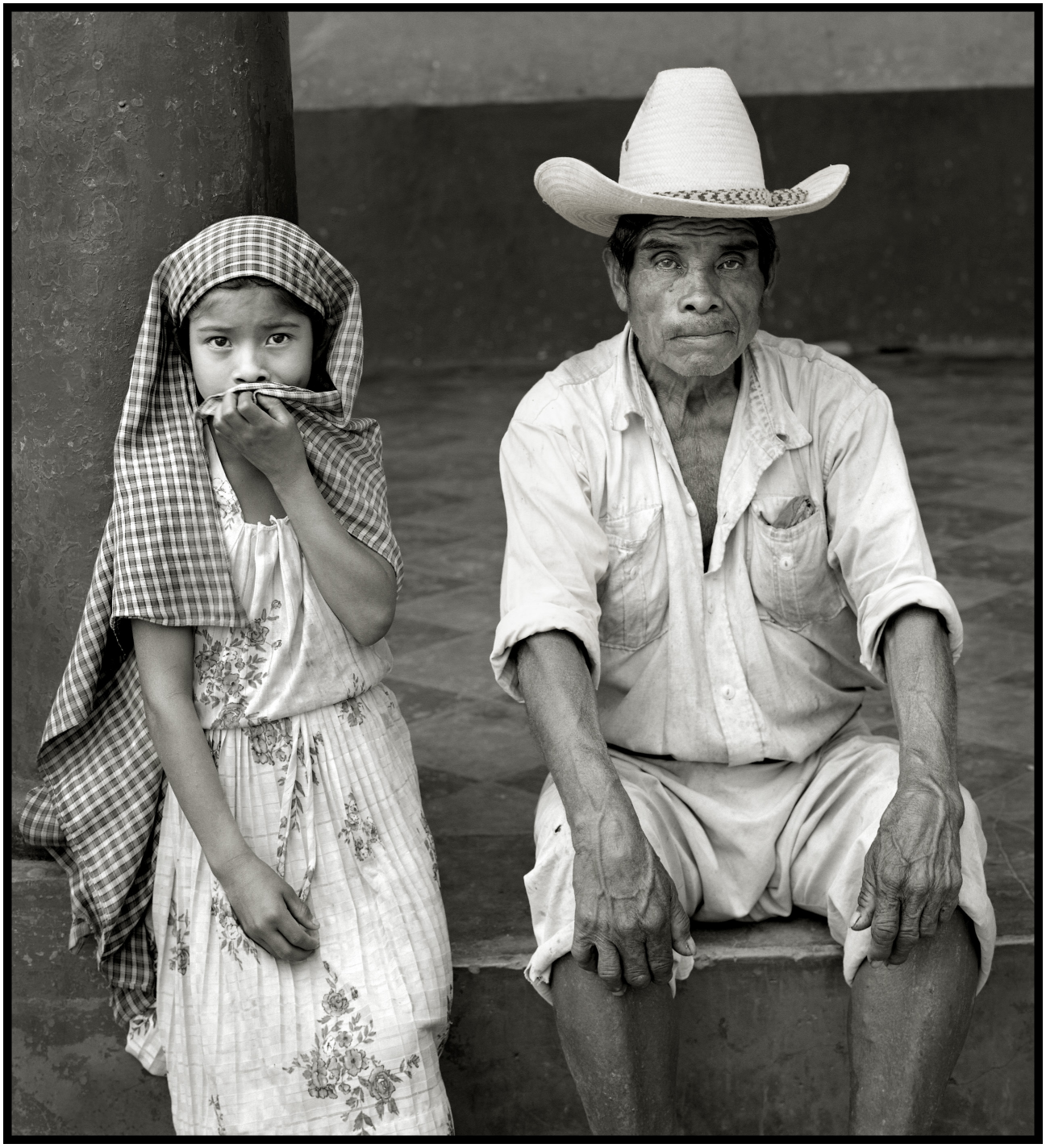
*A*guacatenango - *One*



San Cristóbal - Two



San Cristóbal - Three



San Cristóbal - Four



San Cristóbal - Five



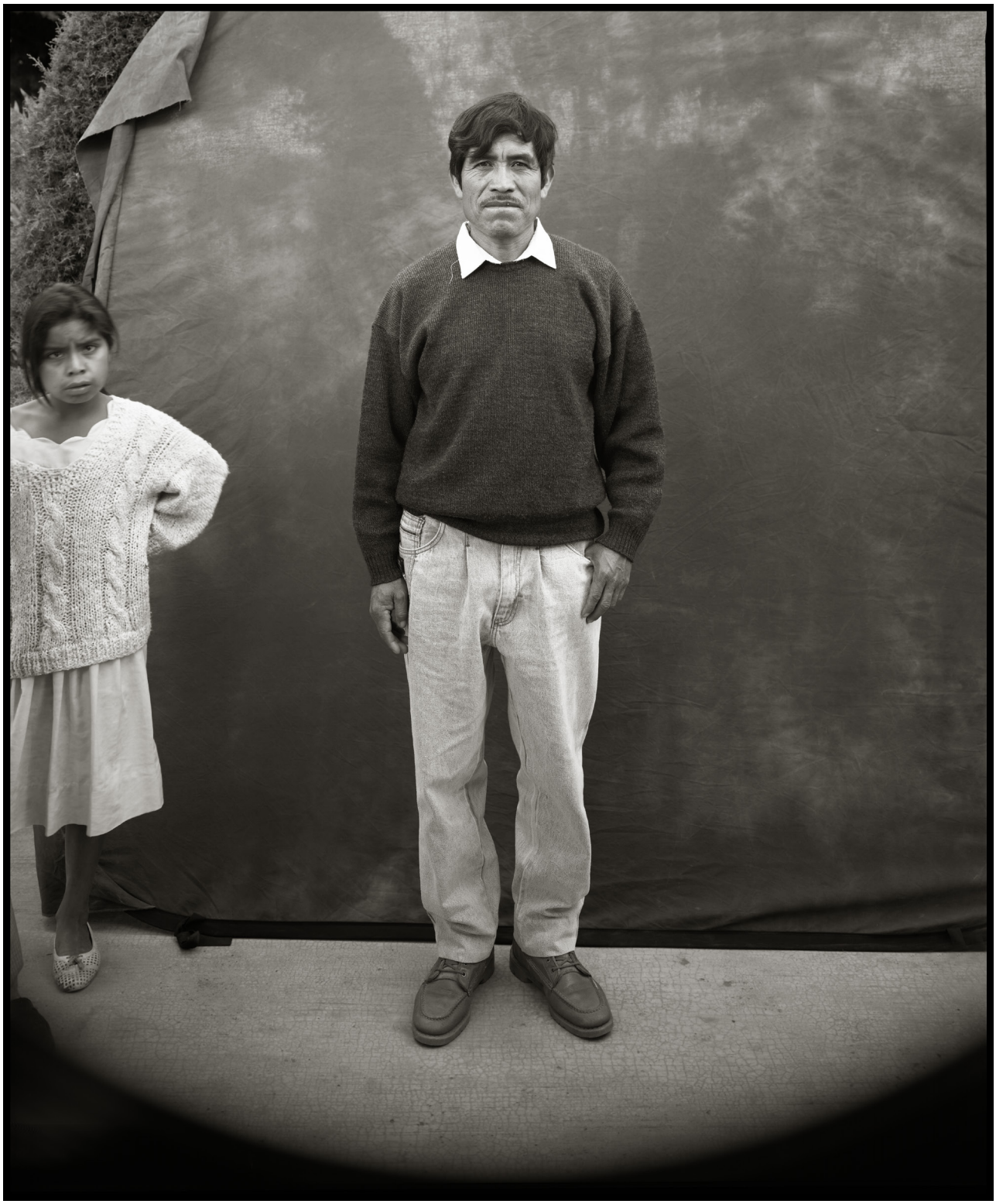
San Cristóbal - Six



Brooms - Seven



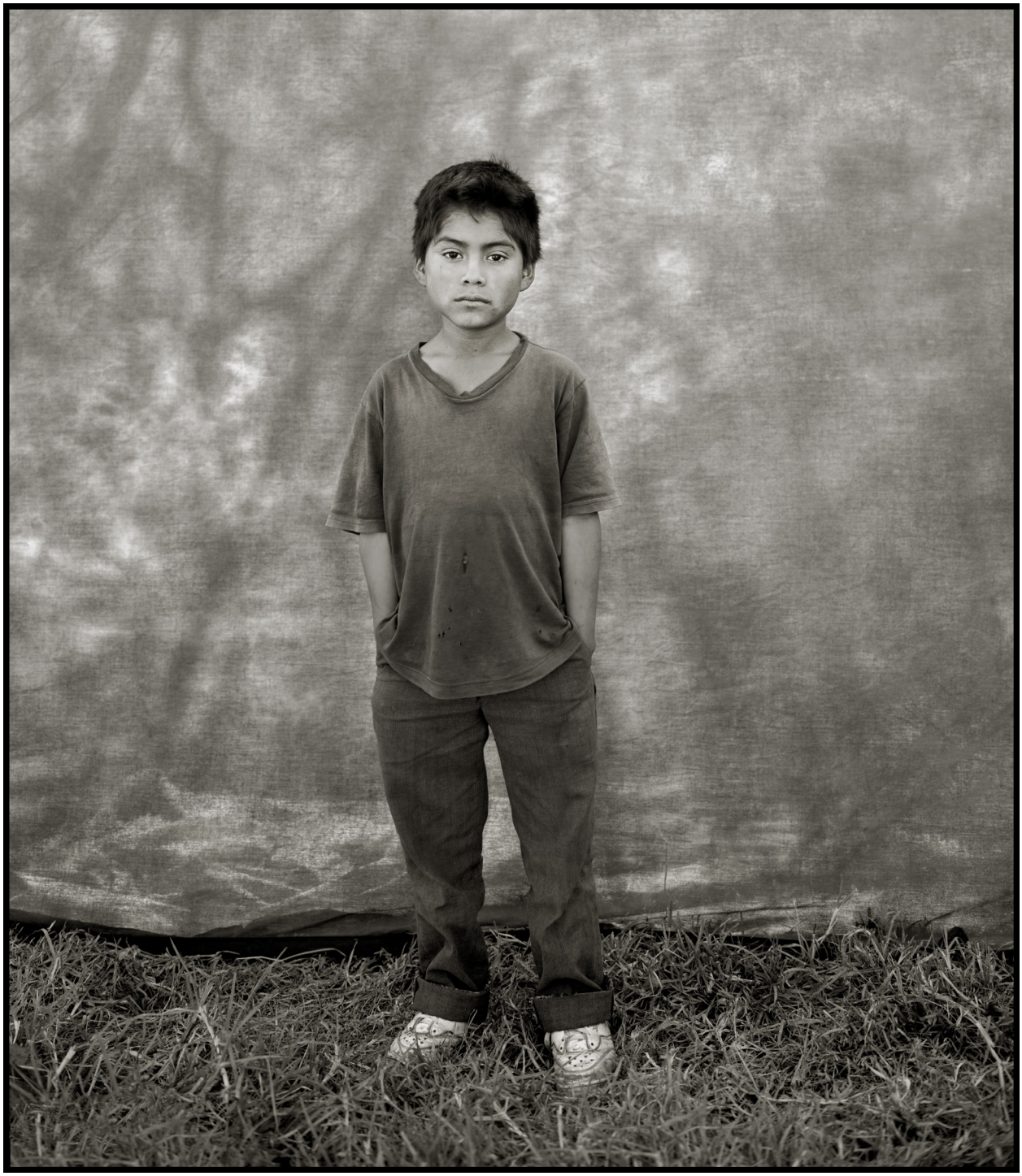
San Cristóbal- Eight



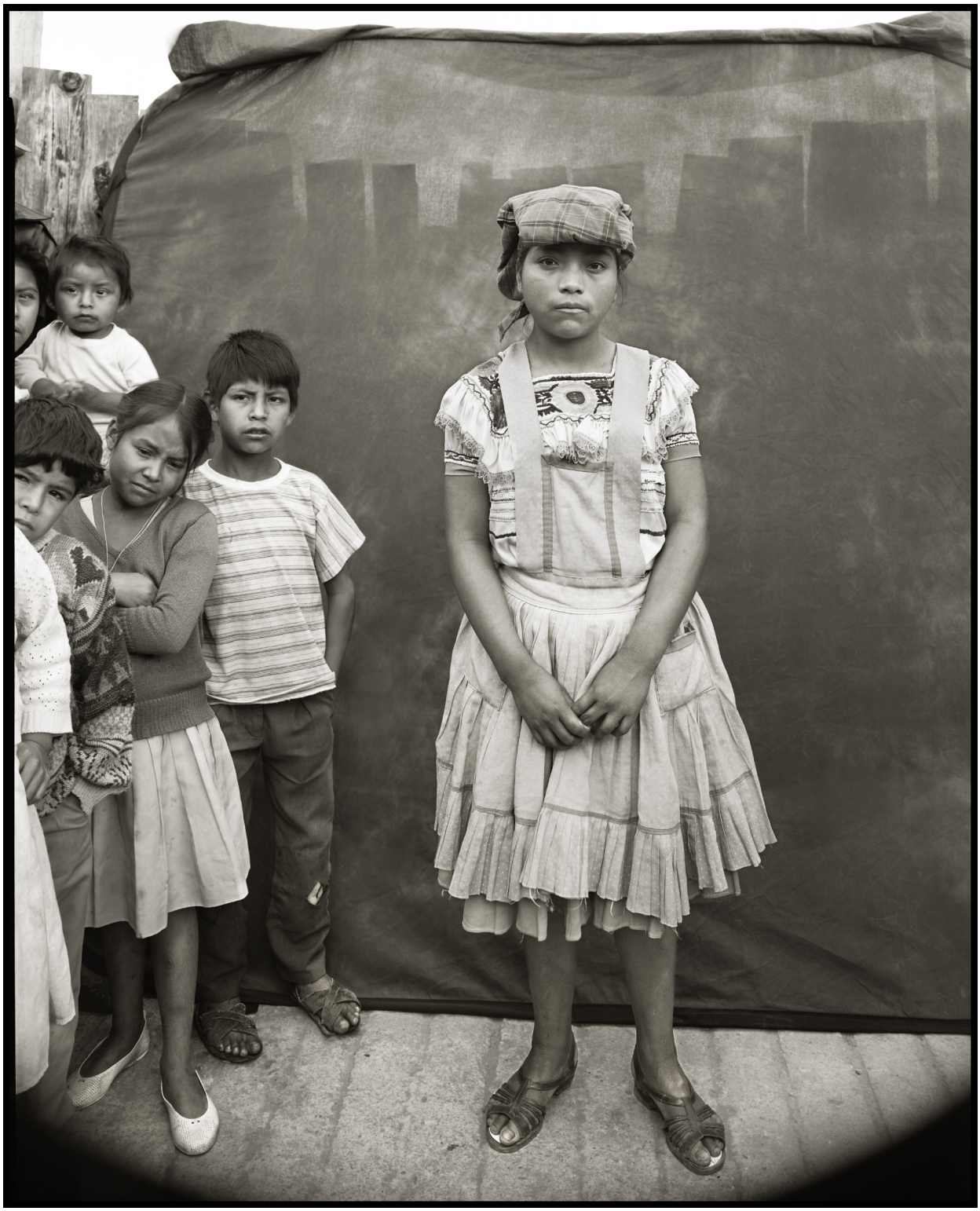
San Cristóbal - Nine



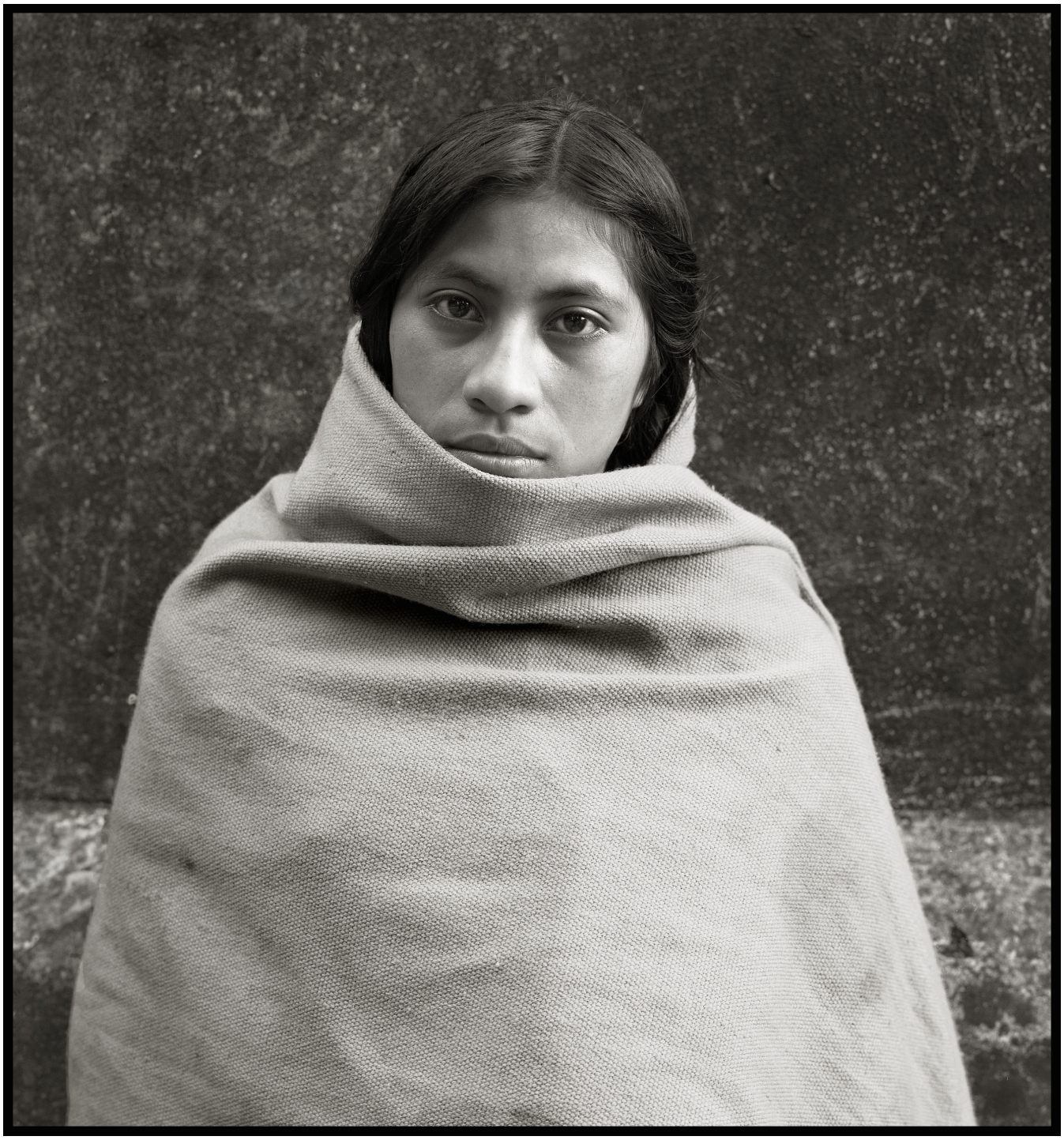
San Cristóbal- Ten



San Cristóbal - Eleven



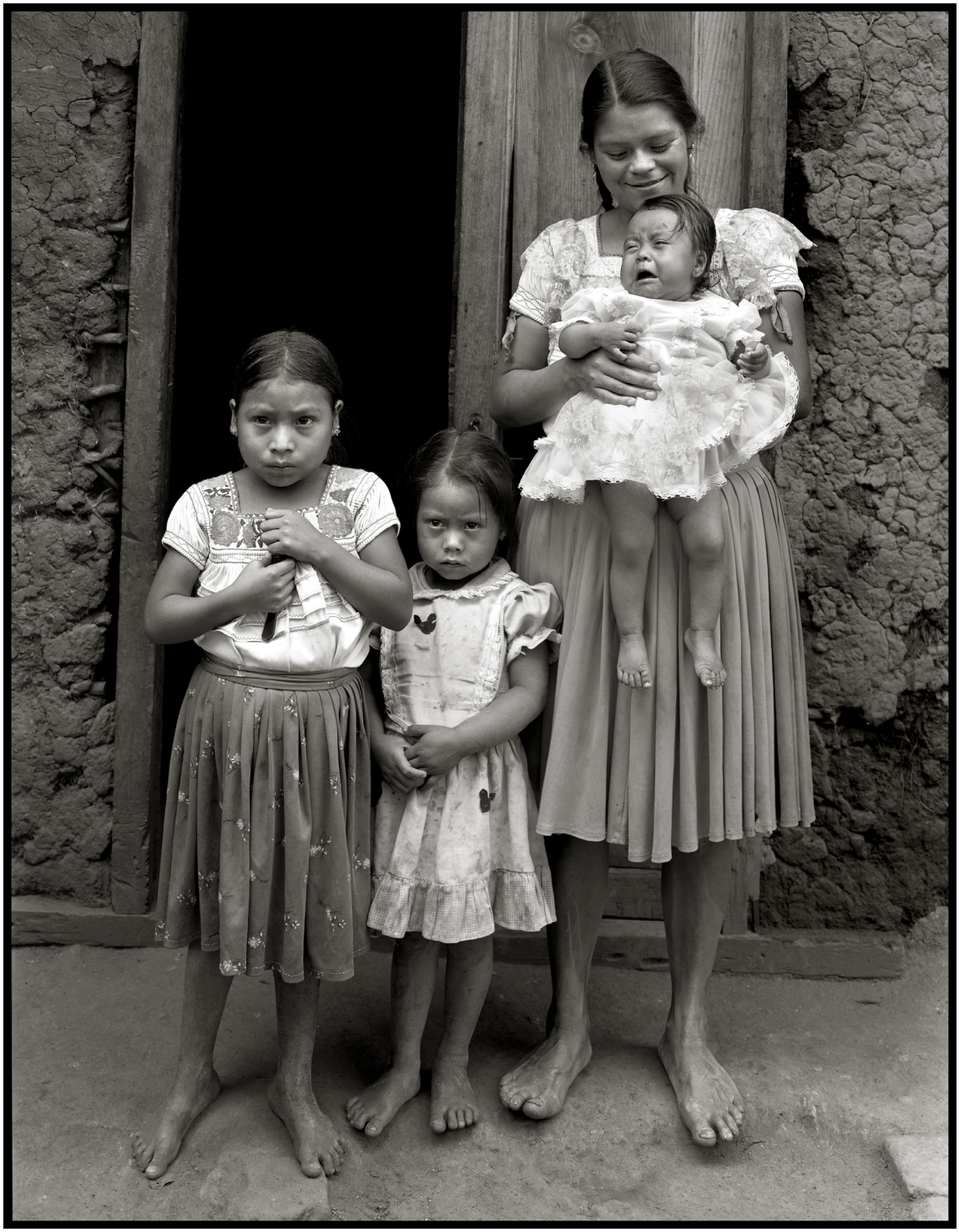
San Cristóbal- Twelve



San Cristóbal - Thirteen



San Cristóbal - Fourteen



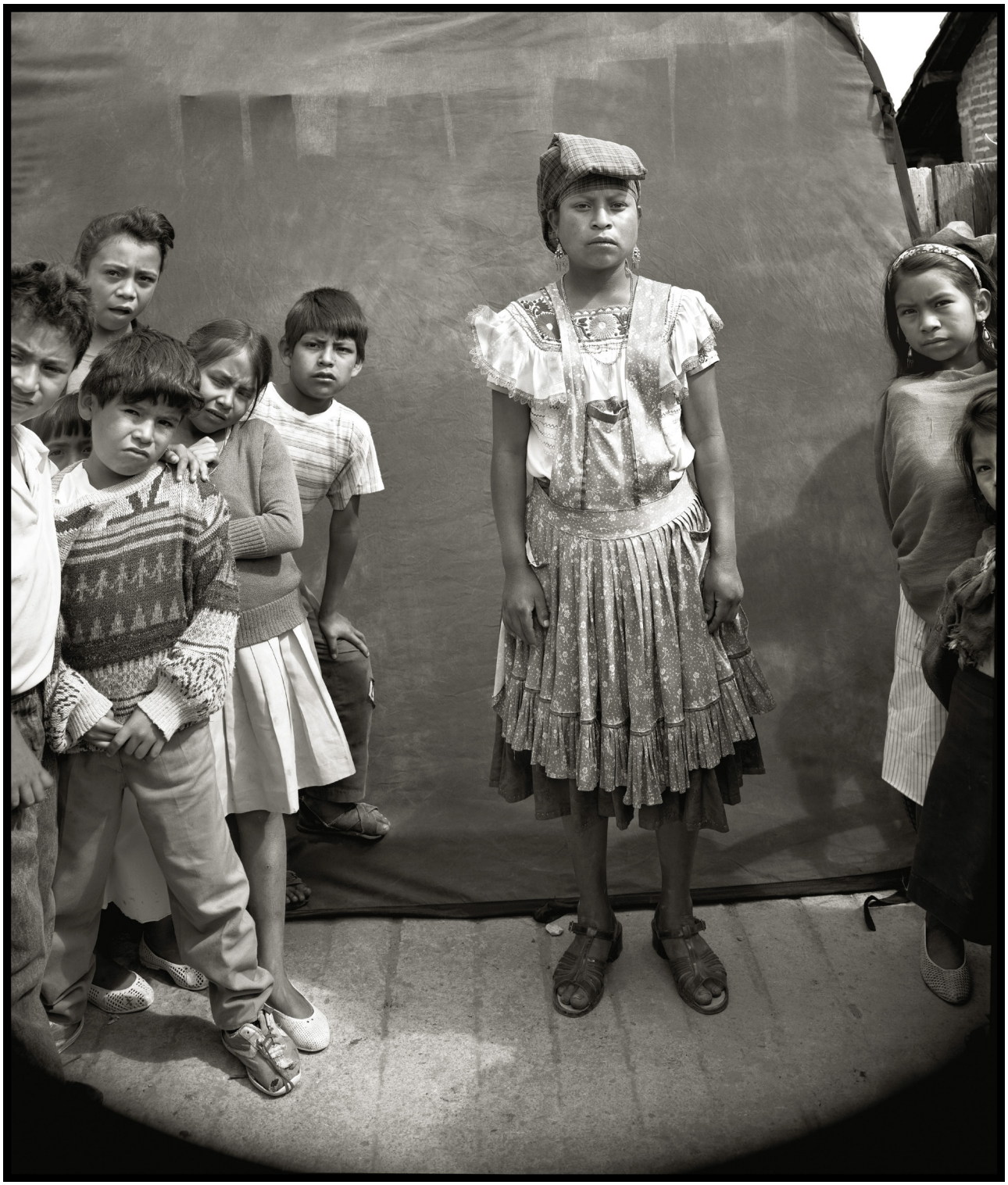
San Cristóbal - Fifteen



San Cristóbal - Sixteen



San Cristóbal - Seventeen



San Cristóbal - Eighteen



San Cristóbal - Nineteen

Series Number Five - 1987

The Word, Soul

Twelve Photographs

Essay - August, 2024

Is the soul solid, like iron?
Or is it tender and breakable, like
the wings of a moth in the beak of the owl?
Who has it, and who doesn't?
I keep looking around me.
The face of the moose is as sad
as the face of Jesus.
The swan opens her white wings slowly.
In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness.
. . . . . *Mary Oliver*

The Word, "Soul"

We tumble into the words we use as children – like breathing invisible air. Experiences and mistakes give words their gravity and legs. Some words are trivial, some have a serious side, some are as wide as a horizon itself.

The word, "Soul" and some of its close equivalents, spirit, ego, consciousness, vitality, essence, energy, presence, animating principle, enthusiasm are important words because they fill spaces that ideas need.

Why do words that live below the surface become so interesting? Many religious traditions believe we are given an immaterial essence by a god or gods or some metaphysical presence. Some think the soul is a metaphor connecting us to aspects of our humanity. Soul or essence could simply mean just being alive, or the total sum of our life experiences, or the ability to feel kindness, to express goodness, to appreciate beauty.

Jacques Barzun as born in 1907 in France. He was a cultural historian, philosopher, teacher and writer of many books on education and culture. As a child he met with his great grandmother, a historian after school who was born in 1842. Jacques said, "she made history come alive". Over dinner one night at the age of 100, I remember Jacques talked about Joan of Arc and William James in the same sentence. He used the word, "Soul" as describing someone's defining character or integrity or of some collective shared identity. Jacques was a human bridge between centuries.

What does a soul have to do with sounds at night, dampness, hedges and dried leaves, new constructed fences, a sleeping dog tied to a post? What does a soul have to do with misery, anxiety, misfortune enthusiasm or confidence? What would a soul say about ambivalence, uncertainty and far-away places?

Series Five: "The Word, "SOUL" was simply wanting to have conversations about heavier words - the entanglement of words – ambiguous words. I also wanted to make portraits. Portraits that point toward a onversation and a present moment. This series could have easily been about the meaning of the word, "Emergence" or the emotions of the words, "Loneliness" or "Hunger" or about the pleasure of the words, "Daydreaming or Satisfaction."

I interviewed twelve individuals and asked questions about the meaning of the word, "soul". How would they define the word "soul", or "souls"? Did they have a "soul"? Were they certain or uncertain? What were their beliefs based on? I used excerpts with their permission.

Excerpts from:

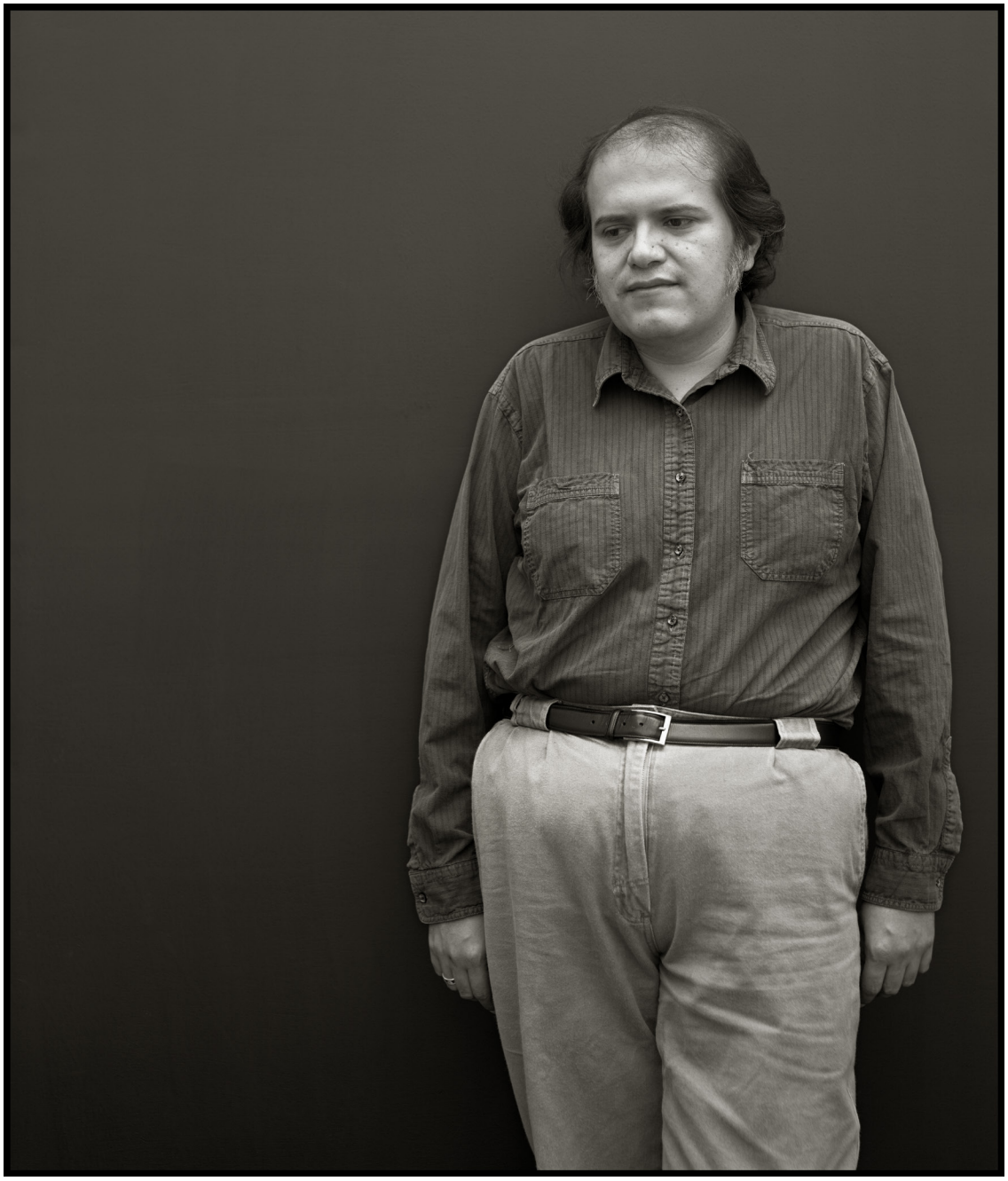
> Two poets/writers -- a former prize boxer, (now a pie baker) -- an architect – housekeeper – musician. -- teacher from Mexico City ---- a volunteer --- an artist, *(Brain surgery was scheduled following week, she died shortly thereafter*.) – minister – unemployed & homeless --- an artist -- a carpenter.

Essay - August 2024

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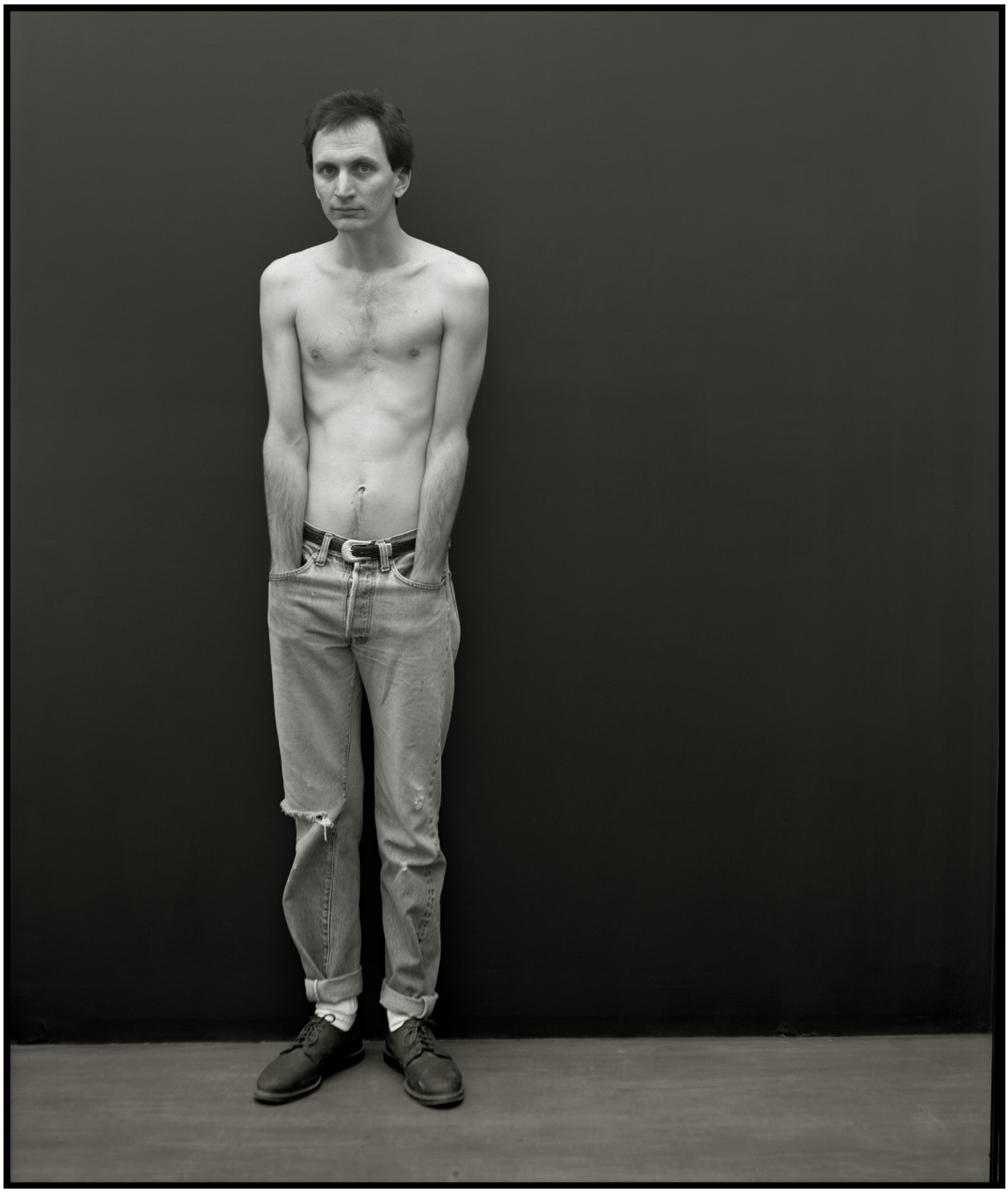
Some days, I don't believe in the soul. The idea seems unreal. If only I had some clarity. Some days I am certain that I have a soul. A soul of colors moving in and out of my body. I feed my soul with knowledge. It needs knowledge.



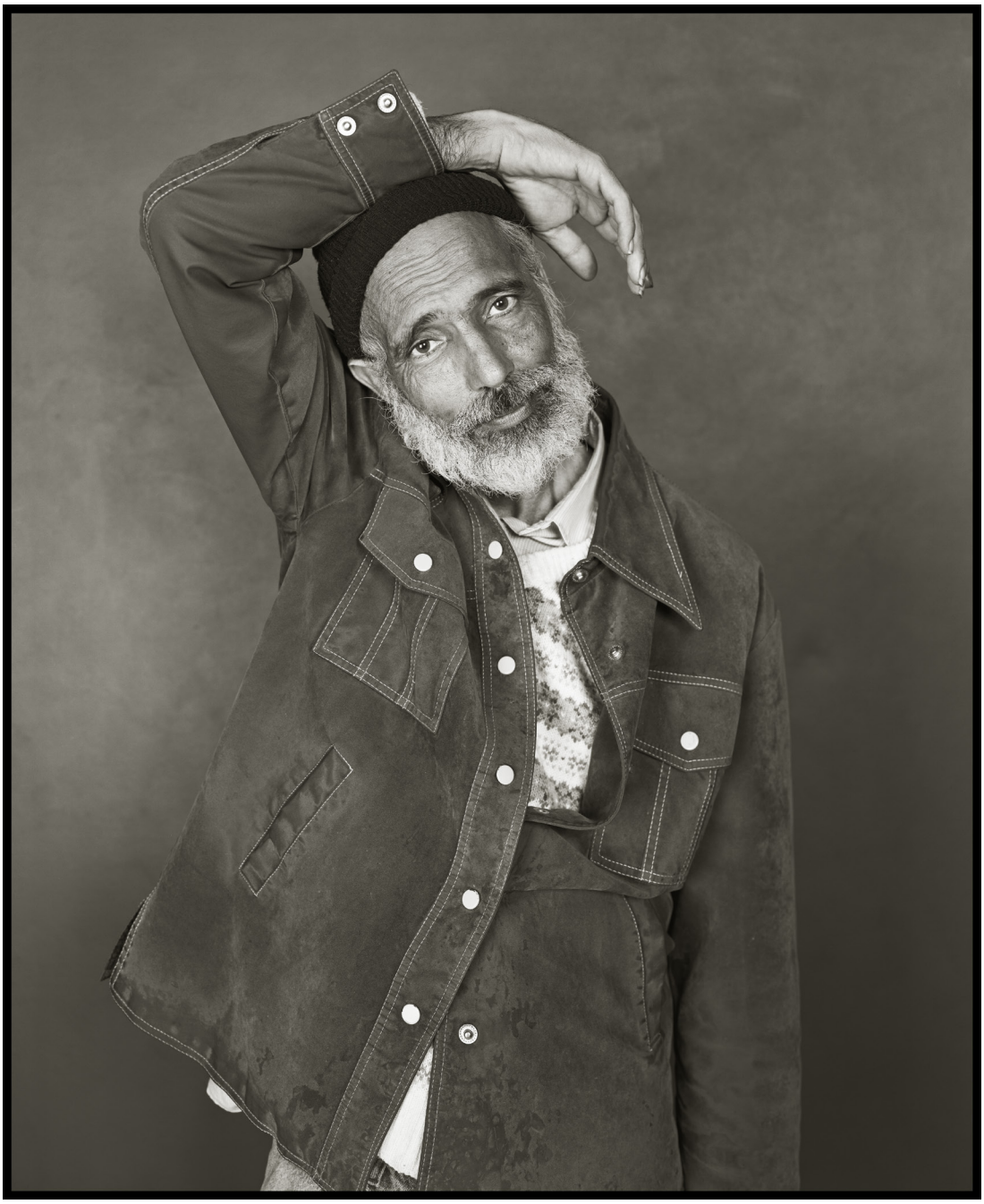
The soul is a way back to our origins and is tied to dreams and memory. The soul is a gift, a collected thing that is given to you by your ancestors. The spirit is different from the soul. The spirit is what you acquire and how you live. But the soul has existed before you were born. You must look for your soul.



I love the second definition my dictionary gives for soul: "energy or intensity, especially as revealed in a work of art or an artistic performance." Yes! The soul that lives in books, music, art, food, in every passionate creation – in a plate of collard greens and Aretha Franklin on the radio -- that is what keeps me going.



The soul is real. It is the life force that we share. The soul cannot become evil and cannot be harmed. What is imporatant is seeking wholeness with your soul. When I die my soul will have no memory, no intelligence. The only thing that continues is the energy.



My soul has suffered. I'm sorry for that. I have made some mistakes, but I have also been kind. I believe my soul will find some peace and calm after I die. I think souls are real.

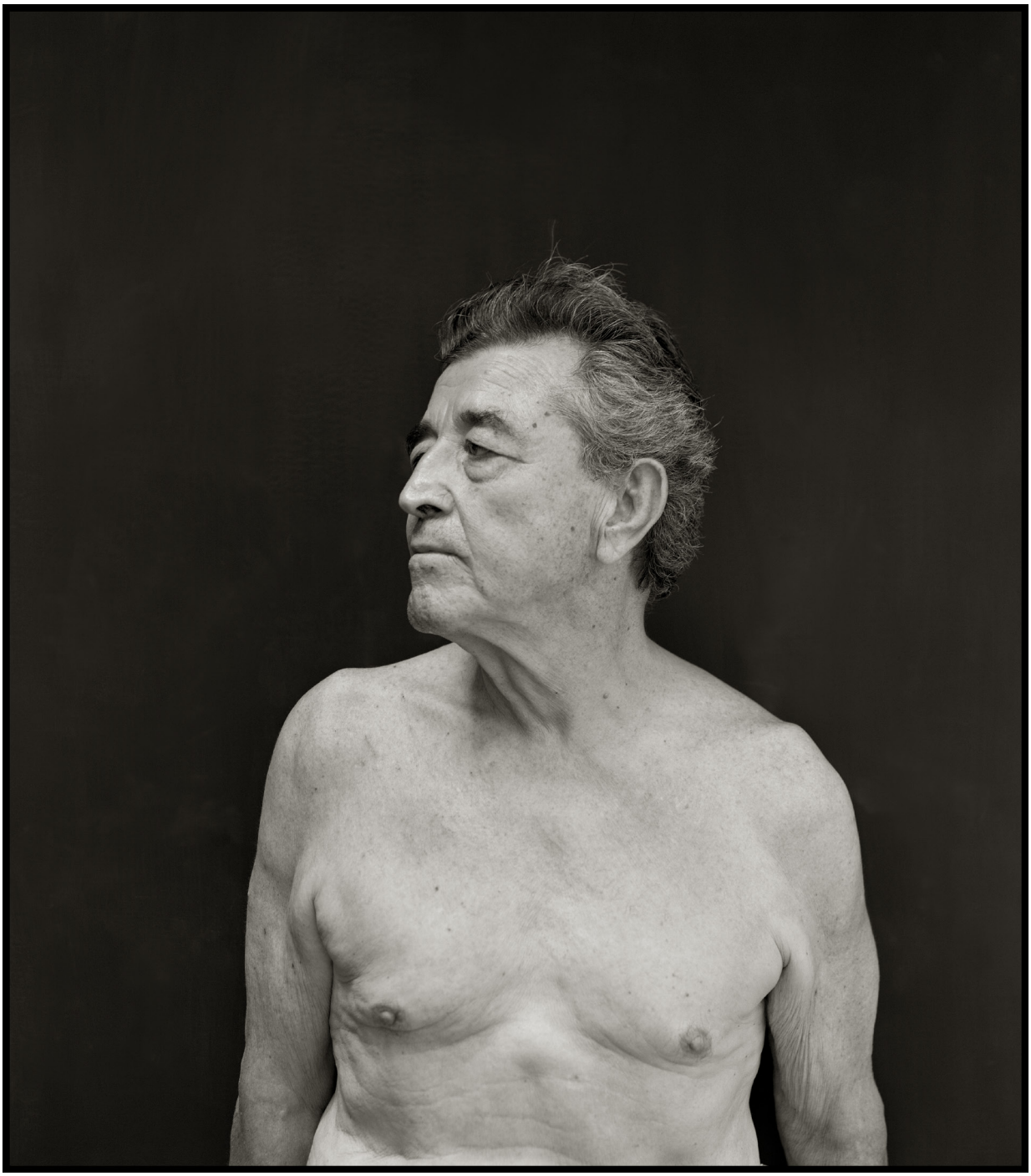


The soul has to be nothing. The moment you say it is something you weaken it, you give it an impurity. The moment you try to define the soul, you limit what the soul is.

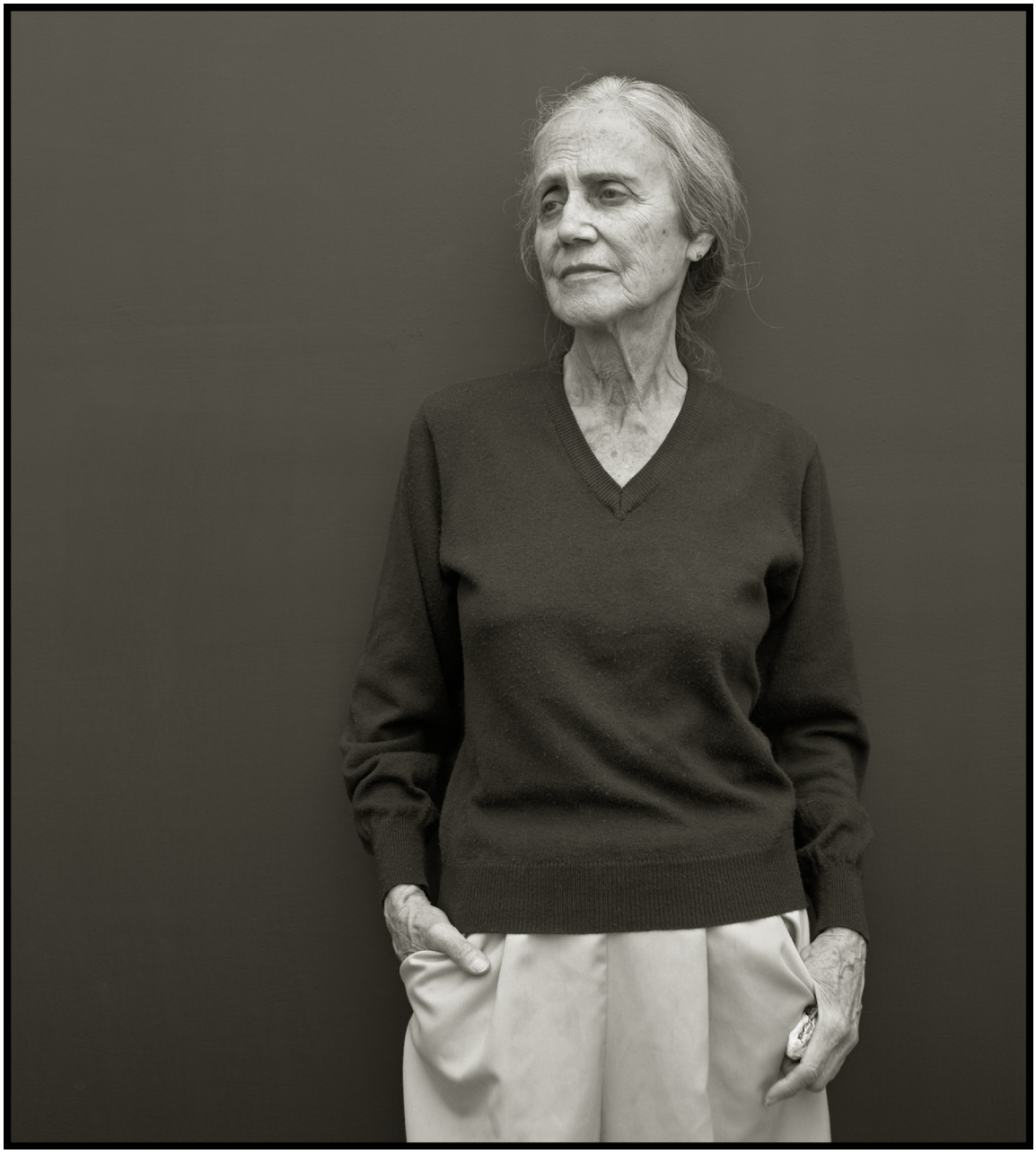


In the forest my soul is happy. The trees tower above me, birds call, sun filters through the branches, scents from the dirt, moss and pine come to me. There are many times I have felt any one of the soul sickening feelings: fear, sadness, anger, injustice, violence, discrimination, suffering, hopelessness. When this happens, I turn to friends, to painting, to music, to walking, to cooking and even to humor.

I don't know what happens to the soul when we die; but I believe memories of the deceased become part of the soul of the survivors. The soul has a vast capacity for this memory. The soul gathers the heart of our experiences and weaves them into our capacity to love and survive.



During my life my soul stays in my heart. It can travel. Sometimes I cry and I say what is the matter? This is my soul going from my heart to my mind. It can clean you. When I die there is no more soul. It disappears.



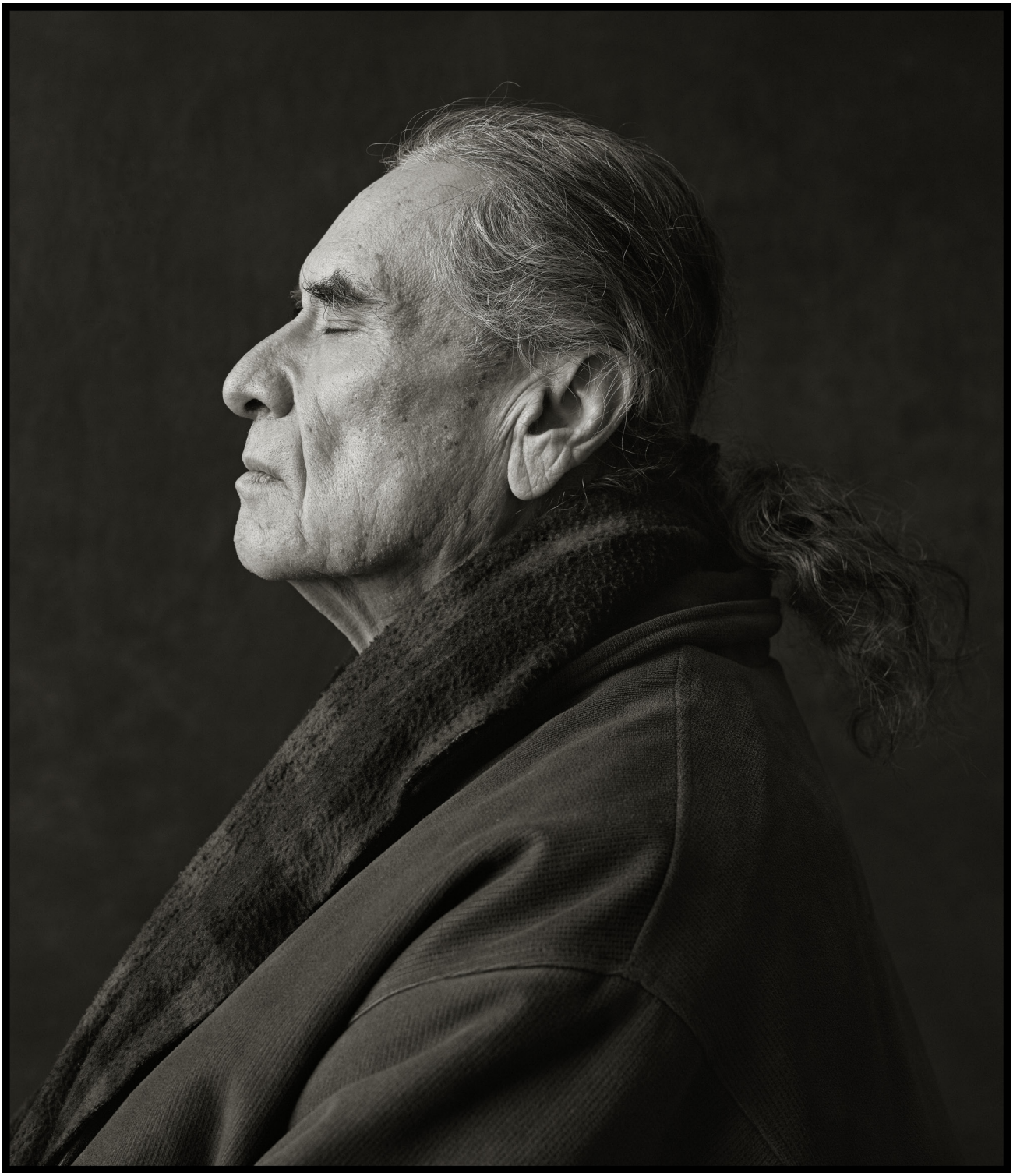
For my soul, I hope to see people that I have loved in my life. To see god. To see something fantastic. That is my hope. That is my wishful thinking. It would be lovely to see the people I have loved again. I'm not sure of anything.



The soul is the timeless cord that has always connected me to everything. When I was young, it let me feel old. Now that I am older, it enables me to stay young. It is the freshness of all being and the eneffable wonder.



The Soul is the human recorder. Whatever happens in your life your soul is recording it. You can't get by. It records everything. When I die my soul stays with my body until the end of time. My soul will then rise to heaven to be with God.



I think my blindness has enabled me to bridge ordinary from non-ordinary realities, whereas most people encounter a veil separating this life from the sacred. I feel so much compassion that I weep at the the slightest news of other people's pain and sorrows. My blindness has made me into a very sensitive soul. It has enabled me to not see a boundary between these two realms.

Series Number 6

One More Look

1988

Nine Photographs
Essay - November, 2024
Michael Nye

One More Look

My parents had five sons and one daughter. As I write this, both my parents have died. I am the luckiest because I was born in the middle, the third oldest, which gave me a particular perspective. Every time any of my brothers or sister would visit our parents, my mother would cry when they left. Driving away dissolves in a moment. To take ONE MORE LOOK as I was leaving -- is as simple as turning your head around again.

My wife Naomi, was invited to Oregon to be writer in residence for a rural library project though the Oregon library system for three months in 1988. We drove cross-country and followed, as much as possible, the Oregon trail. Our two-year old son, Madison in the backseat, sang along with Bruce Springsteen, "One Step Up". He memorized every word and demanded that we play the song over and over.

Woke up this morning, the house was cold
Checked out the furnace, she wasn't burning
Went out and hopped in my old Ford
Hit the engine but she ain't turning . . .
We're the same sad story, that's a fact
One step up and two steps back

How we interpret what we see is often related to how we feel, our moods and temperament. The emigrants on the Oregon trail must have felt the, stepping backwards as they moved forward. As we drove, we read emigrant stories out loud. Words can't satisfy an appetite, but vision can. Gold was heavier then. Crystal and fossils embedded along the river's edge were tiny voices pushing them forward. ONE MORE LOOK is as simple as turning your head around again.

We drove across the state of Idaho and crossed the border into Oregon. Who wouldn't stop and stare at the drama of the Columbia River? We were stunned. How can a river have such a wild imagination? (Even considering that over the last century it has been dammed and tamed by private interests.) Captain William Clark took ONE MORE LOOK when he wrote in 1805, describing the 'Short Narrows' of the Columbia River:

> ". . . the horrid appearance of the agitated, gut swelling water was boiling and whoring in every direction. . "

Driving alone, along the Oregon coastline on Highway 101 from Cannon Beach south, the whole world was a shimmering, white dreamy fog. Dampness lowered and uncovered itself. The ocean holds so much water. I would randomly pull off the road and park, then hike into the thick darkened forest. Each hike was a window into a continent of trees and the undergrowth's layered history. On one such random look, I came across what appeared to be a shadow of an old road. "*Maybe, I thought...*" I followed its tender crease down into a valley. There, finally, in front of me, were huge wooden trestles that supported an old wooden bridge crossing a deep gorge. On the floor of this bridge was soil. Out of this soil on the bridge, trees grew and reached high into the forest's canopy. This is what time can do with a forest. How many men, how many days, how much resolution created this scene? The ocean up close is a rumble and roar, but as the sound moves into a forest, it's a sizzling, a whispering arising from the earth. I brought my wife Naomi and our friend Kim Stafford to this spot for ONE MORE LOOK. We imagined that it must have been a logging camp active in the 1920s. ONE MORE LOOK is as simple as turning your head around again.

SERIES 6: "One More Look"

This small, very simple series of photographs is about annexation. The act of appropriating a second image advances spaciousness, a breeze that blows toward a larger perspective. Each scene is two separate photographs. They connect at one of their corners. The first photograph, (the first look) is on the bottom. The second photograph, (One More Look) is on the top. These scenes, like vision itself, has many sides.



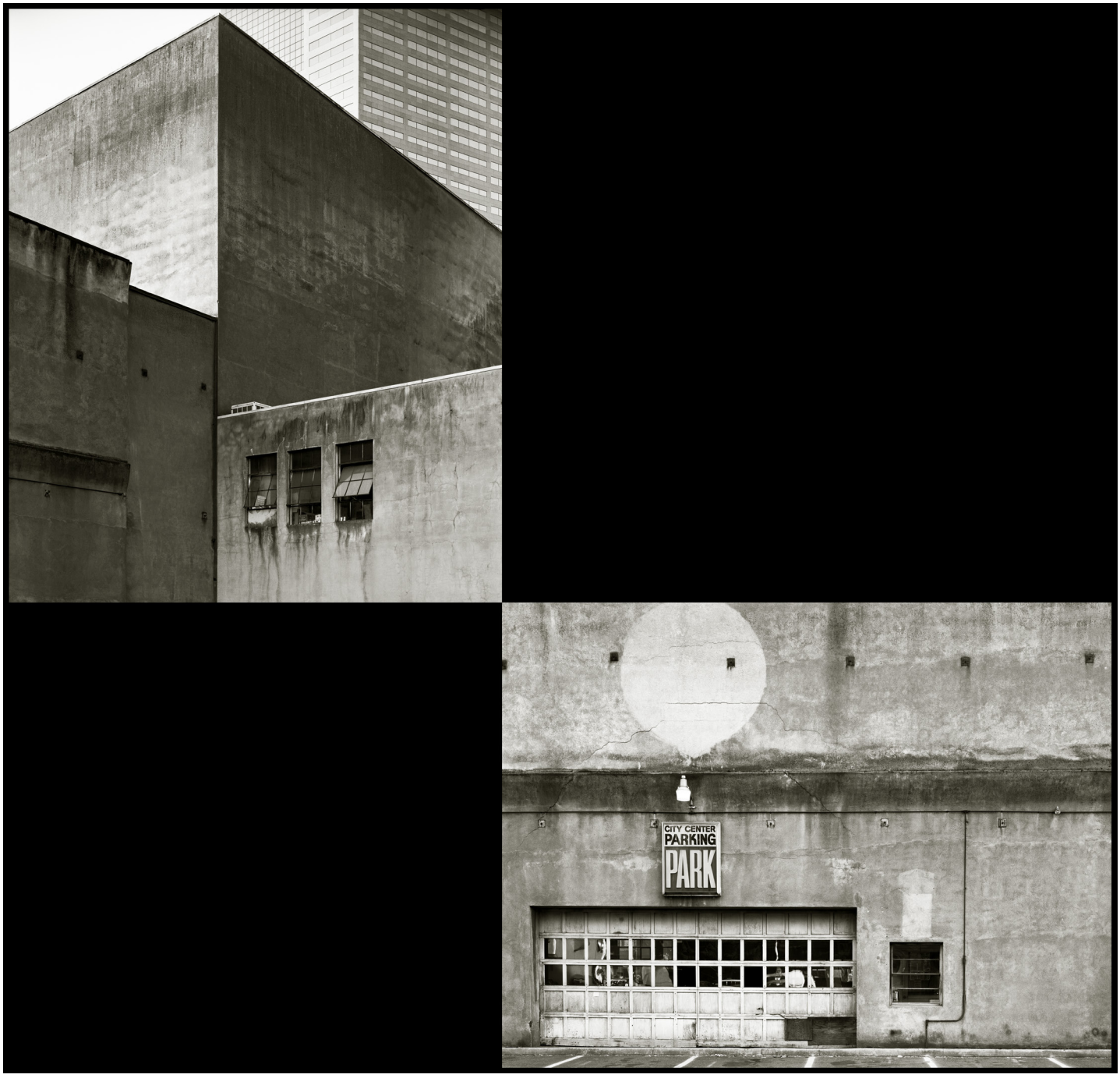
This series was an attempt to visualize an idea, a notion of turning my head around as I was leaving for just One More Look. Where do the edges lead? Why didn't I see the second image the first time? One More Look is to look again, to look around, to look closer, to look in-between. It is attention that separates and connects the two images. Where will this simple idea of a photographic series tumble and rest? What would I find out by turning my head around, for One More Look?

The cliffs protecting the wild Pacific Ocean along the twisting Oregon coast take One More Look before darkness arrives at night. I exhibited this small series of photographs twice. Each time someone, a curator, a family member, a stranger would say, *"Mikey, this series doesn't work."* Or, *"Michael, it might be best not to show this series anymore.*" Several said, "*I really don't like the way the photographs look."*

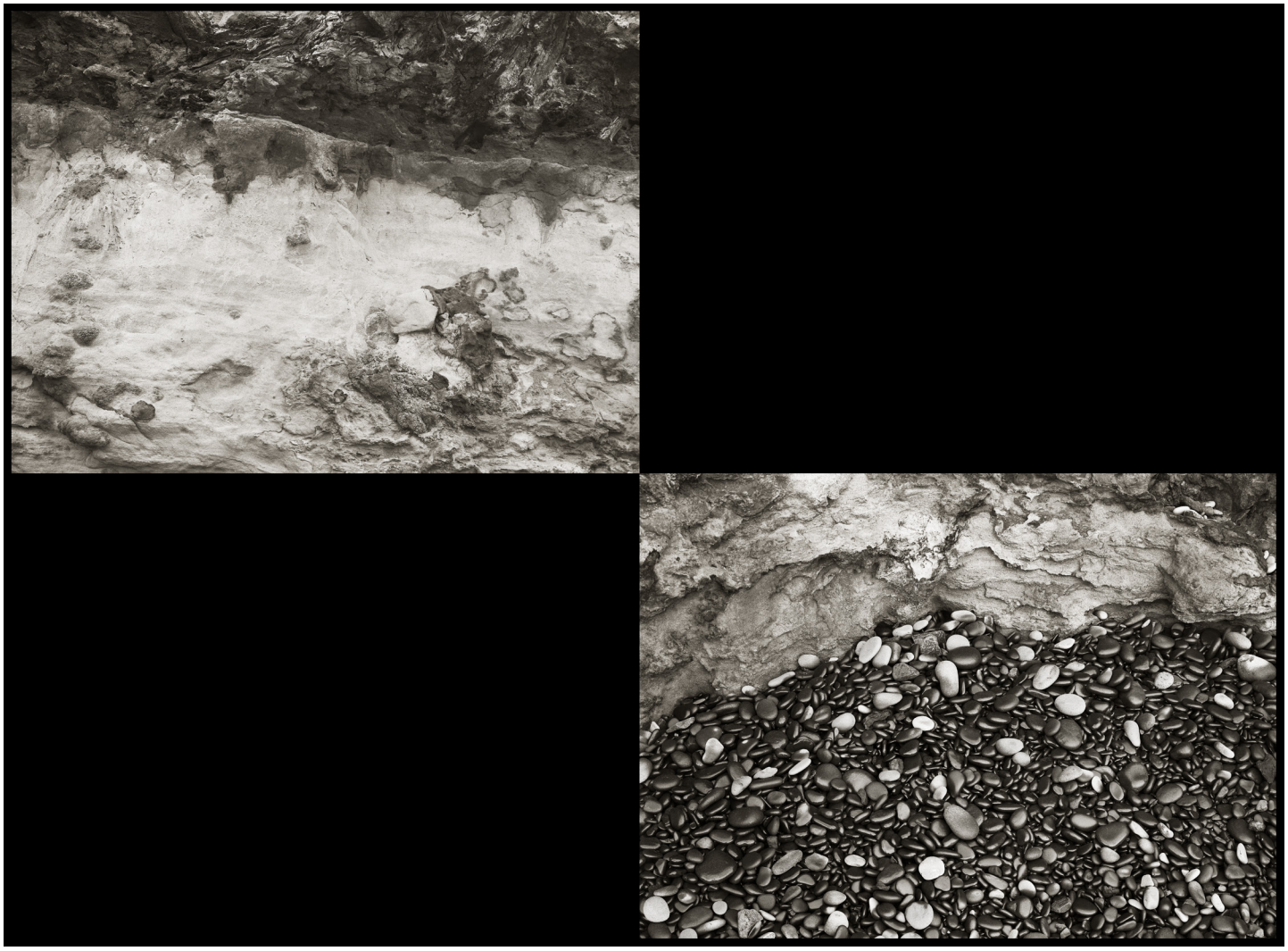
This series of photographs has no ambitions. These photographs shouldn't have poor self-esteem, but they do. They don't want to be owned or traded. They are shy and would rather live alone in dark places or in boxes dreaming of distant connections, third cousins, go-betweens, and early morning alliances.

November, 2024

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One More Look - One



One More Look - Two



One More Look - Three



One More Look - Four



One More Look - Five



One More Look - Six



One More Look - Seven



One More Look - Eight



One More Look - Nine

Series Number Seven - 1988

Saints

Eight Photographs
Essay - December, 2024

Saints:

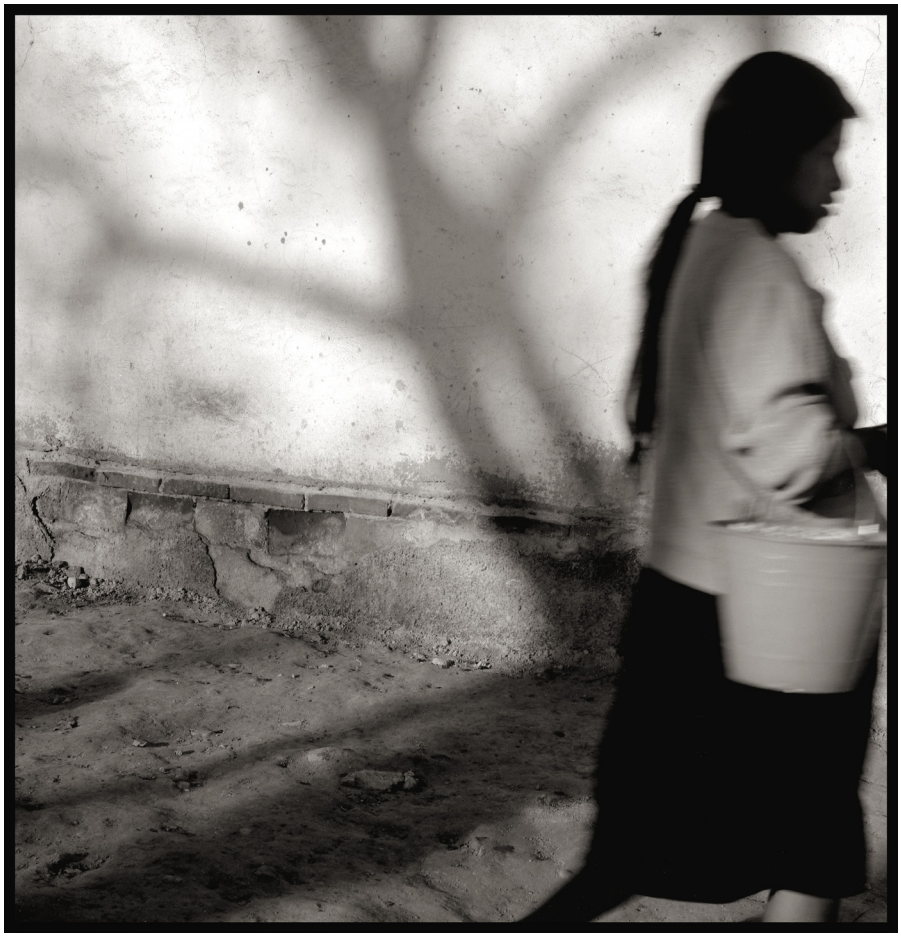
> *'Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proven innocent, but the tests that have to be applied to them are not, of course, the same in all cases.' So begins George Orwell's Reflections on Gandhi (1949)*

Saint Agnes was a member of the Roman elite born in 291 AD. As a young woman, she had many suitors, but refused their advances because of her devotion to purity. As a result, she was condemned to be dragged naked through the streets to a brothel. She prayed and her hair grew and covered her body. One man tried to rape her but was immediately struck blind. There was a trial and she was sentenced to death but the wood would not burn, whereupon an officer in charge drew his sword and beheaded her. Agnes is the patron saint of chastity, gardeners, girls, rape survivors and virgins.



Saint Agnes

One characteristic of saints is that you admire them for some honorable deed performed or imagined. As a child I wondered about saints. Why so serious and sorrowful? Can someone be a saint and not believe in God? The first time I got into any serious trouble was in the second grade. My teacher walked me to the principal's office for daydreaming in class. She told me, *"Wait here Mikey, I'm going to get the principal."* It was a small room and I was alone. Around the edges of the room were paintings of saints and a life-size crucifixion of Jesus. It seemed scary. As I waited, I spotted a large red button that had the word, *"PUSH".* So, I pointed my finger and obeyed the instruction. The school's fire alarm bells began screaming. Children from grades one through seven went running outdoors, each eye searching for smoke. Four nuns came tumbling into the office. The principal nun was smoking a cigarette and had a pulsating vein in the center of her forehead. She asked me, "*Mikey, did you press that button?*" I spoke with a slow stutter, *"NO, no, no I – I - I did not."* I was un-saintly and my life went on from there.



Saints # One

On our second trip to San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico we were invited to stay in the home of Robert and Mimi Laughlin, located in the center of the city. Originally the home had been a monastic monastery with reddish thick adobe walls enclosing the property and gardens. Robert was an anthropologist and had compiled a book recording dreams from indigenous Zinacantan communities. In the dark early morning away from our dreams, my wife Naomi and I would build a fire and walk along the remembered stones to the kitchen to boil water. We were in two worlds. Inside the walls were luscious rose and herb gardens, parrots whistling, life bursting with stillness and the untroubled plants growing. Outside, was a city in motion, sounds of ringing bells, voices rising, crowds of people rushing, bicycles, young men carrying fruits and firewood to the markets. I was surprised what walls could do.

One day, just after noon, I followed a father and his two young sons into one of the smaller churches on the edge of town. The two boys were young – maybe seven and three. The church was empty except for us. They walked to the smaller side altar and begin playing music and singing. The father played the violin, the older son a guitar and the little boy a bass guitar with only one string. It was the saddest most beautiful song I had ever heard or have ever heard since. The musical notes floated in mid-air. Some distant place or truth existed in that song. Their faces were pointed to the many marble Saints above them. They were the Saints. They gave their voices and song freely.



I saw Saints everywhere that day – shopkeepers - waitresses - men repairing a street -a donkey carrying food, a teacher with a basket of books - a mother and her child waiting for a bus - an affable banker and a quiet street sweeper all seemed Saintly. Faces raised, “Mucho gusto!” ¿Cómo estás? In this series of photographs, Sainthood is not conditioned on membership or sincerity. Sainthood is not contingent on sinlessness, faith or extraordinary powers. Sainthood has more to do with a devotion to presence, a stretch of a story or the endurance of a long walk. Here, in these crowded streets in San Cristobal de las Casas, sainthood requires no canonization.

In small stores along Calle Real de Guadalupe, shopkeepers were selling Saint prayer candles. Each Saintly person pictured on each candle promised some specific protection. Saint Ignacio offers courage and protection from burglary and evil spirits. Saint Justo Juez hands out justice if you have been falsely accused of a crime. Saint Aparicio will help you find lost articles. Saint Alex will rid you of enemies. Saint Martin of Tours will improve the cash flow in your business. Saint Jude was the most expensive candle, he is dedicated to lost explanations and impossible causes.

The marble religious statues of Saints were positioned high in local churches and cathedrals. I went to a local bishop and asked if I could bring my camera and a ladder to photograph the faces of the statute saints more closely. The Bishop granted me permission. I borrowed a 20-foot ladder and climbed to the top, one hand clutching camera and film, one foot carefully balanced.

I found myself eye to eye with sad marble faces offering something unworldly. All around the cathedral were flickering candles - dim lights flowing in from opening and closing doors - stained colored windows – the careful sounds of feet tiptoeing – the slow presence of whispering prayers rising with the smell of incense and imbedded time. One family was on their knees murmuring. Who was listening to them? There, high on a ladder, above it all, lived the softest light in Chiapas.

Essay - December, 2024



Saints # Three



Saints # Four



Saints # Five



Saints # Six



Saints # Seven



Saints # Eight

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Series Number Eight

Downtown City Spaces - 1988/89

Eight Photographs
Essay - July, 2024



City Spaces 9

City Spaces

A Photographer pays attention to both bright restless light and darker quieter light. A photograph freezes all things in motion.

My first memory of being in a downtown city space was walking along Chaparral Street in Corpus Christi, Texas. I was five years old. Downtown businesses were booming – crowds of people were walking in and out of Lichtenstein's department store. Men wore suits with fashionable hats, women dressed in long flowing flowery dresses and neck scarves blowing in December's windy chill. At that time there were no malls – no competing shopping centers – downtown was the only heartbeat that mattered. It was important to be a part of the rush of serious shoppers. I remember a moment on a street corner. I was holding my mother's hand and in the next instant I was holding the hand of a strange older woman. Looking down, she was smiling at me. I still don't know how this could have happened.

When I was a practicing attorney and had a jury trial approaching, I would walk the downtown streets of San Antonio rehearsing my Voir Dire examination. (General statement of facts and selection of a jury.) I remember wanting to be somewhere else. Inside, I felt water boiling on the stove. I watched the light moving on buildings, business men and women walking rapidly and then stopping to look upward. I was leaning everywhere except where I was. Every street corner was a black and white photograph.

In neighborhoods, residents are a part of the narrative, but not so much in downtown city spaces. In these spaces there are too many moving parts. In these unusual places we must pay attention to our senses. Experience is heightened. Humanity is compressed. Sight and sound merge into a single experience. Burning sunlight appearing between buildings can look like the sound of screeching tires. The common experience in downtown city spaces is anonymity and a feeling of passing through.

City Spaces – Photographs

Visually, two aspects of downtown city spaces dominate attention. The first is the *"Streets/ Ground Level"*. The second are the *"Buildings and Skyscrapers"* above. Each can be seen as horizontal strips. The FIRST - "*Ground/Street Level"* - is an ambiguous essay of human activity. Mostly people are going somewhere, waiting for something or leaving.

The SECOND aspect, is the "*Buildings and Skyscrapers"* themselves. The many floors of heavy concrete and metal are secured and planted in their iron-ery roots. What moves is only light passing. At midday, the harsh light on building walls is a constellation of perpendicular lines and complementary angles. It is in these moments, the range of bright light mixed with deep shadows reveals the limitation of seeing. Light lifts and streaks, then falls and disappears into dark grays and soft blacks. Light blue in sunlight turns into dark grey in shadows.

This short series of photographs is about the experience of being, "intertwined". It is about bringing together the street level with the building level. Each photograph is really two images, diptychs. The ground level (first image) and the buildings above (second image) are connected with a black line. Each diptychs/photograph is not pretending to be one moment in time.

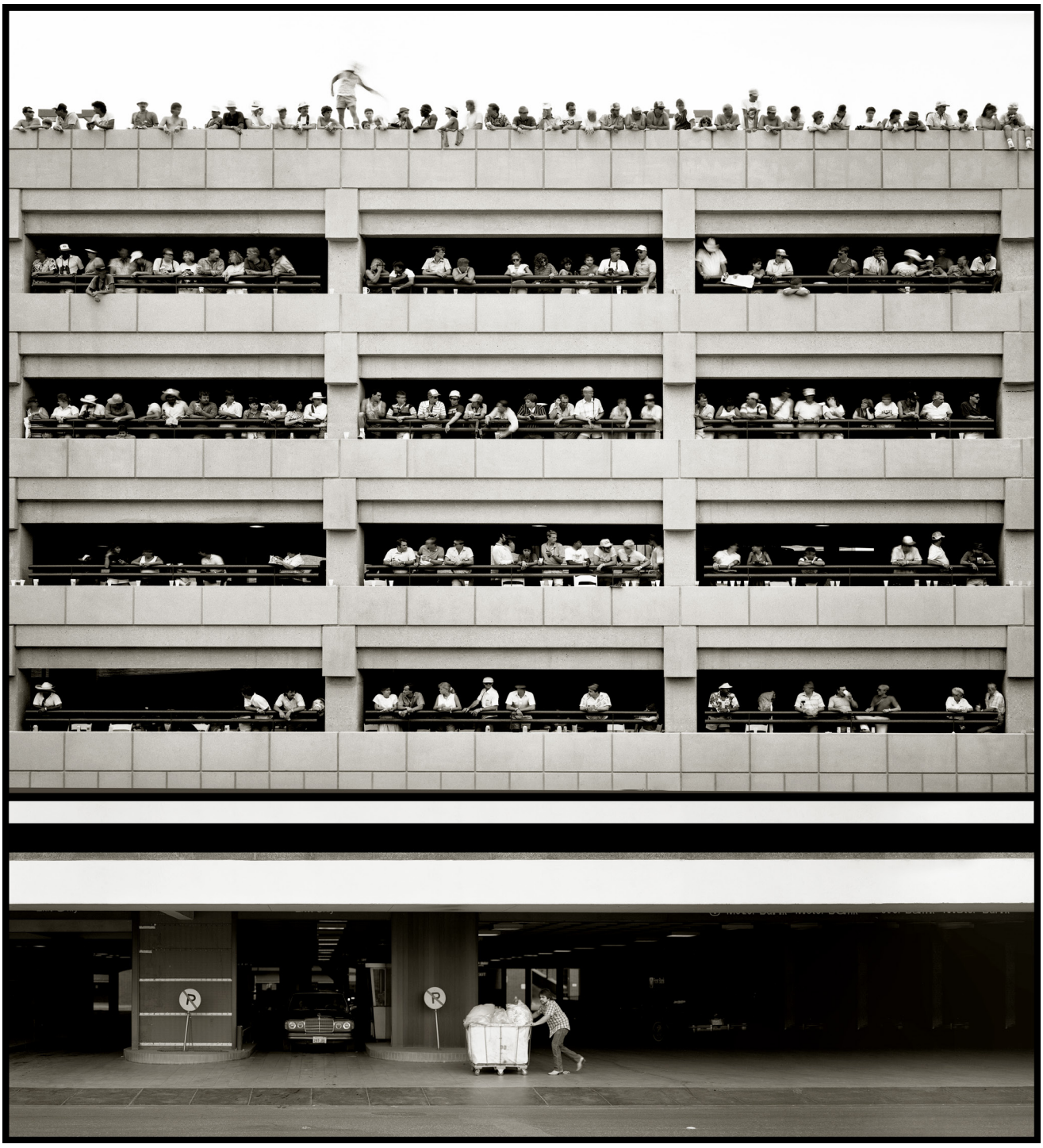
I found that if I photographed the buildings from a distance, the ground level would be tiny. If I photographed the ground/street level closer up - the range of the lens optics and perspective would not reach or distort the top building spaces. The rising building spaces were photographed from a distance and the street ground levels were photographed closer up. I wanted to photograph the city spaces in the ways I experienced them, *BEING THERE*, looking upward sometimes, other times looking down.

Why do downtown city spaces look the way they do? Every building has an entryway and inside exists a whole city of its own. All the private conversations and sideway glances measure mood. Morning light does not rise on buildings but it falls as the sun rises. Wind does not blow, but swirls. In winter, these spaces are warmer than the suburbs or farmlands. Downtowns stands as a symbol for a city's historical heart and a study of utility, self-interest and invisibility.

Essay - July, 2024



City Spaces 1



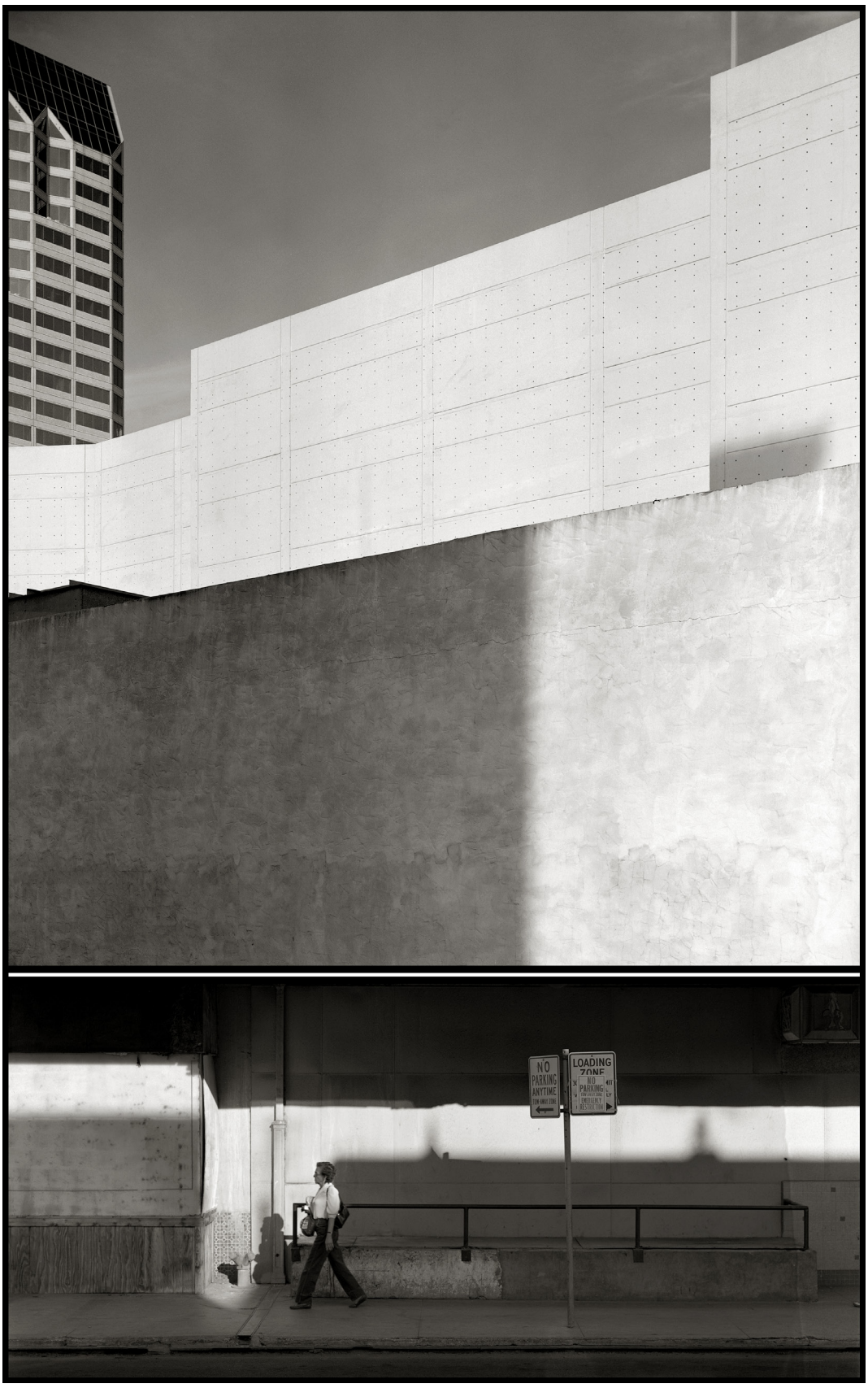
City Spaces 2



City Spaces 3



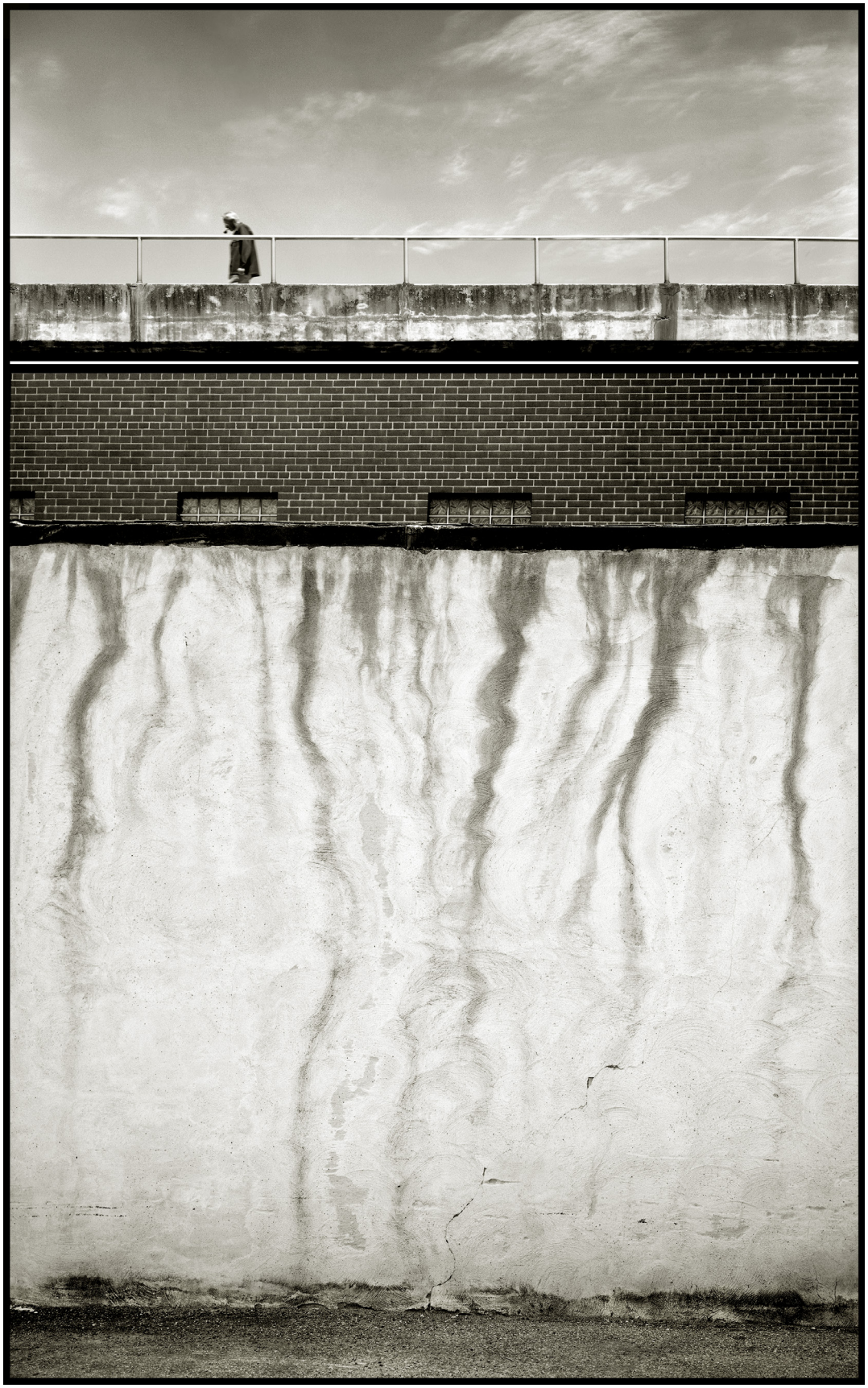
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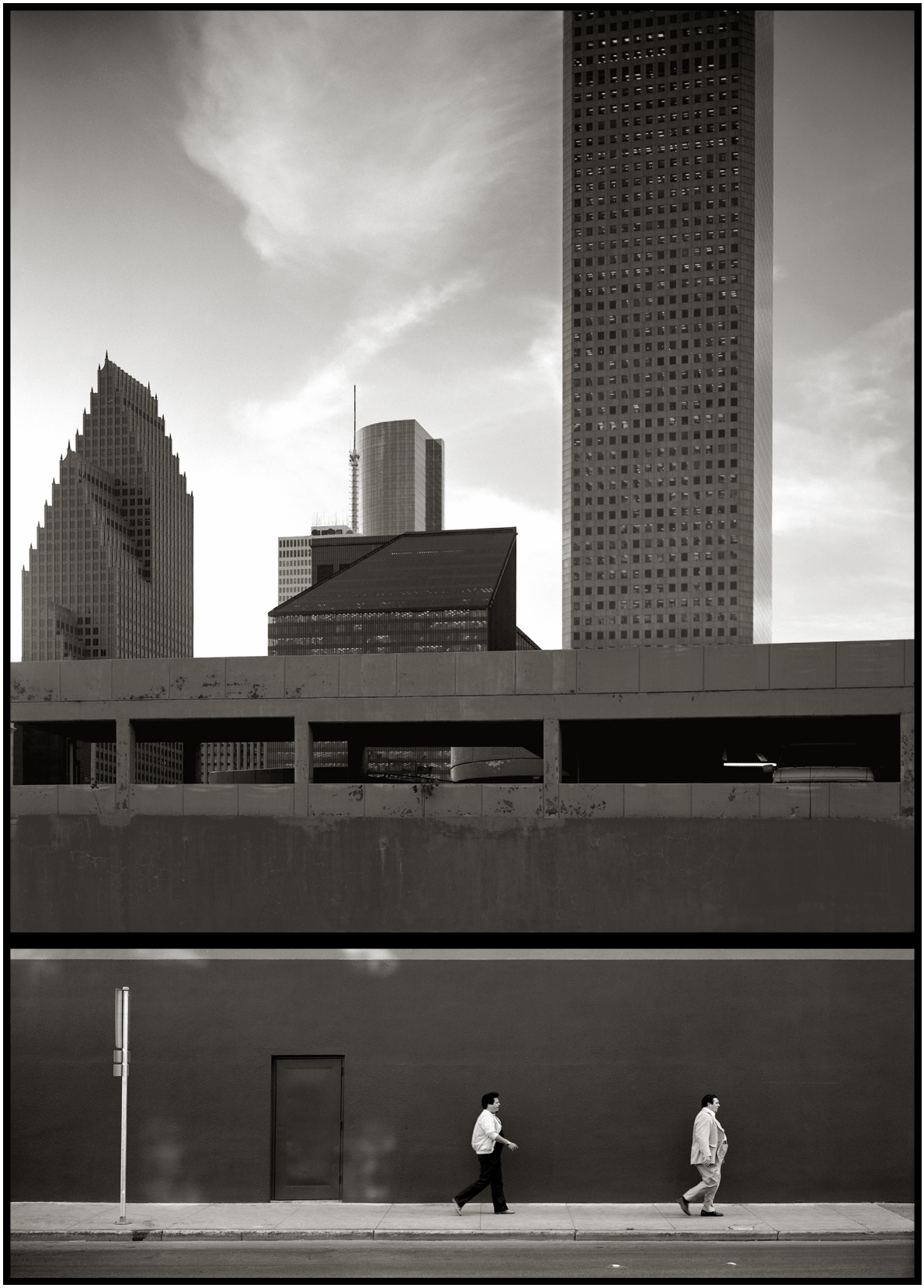
City Spaces 5



City Spaces 6



City Spaces 7



City Spaces 8

Series Number Nine

Cemetery Flowers

The Remember-er & the Remember-ed

San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico - 1989

Twelve Photographs

Essay - December, 2024

Cemetery Flowers

San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico

The Remember-er & Remember-ed:

Black and white photographs are thin pieces of paper. Its hieroglyphics are the textured tones. The spaces between near-blacks and off-whites illuminate memory.

My parents, Nina Elizabeth Hobrecht and Paul William Nye were introduced to each other at the Beeville, Texas Country Club on clear summer night in 1943. My mother said she saw a shooting star streaking across the sky that night. They danced to Ella Fitzgerald and a big band from South Texas. My father was a navy officer teaching flying lessons at Chase Field. Three months later, somewhere on a two-lane highway between Corpus Chris and Beeville, my father parked his 1939 blue Plymouth sedan automobile on the side of the road, confess his love to Nina and ask her to marry him. This photograph was taken one week after they met and my father kept it in his billfold until he died.



When I was six years old my mother drove to the Greyhound bus station located on the highest hill overlooking Corpus Chris Bay to pick up her parents arriving from Beeville. Fred and Nina Hobrecht were waiting for us. They were holding old suitcases. My grandmother was wearing a wide brim flowery hat.

I watched my mother hug her parents tight. On the way home, from the backseat, away from their voices, I lightly touched both of my grandparents (on their backs and shoulders) with the tips of my fingers. I thought, "I will never forget this moment." I still have my fingertips but my grandparents have long since died. I wanted to remember them.

Photographs help us remember a time before now. Unfortunately, they don't contain the sound of a voice or the smell of warm salt-water breezes in the summer time. Looking backwards often helps us look forward. It surprises me to think how much we value some photographs.

Cemetery Flowers Series:

Sadness remembers everything. Cemetery air is thick in blue melancholy. Many walk several miles down the last rounded streets and colored pathways, to reach the San Cristobal de las Casas cemetery. Visitors need no invitation. Walking through the gates, into the cemetery grounds is like walking across a border. Currency changes from now to then. The impulse is reflection, exaggeration and regret. Everyone standing over a grave becomes a time traveler.

Kindly flowers cut from wet gardens find themselves resting on tops of graves of those they have never met. The Cemetery Flower Series are photographs of cut flowers that were found along the raised grave mounds and stones in the San Cristobal cemetery in early morning light in October and December, 1989. Each arrangement of flowers and vase left on graves is a love story.

Part I: Seven Photographs – Flowers found on graves.

I placed a dark backdrop behind many of the flower arrangements. I wanted to emphasize the presence of these private silent offerings. Several of photographs of flowers are leaning against the actual gravestones. Flowers have short lives and shorter still when cut. Flowers remain beautiful even in decay.



The most recent graves are enriched with a clarity of gratitude. Some are dressed with strange tokens – coins – cups and flowers. Others have prayer cards, apples and paintings of saints hanging from cemetery crosses. The older graves are unclothed, exposed and melting into vagueness. The earth is the last one holding and remembering them. Forgetting begins when remembering ends.

Part II: Five Photographs – The Remember-er & Remember-ed.

What does the remember-er do with his or her remembering? When will the remember-er become the re-membered?

Anyone standing over a grave has little control over what memories surface. How do you balance compassion with grief? Five of the photographs in Part II, are diptychs. (Two photographs side by side.) I have mounted portraits of individuals I met at the cemetery, on the right side of the flower offering. In the darkroom I turned on the lights while the photograph was still in the development process. To my surprise, strange pink and red and purple tones emerged on the black and white photographic paper. The portraits represent BOTH the person remembering, (bringing the flowers) and the deceased, the one being remembered.



Remember-er & Remember-ed: One

What is most important in this series is what is not seen. I made mistakes. I failed to photograph the cemetery grounds heavy in regret mixed with morning fog. I neglected to photograph the arched entranceway announcing the village of the breathless. I failed to photograph the birthdays and death-days written on the grave stones. I forgot to photograph the earth that never wanted to become a graveyard. I made missteps, there are no photographs of the families dressed in Sunday clothes murmuring to a deceased parent, a sister or unfortunate child. These photographs could have been made 110 years ago or anywhere. It was my fault not to show anything of the rounded hills in the east or the slow moody nights in hours of cold rain. A cemetery in the morning feels different than a cemetery at last light.

Three weeks before my mother died, (My father died 10 years later.) I drove to my parents' six-floor condominium overlooking the Corpus Christi Bay and brought 20 or more children's books. I prepared dinner and fresh lemonade secretly spiked with rum. After dinner I tucked them into their bed – gave them a glass of my special lemonade alcohol concoction and read them bedtime stories. (Joey the Kangaroo - Round Robin – Mr. Elephant's birthday and Goodnight Moon.) They both laughed and shouted, "Mikey, Mikey, more more . . ." (the rum was working) "Please read us just one more story." I remember kissing them both good night. Beside their bed was one single cut flower resting in a vase. more story." I remember kissing them both goodnight. Beside their bed was one single cut flower resting in a vase.

Essay - December, 2024

Part I: Flowers found on graves



Flowers found on Graves: One



Flowers found on Graves: Two



Flowers found on Graves: Three



Flowers found on Graves: Four



Flowers found on Graves: Five



Flowers found on Graves: Six



Flowers found on Graves: Seven

Part II: The Remember-er & Remember-ed



Remember-er & Remember-ed: One



Remember-er & Remember-ed: Two



Remember-er & Remember-ed: Three



Remember-er & Remember-ed: Four



Remember-er & Remember-ed: Five

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Series Number Eleven

In Between Water & Sky - 1990

Nine Photographs

Essay - February, 2024

Michael Nye

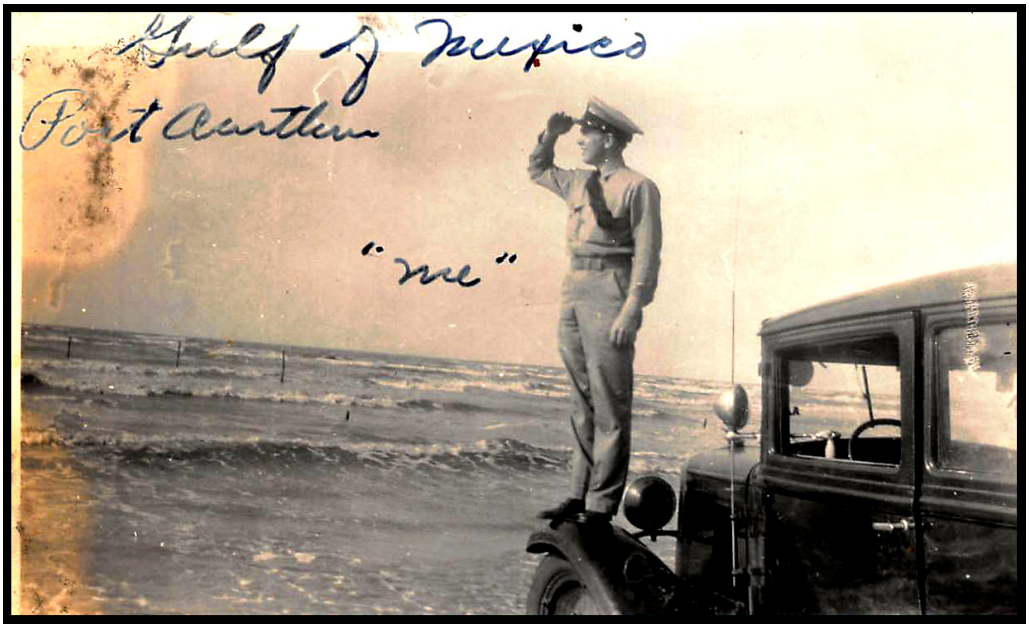
In Between Water & Sky - 1990

Thales was one of the early Pre-Socratic Greek philosophers. 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. 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, Texas 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 could imagine the warm wild breath of the Gulf of Mexico holding them. What I saw in their faces were surprise and wonderment. I kept the picture on my bedroom wall for a long time. Why did it take the family so long to visit the ocean? Why did this photograph seize my imagination so powerfully? What were they thinking about? Maybe everyone is like the family from Robstown, we are all very far and very close - at the same time to the things that matter most.

My father had dementia during the last few 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 his imagination - opened up pockets of memory that have been waiting to be set free.



My father, standing on his car looking out into the Gulf of Mexico 1941
Water-& Sky # 1

Photographs - In 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 separation. In-Between childhood and adulthood is only a moment. The ways we think about imaginary lines and borders is significant. The tiny space In-Between water and sky is both transitory and timeless.

Besides family portraits, the most photographed subjects are water and sky. Who doesn't have a story about a storm or the colors of water and sky at last light? They both live in the world of perpetual motion and changing faces. Water & Sky are always in the state of becoming something else depending on wind, temperature, humidity and the ethereal moody molecules of liquids and gases. Sky borrows color and evaporation from water. Water is bathed and cleaned by cool rain showers from the sky. Their unsettled desires and partnership never suffer fatigue.

Some of the photographs in Series Number Ten are 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 thin line "In-Between-ness".

IN-BETWEEN-NESS shares a border, owns dual citizenship and accepts contrasting conditions. Who among us does not understand this state of becoming something else? 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. The lake appeared as an ocean. There in front of me I watched a silver ring of sunlight dissolving along the creases of water and sky. The space in 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.

Essay - February, 2024

* * * * * * * * * * * * *



Water & Sky #2



Water & Sky #3



Water & Sky #4



Water & Sky #5



Water & Sky #6



Water & Sky #7



Water & Sky #8



Water & Sky #9

Series Number Twelve

Nain, Labrador - 1989

Twelve Photographs
Essay, August, 2024
Michael Nye

Nain, Labrador

One story of light is that it emerges and then fades.

Photographs dream of becoming complete sentences. They are patient, holding time in floating air, while we imagine connections and relevant implications.

I spent a week in the Canadian Gaspe Peninsula and along the shores of the Saint Lawrence River. Gaspe means “Land’s End”. Ice and snow were layered on top of existing ice. It was difficult to determine where earth and ice first met on this frozen landscape as I drove from Chandler to Sainte-Anne-des-Monts.

Every shivering icy concern carried a bluish or purplish temperament. I photographed indented pathways – fallen tree trunks - frozen leaves stacked like dollar bills – the colors of creamy whites shimmering in darker places along the edges of a riverbank. In a local café a man told me: “If you are attracted to this landscape, go to Labrador.” At that moment everyone in the café stopped and turned. His voice was intense and deliberate as if he was speaking about god or gold.

Back home in my darkroom, I discovered that all my negatives from the trip were ruined. I had a small tear, light leak in the bellows of my camera. Too much light and not enough light are equivalent disasters with photography.

Labrador and Mail Boat

Three years later in August, I flew to Halifax and took a cargo plane to Happy Valley/Goose Bay, Labrador. I then booked a ride on a mail boat- The Northern Ranger that delivered mail and cargo up through the fjords to Inuit villages. My destination was the last northern Inuit village, Nain, established in 1771 as a Moravian mission. Population 598.

Journal: On Northern Ranger – from Goose Bay to Nain Labrador

> *August 31, 1989 - Deck hand on the Northern Ranger:*
> *“I think it’s going to blow - aye – the snow - aye – nothing to worry about – It’s from the northeast – Aye – but it’s going to be rough - aye.”*

September 2:

An older women on the mail-boat: *" I flew into Nain in April 1958 on a sea plane. All inlets were still frozen so the pilot landed further out into the sea. We were eventually picked up by a dog sled and taken into Nain. The entire town greeted us."*

September 3:

After three days of very cold drizzle and rain and fog - near midnight the sky cleared and the sea was quiet and calm. Someone called out to see the Northern Lights. Six or seven of us lay on the outside wooden deck with blankets. A bottle of vodka was passed around and we mixed it with water. The Northern Lights were directly above us, surrounding the ship. One man said, "We found the headwaters of the Northern Lights." The lights were so bright that the ocean waters lit up with a warmest reddish glow.



Nain, Labrador 1878

Nain, Labrador - The Place

Nain is located on Unity Bay and may only be reached by air or sea. Nain is open to the Atlantic Ocean, some 440 miles from the shores of Greenland. I rented a small bare room and stayed with an Inuit family for $14.00 US a day. They were quiet and hardly noticed my presence. In their kitchen, on a table was a dead caribou about to be butchered.

When the missionaries came, they couldn't pronounce the Inuit's names so they gave them English or biblical first names, however most retained their historical last names. I met Patricia Ikkusek – Tony Kemuksigak - Sarah Angnatok and Molly Otuk. At night we would sit around the kitchen table and listen to a radio station located only two blocks away.

Journal: Nain – September 7:

Local Inuit radio station: "*Bingo will be on Friday night not Saturday at Billy's house. Josie please call Tim. Bob, bring home some meat. Heard that Sarah is sick. We hope she is feeling better this evening . . . "*

Journal: Nain, September 8:

The blackflies are beyond description! They attack me with vengeance. A cloud follows me everywhere. My only relief is windy days. They even bite through my jeans. Adults and children have scabs on their arm and faces. They seem indifferent to the bites.

Wheelbarrows are used for baby carriages. Inside were a mix of groceries, supplies and crying baby.

John Patuktuq: (Patuktuq means ice crystal.)

There is a captivating ease and comfort when someone speaks slowly and directly to you. I met John Patuktuq along Unity bay four miles north of Nain in an extremely remote valley. John was living alone on the edge of the bay and across from Rhodes Island. Directly behind his campsite was a row of low treeless hills. His tent material was thick, caribou skin, although there were pieces of wood and tin and other washed-up items attached. He asked me if I was hunting. He said he had been exiled from the village for a crime he committed when drunk. It was difficult to imagine how anyone could survive the winters here alone. He was only allowed to go into the village for supplies. In his broken English John said:

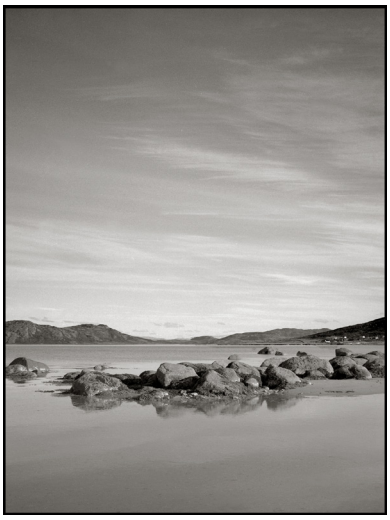
"My earliest memories begin at the age of five. My father could not walk and rarely left his bed. We were the poorest family in the village. I had to go to the minister's house to get a bowl of soup for my father. I was never conscious of being poor. All my thoughts were of playing. I would pretend to kill make-believe monsters along the shore."

John made some tea. Abrupty, he asked if I wanted to hear a story of his "*First Kill*".
"My First kill was a bird. Its wing was broken. I chased it for a long time. I finally fell on the bird with my whole body. I took it to our house to show my father. He kept the bird in

a safe place until my grandmother came home. That night, my grandmother said a few prayers and lit a candle. She then picked up my left hand, turned it over and bit the back of my wrist. She bit me so hard it bled. I screamed. My grandmother looked at me and said: 'Never forget the animal's pain'."

As John described the moment of the bite, he let out a slow and song-like scream that floated across the bay and it stayed there for a while before lifting away. We both sat sipping tea and watched the remote silence circling. John was grateful for invisible things. The animals nearby meant more than meat and nourishment. They lived here too. John was proud of this insight and of the scar trophy he wore on the back of his wrist.

Photographs around Nain & Unity Bay:



Photographs won't admit it but understand that there is nothing comparable with how a particular scene feels-like or looks-like when actually present. A photograph is never like "Being There".

Most of photographs in "Labrador Series" are actually two separate photographs stitched and merged together as one final photograph in the darkroom. Sometimes a broken dish can be glued back together.



(**Photograph one**) I first photographed items found or washed up along the shoreline. A metal bar & ring - a caribou leg - a round rim from a rusted barrow—a whale's jaw bone – a plastic doll hugging the sand. (**Photograph two**) I then photographed what was directly above the first found object, out beyond the shore to the water and colored sky.

Most photographs begin and end with just one look. However in the *"Labrador Series"* each image begins by looking first at the found object at the bottom and ends by looking upward into the horizon and the changing sky. These are vertical narrative photographs.

This series of photographs communicates so little, almost nothing about my experience in Nain, Labrador. These images don't describe the cloud of black flies chasing and biting – the slow moving of ice bergs just on the edge of the Atlantic ocean – the breaching and surfacing of *Flathead* whales within 100 feet of the shoreline – the intense silence in this ancient land - the smell of baking bread - the rhythm and sound of the Inuit language rising with each careful word. These photographs completely failed to describe the serious remoteness of the landscape or the emotional longing many feel and share.

Return:
From Nain, I returned to Goose Bay on a seaplane, taking off from an inlet bay. My flight to Halifax was departing the following morning so I spent the night in a large hollow airplane barracks. There was a small room in the corner where a few of us prepared to spend the night. The room had a popcorn and drink machine. Around 11:30 pm the lights were turned off except for a dim light just outside our waiting room. Inside, an electric floor heater was humming.

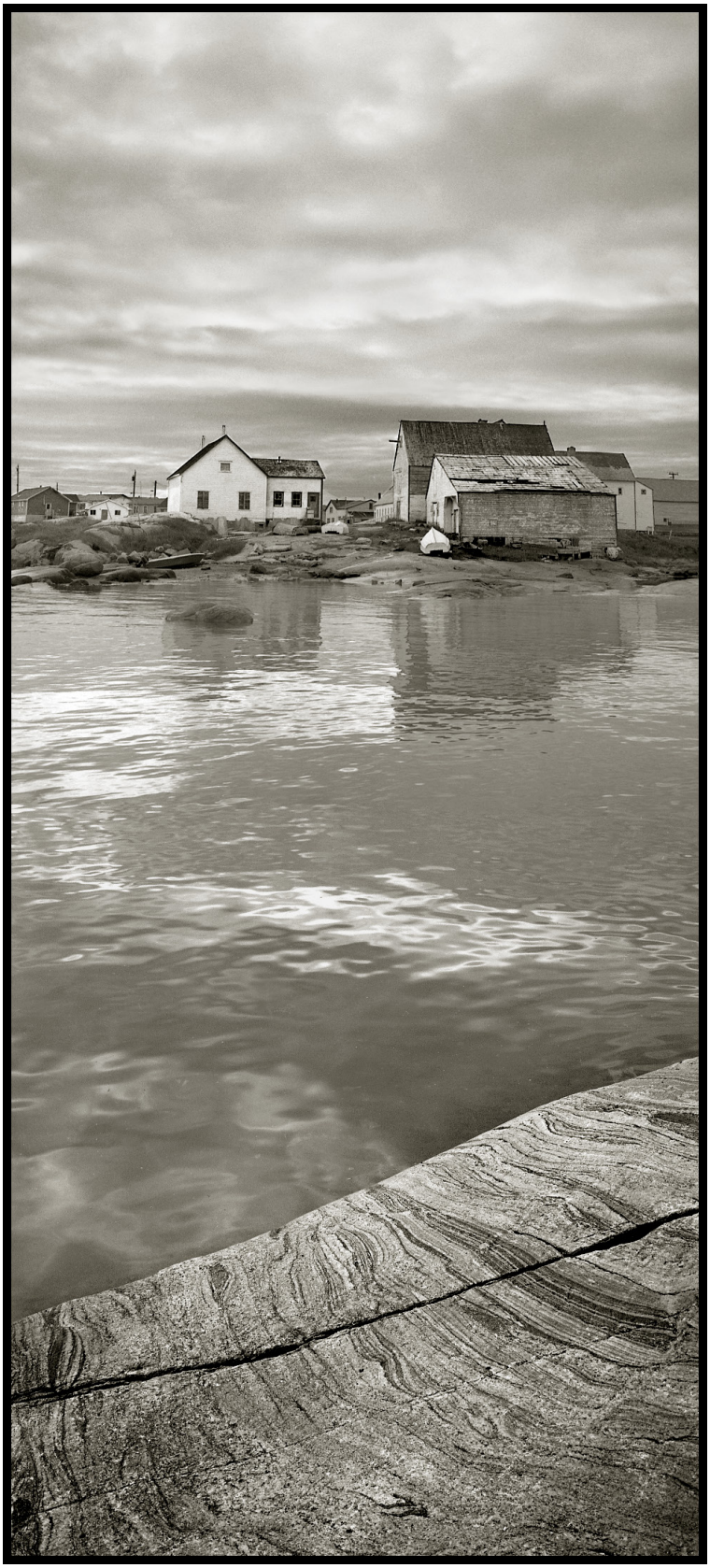
Around 4:00 am I heard feet running and the bright barracks overhead lights were turned on. A man came rushing into our waiting room and begin preparing popcorn. He told us that that an international 747-jet liner flying from London to New York had lost one of its engines. Goose Bay had a long landing strip built during WW II and could accommodate the emergency landing. Soon we heard roaring of an engine, the sweeping of wings and moving air. One hundred and twenty passengers, mostly from England, came tumbling into the barracks cold and confused. Some were wearing formal vested suits, dresses, others in blue jeans and short skirts.

It was September 18th and a light snow was falling. The large crowd gathered around me in the cold asking, *Where are we? What country is this?* The warm popcorn was passed around. I kept say saying over and over, "You are in Labrador. This is Labrador."

Essay, August, 2024



Labrador #1



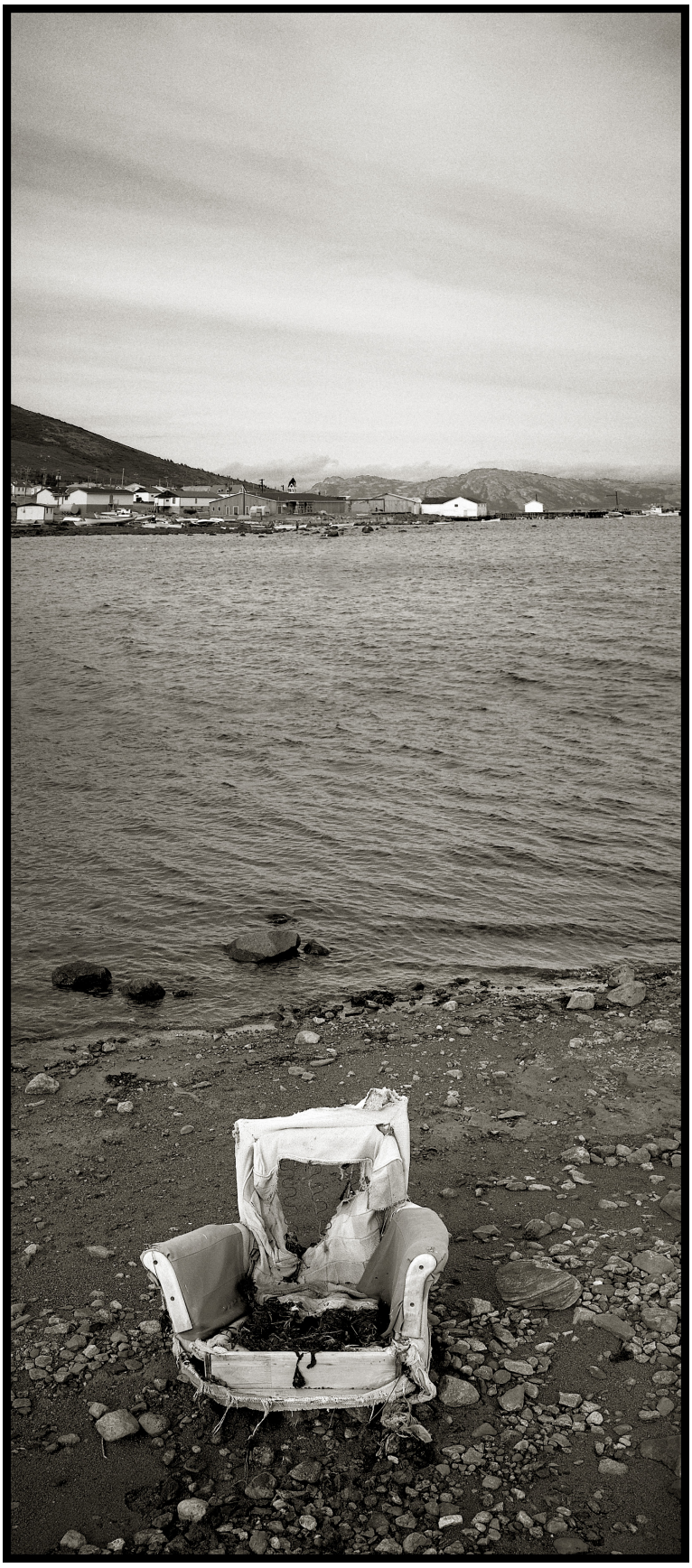
Labrador #2



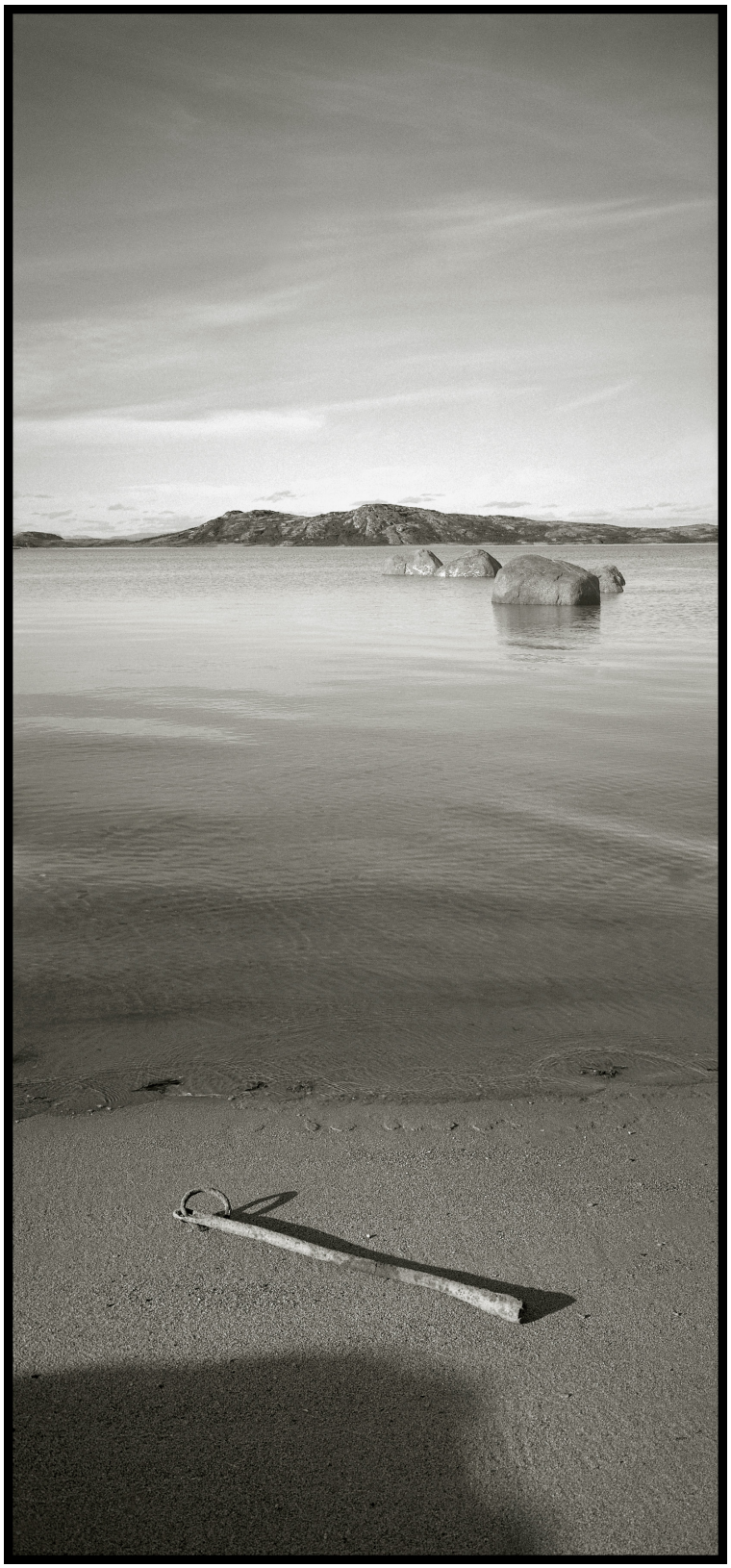
Labrador #3



Labrador #4



Labrador #5



Labrador #6



Labrador #7



Labrador #8



Labrador #9



Labrador #10



Labrador #11



Labrador #12

Series Number Thirteen

Words Pretending to be Photographs

words & photographs

Nine Photographs
Essay - March, 2024
Michael Nye

Words Pretending to be Photographs

words & photographs:

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, 2024



in the east, the sky is clear.



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.



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.



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.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Series Number Fourteen

Simplest of Stories - Chiapas Streets

Photographs 1988/90 - Essay 2025

Nine Photographs

Michael Nye

Simplest of Stories - Chiapas Streets

vastness of unmapped moments – one simple alphabet – not something else – pool of shadows – stepping off a curb waiting for nothing – empty spaces chose me – invisible impulses - patterns of necessity - Everyone carries a desire

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 act of choosing, the act of photographing something that is seen and **Not Something Else.** This series of photographs 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. This series of photographs is about an extended awareness.

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.

Essay, March 2025



Simplest of Stories: Two



Simplest of Stories: Three



Simplest of Stories: Four



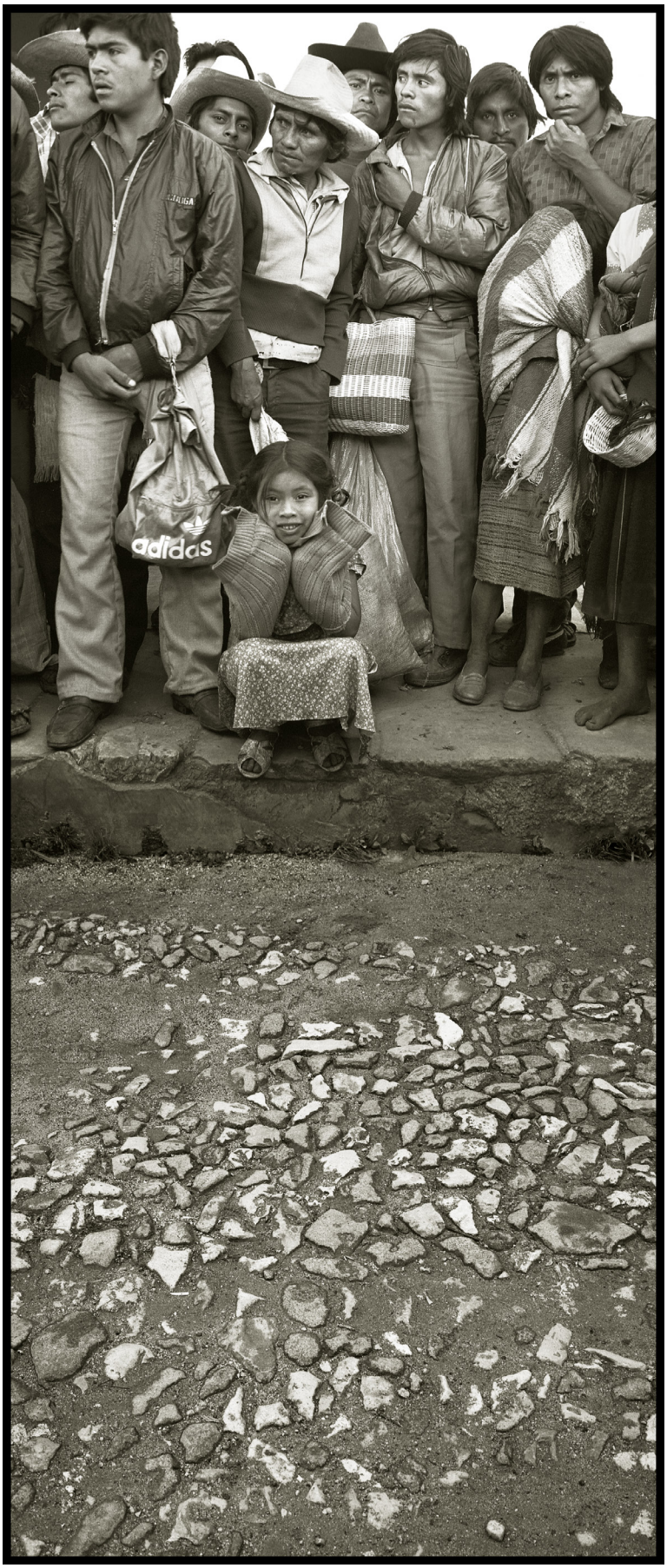
Simplest of Stories: Five



Simplest of Stories: Six



Simplest of Stories: Seven



Simplest of Stories: Eight



Simplest of Stories: Nine

Series Number Fifteen

Iraqi Kurdish Uprising - Iraq 1991

Twenty-Three Photographs

Essay - January, 2024

Michael Nye

Iraqi Kurdish Uprising - 1991

On my seventh birthday, my father bought me a BB gun and ammunition. My neighborhood best friend, Richard asked me to shoot him in the back one summer afternoon. He assured me that the BB pellet would bounce off his tough skin. He took off his shirt and told me, “Shoot me in the back, Mikey!” He spoke with such authority and assurance with repeated insistence. Even with a “I know I shouldn’t do this” reluctance, I aimed and pulled the trigger. The BB lodged just under his skin in the middle of his back. He ran to his parents, screaming, “Mikey, shot me in the back.”

War: What do trees or green fields or passing clouds or flying birds know about worry. How much loss can someone endure? In my University World History class our professor asked us on the first day, “How many wars have there been in the last 6000 years? What are the reasons for war and violent conflicts between groups and countries?” Why do insects and animals and communities fight with each other? How can war best be avoided?” World History never calculate or measures the cost of war’s emotional trauma.

The 1991 First Gulf War:



The First Gulf War was between Iraq and a coalition of nations including the United States. The Coalition forces defeated Iraq and forced Iraq to retreat from their invasion into Kuwait. Toward the end of the First Gulf War, February, March, 1991 the Kurdish Iraqis as a result of years of systemic brutal repression, rose up against the Iraqi government demanding self-rule and independence. The Iraqi government retaliated against the Kurdish communities. They rounding up the men, women and children for mass executions. Some 400,000 Kurds fled to the mountains in northern Iraq near the border of Turkey.

In February, 1991, I went into northern Iraq as a war journalist representing the San Antonio Express News. I took with me my 8 x 10" large format camera, film plates, clothes and a tent. On a budget, flew to Istanbul, then to Ankara where I obtained a "Turkish War Press Card and Credentials". I took a 950 km bus ride to Diyarbakir, in southeastern Turkey. At an American military base, I got a ride with several war journalist who were traveling overland into Iraq and into fighting area.

A war from a distance is not the same as war close up.

In Zakho, Iraq and the surrounding villages, tens of thousands of fleeing Kurdish families were arriving from the mountains. A Kurdish mother was carrying pillows, blankets and pans on her back. Parents were holding their children. Refugee agencies were setting up tents and medical facilities. The U.S. Marines and a few coalition forces tried to create a temporary safety zone for the frightened refugees. No one was in control.

Even on the hard desert floor, a shoe print leaves an unmistakably trail. Smoke rising from campfires was circling and forming a question mark high above the camp. One woman's hand turned into a waving fist. I watched the sharp blade of the sun resting on the top of the silver mountains before it faded into the earth. I witnessed the compassion of volunteers, relief groups and doctors. The soldiers were so kind. I heard a grandmother coughing. I watched villagers cooking soup. I heard gun fire and explosion of bombs and words that I did not understand. Children everywhere were not playing or laughing, just silent. During the night of cold rain, not everyone had tents. Does melancholy have a favorite song?

I met a French naval officer. His unit was the first to arrive to fight in Iraq. They allowed me to stay with them in their large tent. Twelve of us slept on cots with guards holding rifles outside at night. They were serious and careful. They introduced me to a Kurdish taxi driver. He agreed to take me into the mountains near Duhok. Approaching a check point on an isolated desert road was frightening and arbitrary.

I was invited into tent after tent by Kurdish families. They offered me self-rolled cigarettes and tea heated from campfires. The stories made me cry – would make anyone cry. With an interpreter, the language was slower and more immediately desperate. Like a virus everyone was impacted.

I stayed with one Kurdish family for a full day. A father told me, "*Ten days earlier, the Iraqi army had entered our village. We were ordered to stand outside our house. While we looked on, an Iraqi soldier shot and killed one of my daughters, age seven. He then demanded that we pay for the bullet."* The second daughter that witnessed the atrocity is dressed in white: (See *Kurdish Portrait Three.*)

How can such things happen?

The Kurdish people have their own language and culture. At the end of WWI and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Kurdistan failed to obtain statehood. An estimated 30 million people of Kurdish ethnicity are spread mostly across southern Turkey, northern Iraq, north and eastern Syria, and Iran.

I remember thinking, “What right do I have to make these photographs? How can I help in some small way?” Maybe, as a witness to the murmur and presence of it all? It was much more difficult to leave Iraq then to get in. A pilot in an Italian helicopter agreed to give me a ride back into Turkey. The sky was wearing a blue velvet vastness. The doors were open and two Italian soldiers with machine guns were positioned at each open door. They flew through the desert and then down along the Tigris River, just above the blue that owned water. They were looking for Iraqi guerrilla soldiers. I wore a radio headphone and listened to the soldiers speaking in Italian. On the helicopter flight back, looking down upon the wide space of land, I saw Kurdish families in brilliant colors walking in straight lines, other times in circles. Their thinking, I can only guess, was somewhere between where they stood and some far distant place I could never imagine.

Photographs – Kurdish Refugees:
The photographs in the Kurdish Iraqi series are made in two separate visual representations.
Part One: Portraits -
Part Two: Toward not Forgetting:

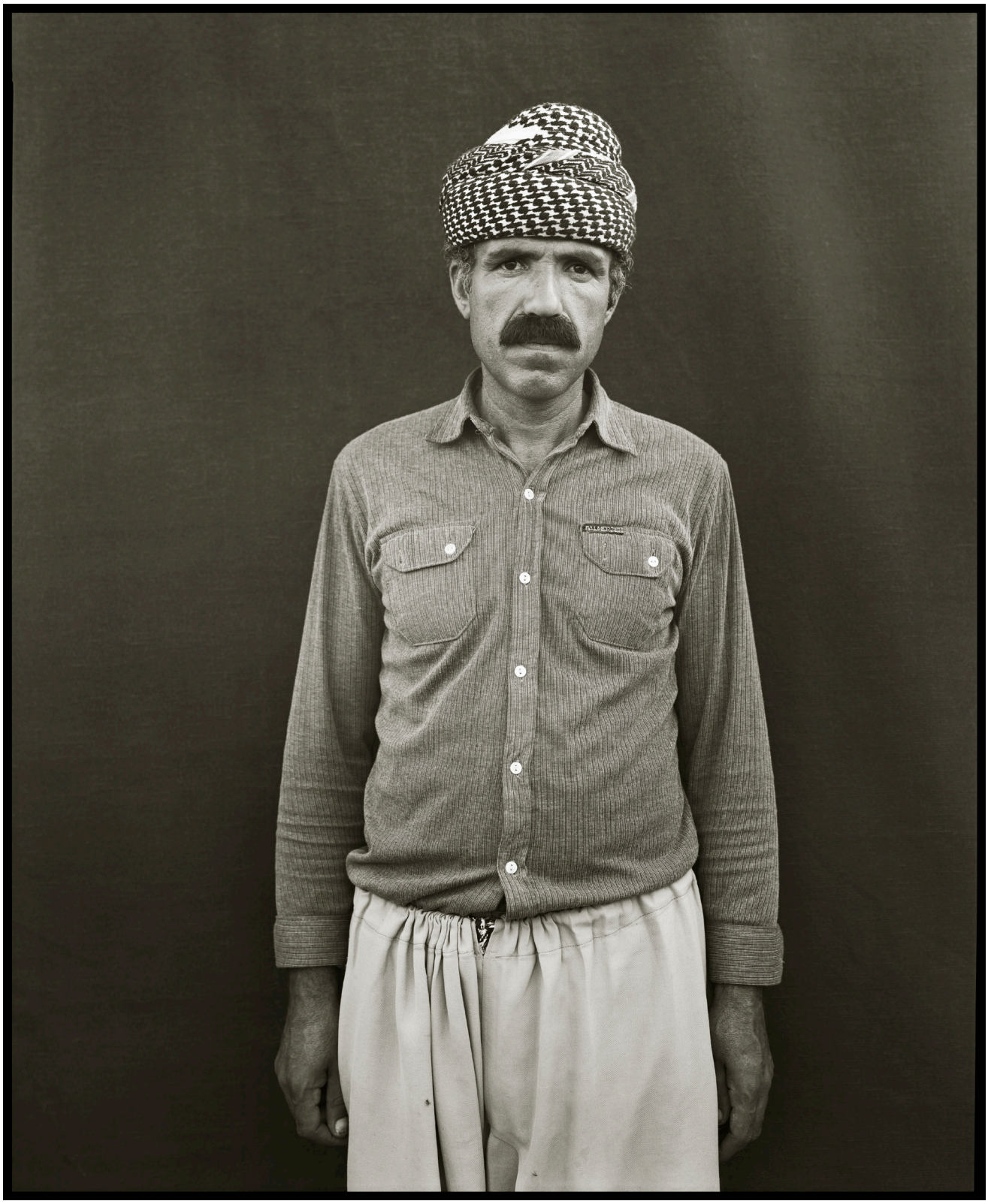
Part One: Portraits - *(Fifteen photographs)*

Photographs can be thought of as a continuity of touching. Light reflecting off a person travels through the camera lens and lightly touches the negative. Then in a darkroom, light from an enlarger moves through the same negative and touches the photographic paper.

Looking forward or backwards in time is still a measure of looking. A photograph of someone says so little about that person and sometimes the portrait is not that person at all. There is so much more to know. It is the surface of a person, a tiny moment unlike other moments. Each person spent some me before the camera. With an interpreter, we talked around the edges. I used a large 8 x 10” view camera, film plates on a tripod against a clumsy black backdrop. The backdrop is an open letter, an invitation toward the intensity and hardness of imagination, what is not seen but present.



Kurdist Portrait One



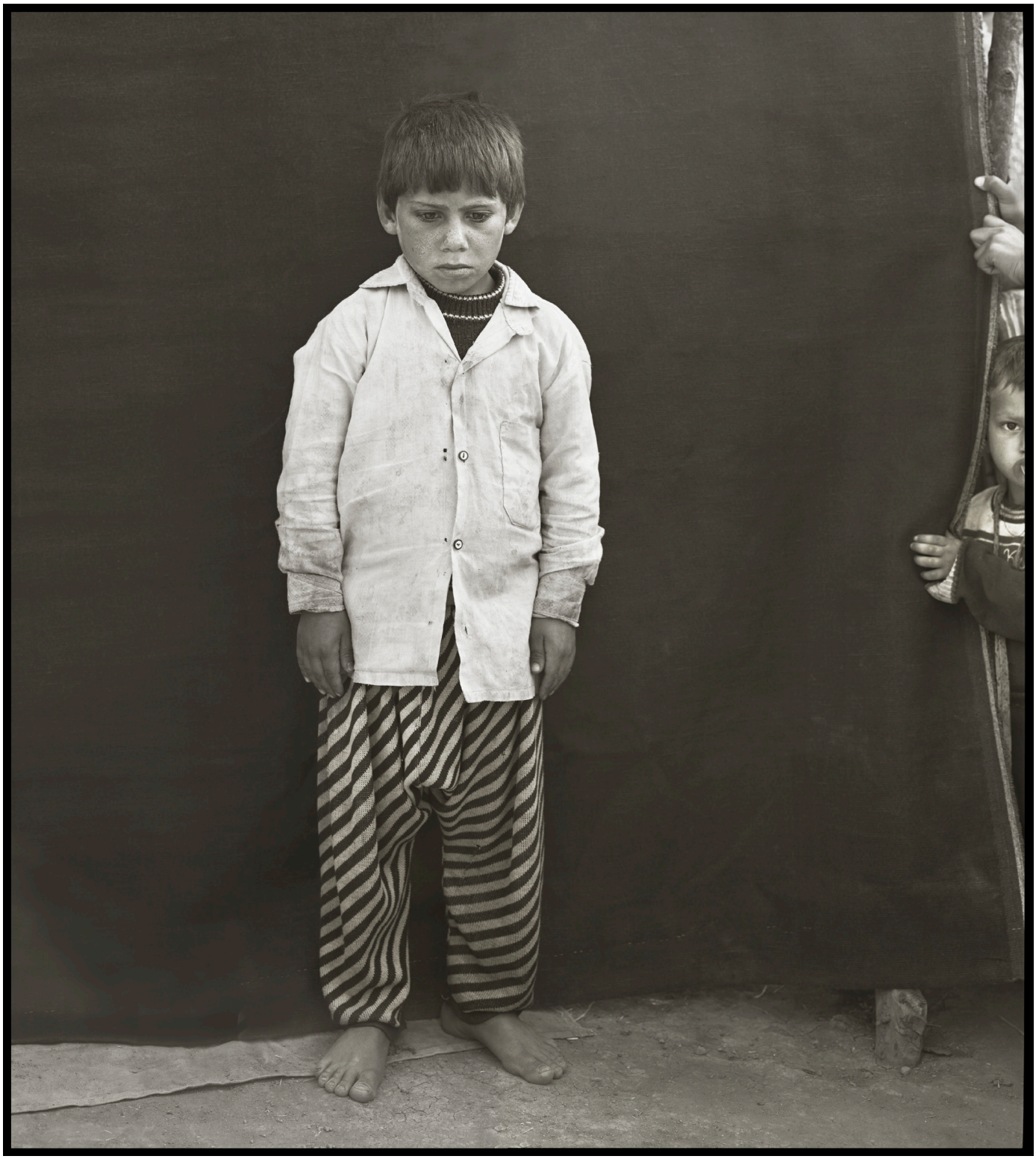
Kurdist Portrait Two



Kurdist Portrait Three



Kurdist Portrait Four



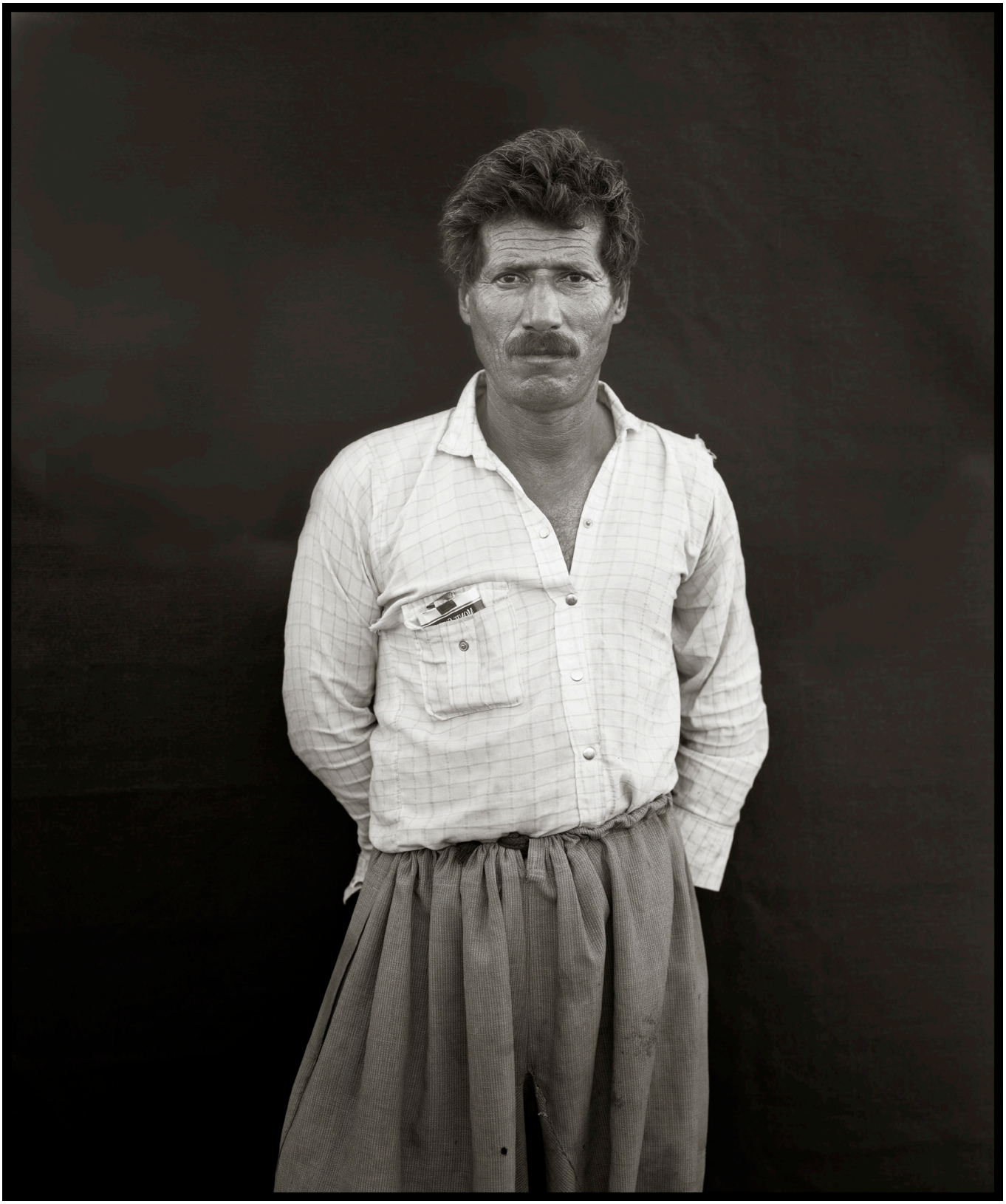
Kurdist Portrait Five



Kurdist Portrait Six



Kurdist Portrait Seven



Kurdist Portrait Eight



Kurdist Portrait Nine



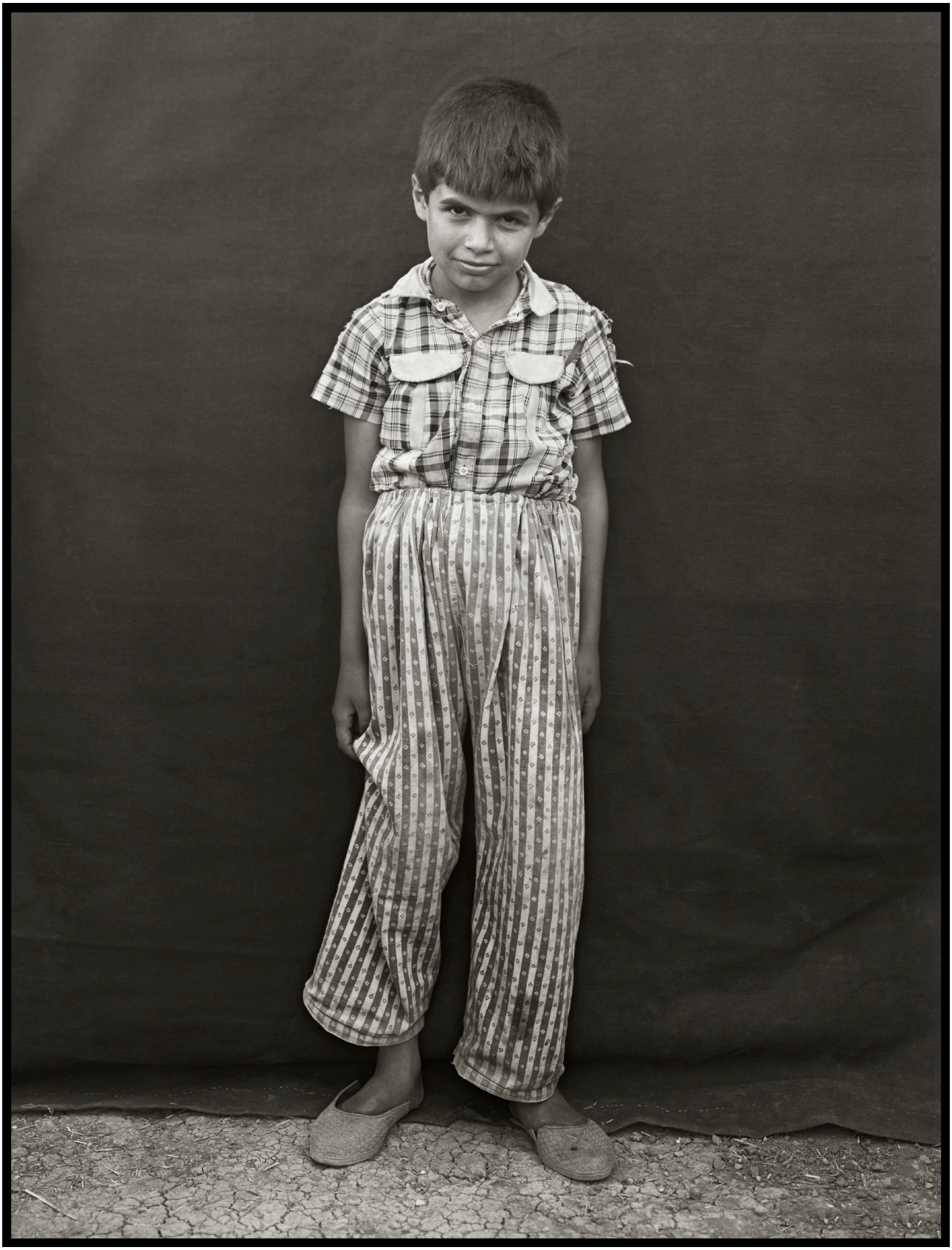
Kurdist Portrait Ten



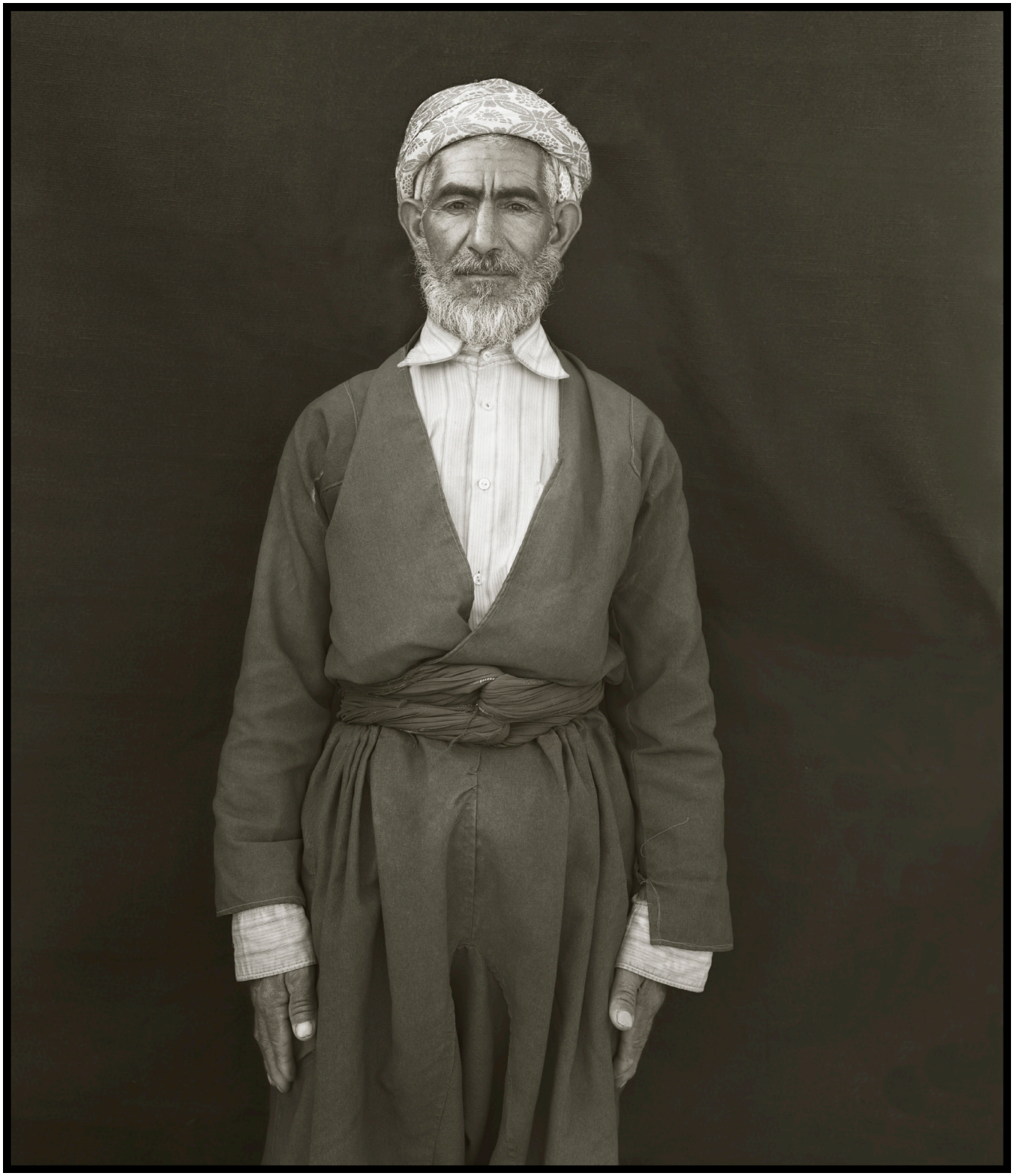
Kurdist Portrait Eleven



Kurdist Portrait Twelve



Kurdist Portrait Thirteen



Kurdist Portrait Fourteen



Kurdist Portrait Fifteen

Part Two: Toward not Forgetting: (Eight photographs)

In the darkroom I turned on the lights while the photograph was still in the development process. Strange pinks and oranges and purple tones emerged on the black and white photographic paper. These images are maps of “then and now”. These photographs point toward a history of: *“Don’t forget who we are”*. Not so much of injury or death or loss but of the ferociousness of present moments. I did not photograph any mile of the scattering of blankets and tents. I did not photograph the bombed-out homes and villages. I did not photograph the anxiety of the land or the always hopeful nature of air. I did not photograph mothers and fathers crying. I did not photograph death or the verbs of war. Others have made those images.



Toward not Forgetting - One



Toward not Forgetting - Two



Toward not Forgetting - Three



Toward not Forgetting - Four



Toward not Forgetting - Five



Toward not Forgetting - Six



Toward not Forgetting - Seven



Toward not Forgetting - Eight

Series Number Sixteen

Rainforest

Oahu Hawaii - 1991

Twenty Photographs

Essay - February, 2024

Michael Nye

Rain Forest: Oahu, Hawaii

On the last day of the world,
I would want to plant a tree
W.S. Merwin

In the forest above Manoa Valley and upward through the hills on the island of Oahu it's raining. The salmon crested cockatoos call and cry to each other. The earth is moist and the ground holds its melting leaves. What does intricacy have to say about shades of green, trees that are fully awake, the earnestness of insects or the language of the zebra doves? Every look is a bloom of midnight colors. Every inch of ground has an expression. Rain is as present as the slow reach of shadows. How long did it take to create this dark forest of so many living things? The difference between a desert and a rainforest must be water.

William Merwin former U.S. Poet Laureate and twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize died in March, 2019. William and his wife Paula, turned their 19 acres in Maui, Hawaii into a lush palm garden. Over 40 years, they planted more than 3000 trees, nearly 900 different varieties of indigenous and endangered palms. Today, it is considered one of the most important collections of palms in the world.

It was July of 1991 when William was asked to speak on the impact on earth's changing climate in Honolulu. We were living in Honolulu for six months, Naomi, teaching at the University of Hawaii and I was practicing law long distance. The event director somehow failed to promote William's lecture. The auditorium was mostly empty. Eleven individuals were present. William spoke for one hour and fifteen minutes. Passionately. Without notes. His poems and stories connected us to our planet and to responsibility. At dinner that night, after his lecture, William talked about palm trees and the generosity of dirt. He never mentioned the mostly empty auditorium.

The next morning, William took Naomi and me for a hike and a stare. We drove above Honolulu, above Manoa valley into a cloudy lush rainforest. We hiked up among the thick trees. We stood still for a long time. William knew about the history of trees, birds and the sounds they made. He picked up fallen leaves. William stopped and pointed to a tall palm that rose upward into the canopy. Our heads lifted. William told us, " This palm, Spectabilis is extremely rare. Endangered. It has a remarkable life cycle. It lives to 100 years, blooms only once, branches into hundreds of tiny flowers and dies. Spectabilis means, 'blessed."

Sometimes, what you don't want to do, becomes the thing you want to do the most. I never really wanted to live in Hawaii. I thought it might be confining. However, the first week in our apartment high on the hills overlooking the lights of Honolulu and the Pacific Ocean, the trade winds that traveled so far, rocked us to sleep. An island has a gravity and pull that it owns.

RAIN FOREST SERIES - LYON ARBORETUM

Harold Lyon Arboretum is a 200-acre botanical garden and tropical rainforest with a collection of more than 5000 plant species. For four months, a few days each week I spent time hiking and photographing deep into the wild rainforest hills. (See - *Lyon Arboretum -One)*

At night in Hawaii, loading my 8x10" negatives into my film holders, I wondered what light and moist air might touch this film. This series of photographs was the result and a desire to spend time in a rainforest. I photographed tree trunks – bodies of trees, younger and older tree trunks in the same way I would photograph people. I also looked upward and made photographs of the rainforest canopy.

There were challenges. I brought in my 8x10" view camera, tripod, film plates and backdrop. My equipment was heavy and awkward. It rained. I used large plastic sheets to protect my film and camera. It was muddy and slippery climbing up and down hills and valleys. My camera fell over. I fell over. My backdrop blew and tumbled. Many of the sheet films were ruined by rain. I wondered what I was doing? Large branches and thick foliage prevented mobility. Why was I making this simple series of photographs so difficult? Why was I photographing trunks of trees?

Three birdwatchers in Lyon Arboretum pointed their fingers toward a flying Red-Vented Bulbul. The forest of trees leans in the late afternoons. The muted light and slow rain impacts mood. At night, the moonlight, the starlight, and raindrops first fall on leaves before finding the soft soil below. Many days I would not photograph at all, but just listen. The sounds in this wild place were dramatic. The leaves, the wind, the rain, the birds, the murmuring, the chirping behind me, the moan high in the trees, moving water, the insects were all using this space at the same time.

The birds and ants know how lucky they are living on this island. The rain arrives each early afternoon on time. Our attention changed while we were living on Oahu. What became important, what we talked about, what we thought about privately were sensory experiences. The richness of the soft air, Hawaiian words and songs, the ocean and its sand, the rainforest and its community of greenness seeped into our bones.



LAST NOTES:

In August, 2016 I interviewed and photographed poet William Merwin in his home on the island of Maui, Hawaii. William and his wife Paula were living in the middle of their 40 year-old palm forest. I was working on a project on blindness and adaptation, interviews and portraits. I heard that William was losing his eyesight due to macular degeneration. I flew to Maui and spent the afternoon asking William questions about blindness and the nature of perception. It was raining and we drank coffee and hot tea.

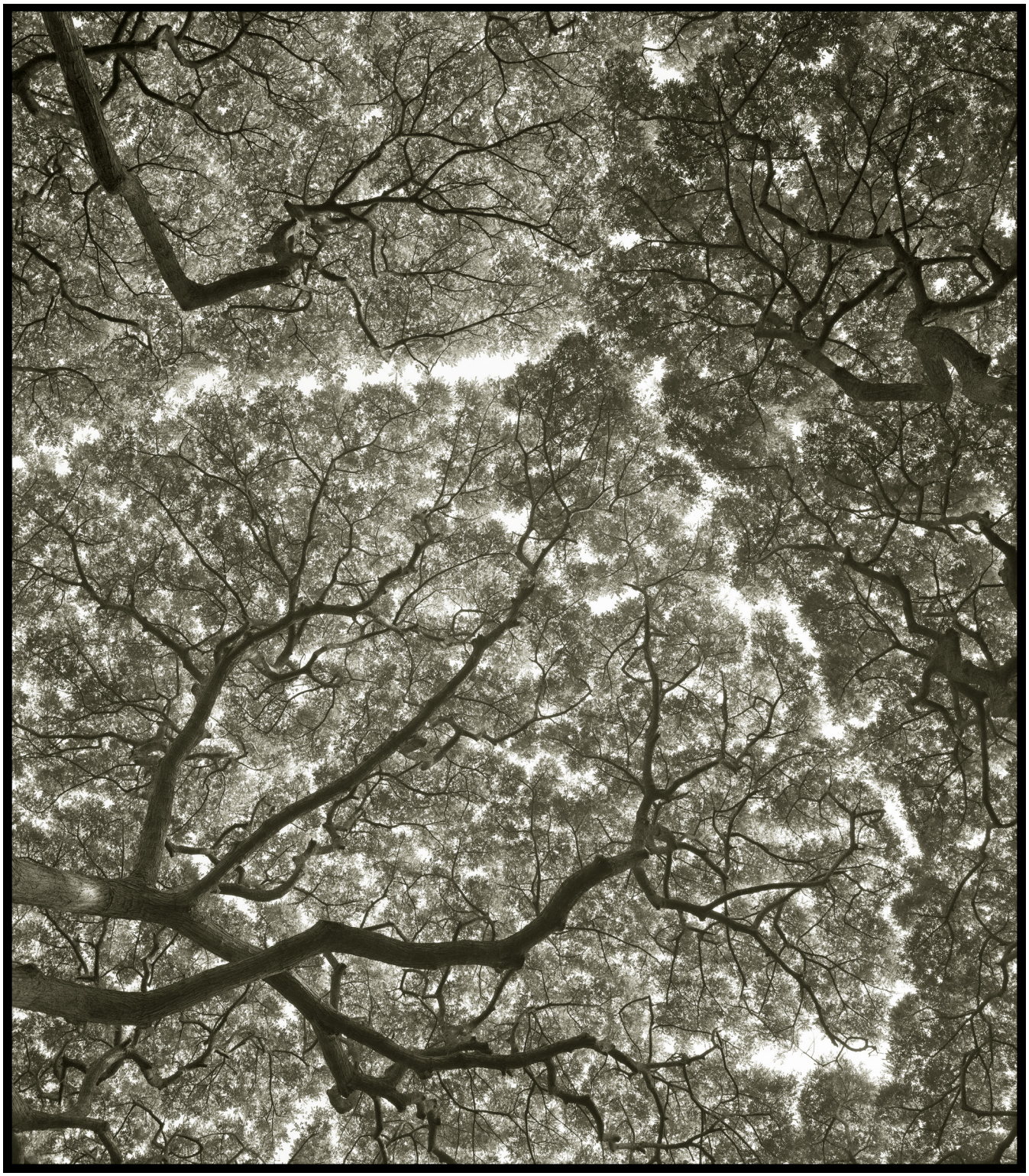
I asked William, what does the public not understand about blindness? William responded by talking about rain and dragon flies. How rain turns into streams and how dragon flies can fly sidewards and backwards.

I asked William about awareness and visual memory? He responded by talking about sound. How sound has a shadow and a shape and a destination;

I asked William about his whether his vision loss has impacted his sense of time? Did he have any newfound perspectives about attention? William responded by talking about his palm garden. “Trees are our teachers. They are millions and millions of years old and connect us to the earth and being alive. We know so little about trees. We have to pay attention.”



Lyon Arboretum -Rainforest - One



Lyon Arboretum -Two



Lyon Arboretum -Three



Lyon Arboretum - Four



Lyon Arboretum - Five



Lyon Arboretum - Six



Lyon Arboretum - Seven



Lyon Arboretum -Nine



Lyon Arboretum - Ten



Lyon Arboretum - Eleven



Lyon Arboretum - Twelve



Lyon Arboretum - Thirteen



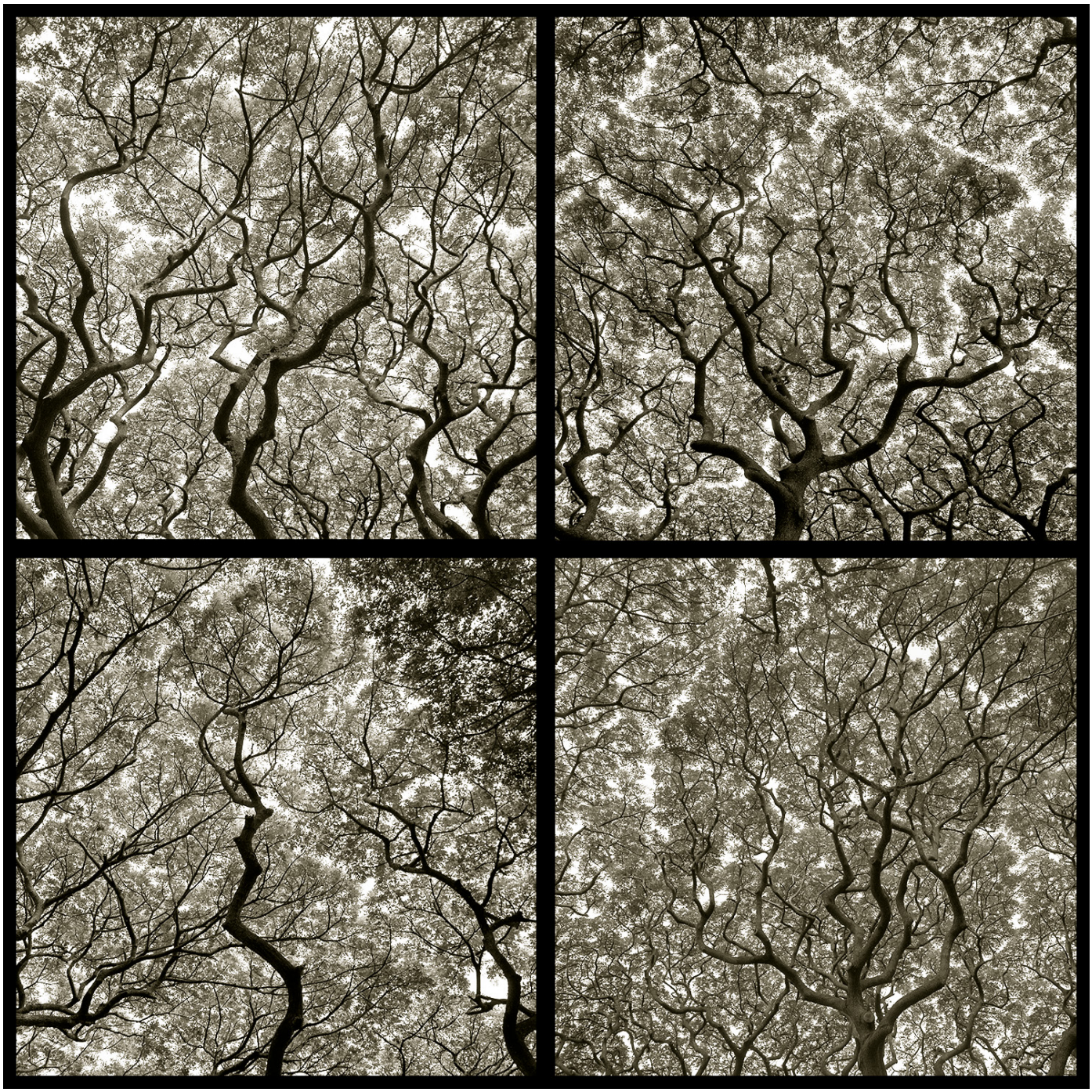
Lyon Arboretum - Fourteen



Lyon Arboretum - Fifteen



Lyon Arboretum - Sixteen



Lyon Arboretum - Seventeen



Lyon Arboretum - Eighteen



Lyon Arboretum - Nineteen



Lyon Arboretum - Twenty

Series Number Seventeen

Nu'uanu Pali

Oahu Hawaii - 1991

Nineteen Photographs
Essay - September, 2024
Michael Nye

Nu'uanu Pali - Oahu, Hawaii

Nu'uanu Pali, (High elevation/cliff) was the site of one of the bloodiest battles in Hawaiian history. It is a section of a cliff located on the Island of Oahu. It has been a vital historical route and passage-way because of the Ko'olau mountain range that connects the leeward side of the island to the windward side.

My wife Naomi said of our visit:

> *"Pali Lookout is the most astonishing single place on earth I have ever visited. Somehow better than the Himalayas or the vastness of the Sahara Desert. I think how it must have felt for the early Hawaiians to limb and experience that view - before roads or concrete or signs - that exhilaration of, "here is your island, your incredible gift of a place*."

Thousands of tourists arriving in Honolulu find their way to Pali Lookout to take a photograph of the expansive Island and ocean and have a photograph taken of them to document, "*I was here.*"

Nu'uanu Pali has a history and nine hundred stories to tell. This story really began in 1758 the year Halley's comet and its trail of light passed over the Hawaiian Islands. It was the same year that King Kamehameha was born. He grew up on the biggest island in the Hawaiian Archipelago. On the day he was born there were reports of storms and strange lights. There was a prophecy that Kamehameha would be a great leader and unite all of the Hawaiian Islands under one government.

A lieutenant from the British Royal Navy in 1778 wrote of the young warrior, Kamehameha, "he had as savage a face as I ever saw, but his disposition was good natured and humorous." Captain James Cook described him as, "dignified, astute, graceful and physically powerful."



Kamehameha had lessons in astronomy, geography and navigation. He studied the winds and clouds. He watched the birds in flight. He memorized long chants. He had a unwavering determination and intelligence – knowing when to make alliances and when to attack.

In February 1795, he assembled the largest army the Hawaiian Islands had ever seen, with 12,000 men and 1,200 war canoes. Kamehameha moved against the southern islands of Maui and Moloka'i and then he invaded O'ahu. The warriors on O'ahu fell back through the Nuuanu Valley and were caught between Kamehameha's army and the 1000-foot drop off of Nu'uanu Pali cliff . Over 800 of O'ahu's warriors either jumped or were pushed over the edge of the cliff.

Uniting the Islands of Hawaii was one part of Kamehameha's story, the other part was how he made the transition from a war lord to a peaceful governing ruler.

Series Number Seventeen - Nu'uanu Pali Lookout

For a thousand years, Hawaiians have been hiking up through Nu'uanu valley and standing on the edge of a cliff looking to the other side of the island, to the reach of distance, to the bluest ocean and the connected moving sky. Emotions loom over this seeing. Surprise and Gratitude are the first two insights.

This series of photographs is about looking outward and reflecting inward at the same time. So many visitors fall into a dreamy stare when standing on the edge. What does reverence look like? What does suddenness and wonder feel like? The view from Pali Lookout is a view of empathy, because you can't think of yourself. When does a present moment turn into a question?

This series of photographs was a wish to spend time here, on this mountain's edge. Experiencing with others the first look of surprise like a sudden chill in the air. Here on Pali Lookout, the wind travels up the mountain, then lifts herself higher over the tallest cliffs and merges with light and fog and mist. The experience is more than visual. It is textured and layered and becomes imbedded in memory. The wind can lift you off the ground. The clouds can cover this site with a white imagination then in an instant, like a charmer, lift the curtain of uncertainty.

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Essay - September, 2024



Pali - One



Pali - Two



Pali - Three



Pali - Four



Pali - Five



Pali - Six



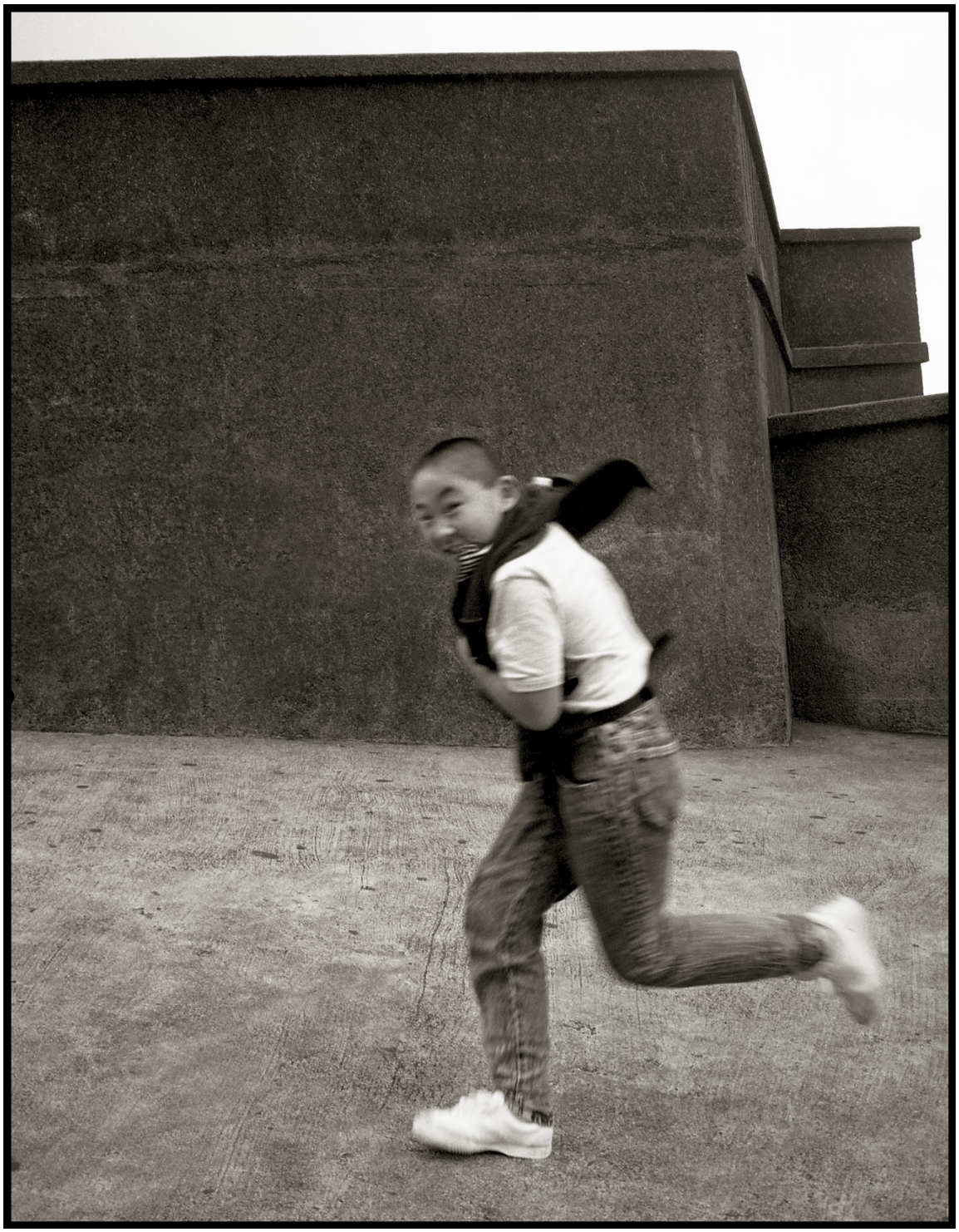
Pali - Seven



Pali - Eight



Pali - Nine



Pali - Ten



Pali - Eleven



Pali - Twelve



Pali - Thirteen



Pali - Fourteen



Pali - Fifteen



Pali - Sixteen



Pali - Seventeen



Pali - Eighteen



Pali - Nineteen

Series Number Eighteen

Moments Not So Powerful - 1993

Seven photographs

Essay - September, 2024

Michael Nye

Chiapas Streets
Moments Not So Powerful

There is a woman who lives down our street on South Main Avenue in San Antonio. She sweeps her sidewalk every morning and evening for hours. She waves to bike riders and joggers and speaks to the paralyzed man in his electric wheel chair. She knows the bus and trolley schedules and anticipates the delivery of her mail. She feels heat and wind and wet pavement after rains. She has lived in the same house for 75 years.

Watching encourages reminiscence.

William James described pragmatism not a doctrine of knowledge but rather like a corridor in a hotel leading to many different rooms. A city street lives with this concept of connectiveness. I made a small series of photographs along one side of five separate streets in San Cristobal de las Casas. Like a train of boxcars, each image is contiguous and connects to the next in space but not time. Each photograph is actually two separate photographs stitched together in my darkroom. Over the period of weeks, I moved down different streets with my 5x7 view camera resting on a tripod. Waiting and watching, not searching was the process.

These streets, these polished sidewalks, stones and colored walls see and hear so much:

The shopkeeper's door opens each early morning.
The same women walks down the same street, every day, at the same time.
Dogs and neighbors look out of windows.
The butcher at the corner cuts off heads of hens.
A rotten orange rests in a gutter.
The sharp constellation of shadows appears at mid-day and then later lifts into nothingness.
A young boy stands against a blue wall.
A bucket of water is thrown on a sidewalk.

Indigenous Tzotzil Maya women, men and children whisper and walk.
A workman climbs down his ladder.
A young couple argues.
Fruit and vegetables exchange ownership.
There are sounds of coins and footsteps and far away bells.
A young girl runs because of some unknown reason.

Tme moves with a rhythm that it owns. A city street cares about how it is being used and treated.

The “decisive moment” is a concept made popular by master French street photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson. Henri found and photographed many powerful slices of moments that are unforgettable. He describes this “decisive moment” as an event that is the essence of the event itself. However, there are other ***Moments Not So Powerful*** that are worth remembering. It is the soft, ephemeral beginnings that make powerful endings possible.

These photographs are moments that occurred at the very beginning of a long story. These longer street images are infused with subtlety and time. Women, men and children are walking down streets going somewhere. Hours later they are still walking but this time returning. There is something beautiful about nuance, distinction, elegance, transparency and fragility all mixed together with light and the slow rush of days.

Essay - September, 2024



Moments Not So Powerful - One



Moments Not So Powerful - Two



Moments Not So Powerful - Three



Moments Not So Powerful - Four



Moments Not So Powerful - Five



Moments Not So Powerful - Six



Moments Not So Powerful - Seven

Series Number Twenty-One

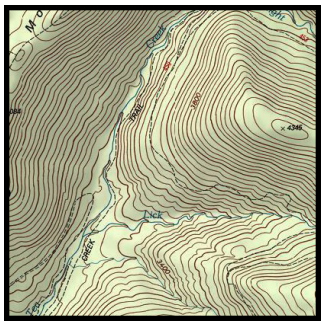
China Portrait Maps-1994

Twenty-Three Photographs

Essay - June 2024

Michael Nye

China Portrait Maps: November/December 1994



Contour lines on topographical maps do not cross each other, and form a "V" or a "U" when crossing a stream. Closely spaced lines represent steep slopes or mountains.

Photographs are more like maps than maps are like photographs. The inherent qualities of both maps and photographs are perspective and ambiguity. Both can be dazzling even as abstractions. Their weakness however, lies in their primary attention to surfaces. Stories and language and history and conflicts are embedded elsewhere.

The photographs in this series started with a map. One night I closed my eyes and placed my finger on the map of China. I found that my index finger randomly landed on a region near Baoshan, China in Yunnan province. I went there alone for five weeks in November, December 1994.

It would take three life times and even more time to understand the complexity of the geological and human history of Yunnan province, China. Early fossils date back over 1.5 million years. The name Yunnan means beautiful clouds in the south. The province is home to 25 of China's 56 recognized ethnic groups, each having a unique culture and language. The province is surrounded by Burma, Vietnam and Laos. On the north-west border is Tibet. The mountains and terraced hills and valleys are visually dramatic and lush. It rained 22 out of the 35 days I was there. It is believed that Yunnan China inspired James Hilton's description of Shangri-La in "Lost Horizon."



China & Yunnan Province



Yunnan Province 18th Century

Awareness breathes deep in the villages around Baoshan City. A cool breeze turns into insights. Light mist and fog grow into a skyscraper's dream. Odorous frogs wake up at night me and roosters find their voice every early morning. Everyone is naive and childlike to cultures they don't understand.

I had help everywhere I went. An older man picked up my suitcase and carried it 10 blocks. He only smiled. A woman opened my beer bottle with her teeth and poured the beer into my glass with careful deliberation. A brother and sister followed me to many villages helping me work in exchange for English lessons. Towns-people at near-by tables helped me order food. Cooks invited me into their kitchens for a taste of soup. Almost without exception, I was invited into homes for meals and to share a cup of tea. Questions and kindness were on every dish.

Notes from journals:

The photographs were made in villages surrounding Baoshan City. In the last 10 days I traveled to Old Dali Town and Xiaguan and photographed villages in the mountain and lake regions. Those accompanying me, students, taxi drivers and volunteers gave the villages we visited English nicknames.

(Red Flower Village)

I accidently knocked a pipe out of the mouth of one of the elders while I was adjusting my camera's aperture. Everyone laughed. Somehow the word got around in the village that I only wanted to photograph old women with bound feet. (Which was not true.) Within moments many women with bound feet came stumbling out of their homes to be photographed. Each woman walked with a self-assured limp. (Li Da Jing told me that the custom became popular during the Song Dynasty, however it is no longer permitted.) The woman seemed proud to show me their tiny embellished shoes and hidden small feet. From a young age, girls' feet were tightly wrapped and bound in cloth. It was considered to exemplify beauty and an advantage in marriage.

(Fishing Village)

I went to the shing village. It rained all day and night. We put plastic sheets around my camera and film. An old man and woman were arguing. I was told that they were born on the same day and one insisted that they should also die on the same day. I passed a woman carrying a bucket of hot coals to keep warm and a man was soaking his feet in a tub of steaming water.

(Coconut Horse Village)

Li Da Jing from Baoshan took me to his village in the Mountains. We had lunch with his mother, brother and grandmother. We drank fermented rice wine after our meal. One woman stood still in a downpour while waiting for her portrait. Another woman yelled to the children, “You forgot to eat your lunch – you are only watching the photographer.” On the way home I saw a cart of skinny dogs being taken to Baoshan City market.

(River Village - Village by the Lake)

A taxi driver, Wang Xiu agreed to take me to his village far away in the mountains. We left at dark. Along the way, there was deep-throated low thunder and rain. We had tea in his parents’ house. I was taken to an old schoolhouse full of small children. When the children saw me they started screaming and then laughing. An older child told the children to behave. He raised a red flag in the air and the children started chanting a school lesson. Repeating it over and over. over.

(Village of Two Towers - Village with Prayer Candles)

I met Dwan Ye Fen and her younger brother Zhang Wei just outside my hotel. They both were historians and story-tellers. They wanted to travel with me to the villages in order to practice their English. Dwan Ye told me a story as we made our way up the mountains to a remote village they called, “Village of Two Towers”. She spoke slowly as if she was telling me a secret.

“Three hundred years ago lived identical twin brothers. They were handsome and strong. Their last name was Menski. One day, the first brother was walking along a riverbank and saw a beautiful young woman on the other side. They smiled at each other. For many weeks the first brother would intentionally walk along the river to see the young woman. They fell in love. Months later, the second Menski brother was walking along the same riverbank and saw the young woman. She smiled at him thinking he was the first brother.. He also fell in love with her. The young woman did not know they were twins. In this village there was an evil snake that liked to eat young babies. The Menski brothers decided to fight the snake. The fight was intense. At the end of the struggle, the snake and both brothers died. The young woman rushed to the battle site and discovered that the young man she was in love with was not one man but two. She died soon afterwards from grief and heartache. The twin towers were built in honor of the Menski brothers’ courage. One tower for each brother.”

Dwan Ye said, “At night you can hear the wind moving from one tower to the other. It’s a sound of longing, crying sounds. It’s the sad voice of the young woman’s spirit traveling back and forth between the towers visiting the two brothers. Dean Ye said, it’s a true story and everyone in the village believes it to be true.”

(Village with No Name - Bai-Muslim Village)

In the evening – in the Village With No Name, villagers would bring their birds in birdcages to an open park and hang them in trees. Once the covering hoods were removed from the birdcages, the birds would then speak to nearby birds.

At night time I arrived back in Baoshan City. Walking back to my hotel there were 100 campfires along the darkened streets. Families were cooking dinners and tiny outdoor restaurants were serving soups and roasted peanuts. Floating above the crowds was a fragrance of spice and smoke. I watched a man with no legs writing a message on the sidewalk with chalk. I saw headless chickens boiling in water and a donkey's head for sale on a simple blue table. Beside me, were streams of bicycles and rickshaws passing in swishing sounds. I paused, as I passed a small boy doing his homework by candlelight. He was writing with his right hand and with his left hand he cupped the candle so as to provide more light. There is an uncomfortable contrast between the old and new China worlds. Inside a modern restaurant young teenagers were singing loudly to a karaoke jukebox. Not far away in the park, older Chinese men and women were playing flutes and the huqin (like a violin) waving their hands high above their heads. The songs were so haunting, and so beautiful and sad.

China Portrait Maps Series – The photographs in the China Map Series were made in three visual representations.

Part One – Portraits: (Twelve Photographs)
All photographic portraits carry concealed maps. They are puzzles. The contours of a photographic print are the thin slice of space and a tiny blink of a moment. We carry maps on our hands and on our textured tongues. Our feet know the significance of crossing a border. It is surprising how brief encounters can burn deep silhouettes in our memories. There is a pleasurable slowness about using an 8x10 view camera. Camera resting on a tripod. There is backdrop, light meter - dark cloth, bellows and ground glass used to focus. There are mistakes. I reach for a film plate while readjusting the aperture and shutter lens. Always, always so many exchanges of words. The rhythm is the slowness – the unknowing - the pause – the pushing of the shutter cable release and the steady serious stare.

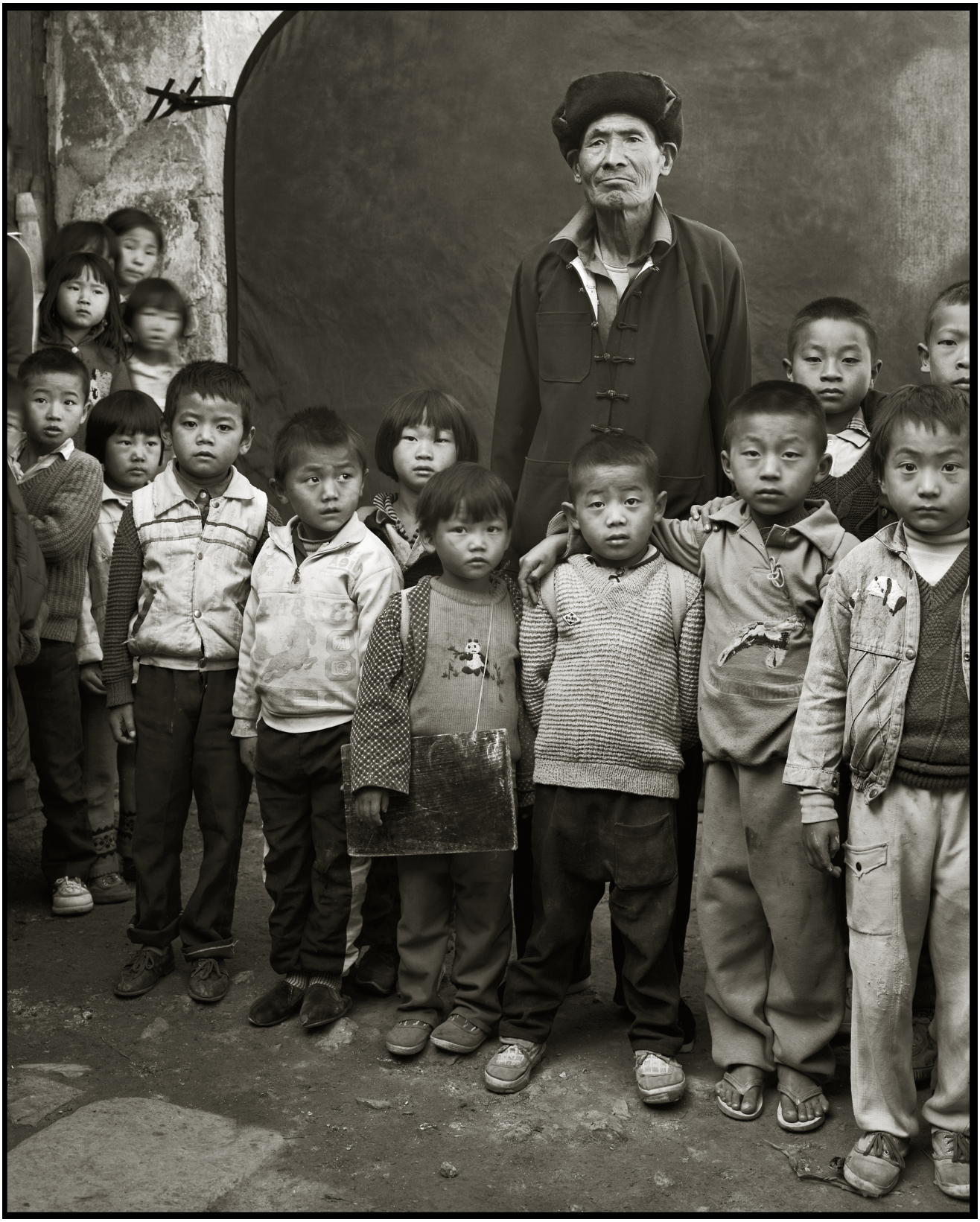
The portraits in PART I are conversations. Although I don't speak Mandarin, the portraits were a result of wanted to be there. Students followed me into villages, translating in exchange for English lessons. A fruit seller took me up a mountain pass in his horse and flatbed wagon. A taxi driver took me to his village to meet his grandmother. Almost without exception, I was invited into homes for meals and to share a cup of tea and to make portraits.



Portraits - One



Portraits - Two



Portraits - Three



Portraits - Four



Portraits - Five



Portraits - Six



Portraits - Seven



Portraits - Eight



Portraits - Nine



Portraits - Ten



Portraits - Eleven



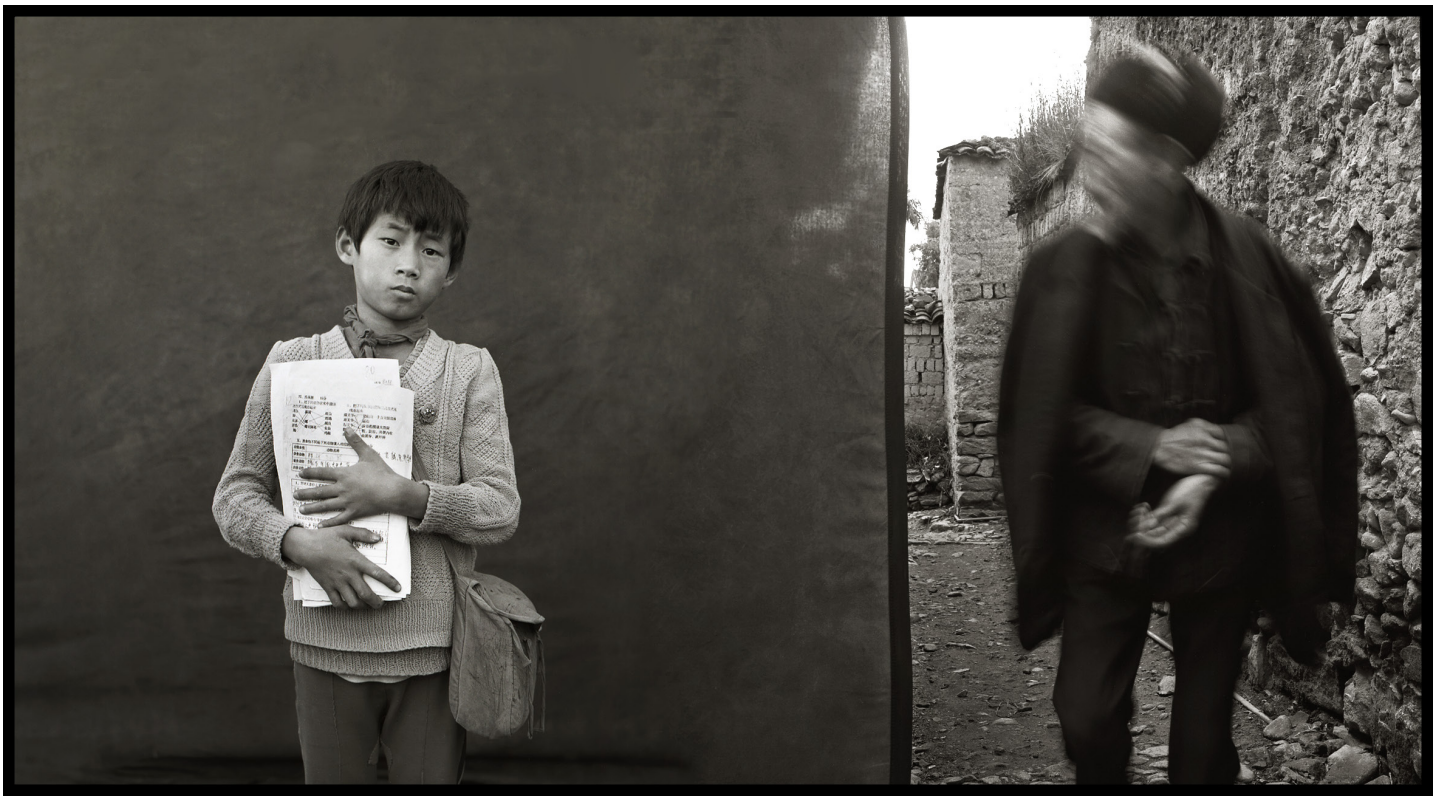
Portraits - Twelve

Part Two: Beyond the Backdrop - (Six photographs)

The photographs in PART TWO are looking in two directions at the same time. The first look is the backdrop and the person photographed. However, there are other important moments. The second look is the space living outside the backdrop. The backdrop might illuminate presence of the person photographed but it also eliminates connected spaces. These images are a glimpse into the rich active spaces and narratives living outside the rectangle shaped portrait and backdrop.



Beyond the Backdrop - One



Beyond the Backdrop - Two



Beyond the Backdrop - Three



Beyond the Backdrop - Four



Beyond the Backdrop - Five



Beyond the Backdrop - Six

Part Three: Random Second Look - *(5 Photographs)*

What happens after a photographic portrait is made? Still portraits are so misleading. They are not quiet nor still nor motionless. There is so much happening. Randomness is in control. These images are diptychs. (Two photographs side by side.) The first photograph is a portrait. The second image on the right is a random second look at the changing incidental moments after the portrait is made.



Random Second Look - One



Random Second Look - Two



Random Second Look - Three



Random Second Look - Four



Random Second Look - Five

Last Notes:

I regret not knowing more about the culture and languages in the villages I visited. I regret not knowing more of the history and contemporary political issues. I am aware of the past and present discrimination and injustices. I regret not being able to have conversations in deeper capacities. However, I was beyond fortunate to have randomly placed my finger on the map of China, and to discover that my wise finger fell on the Baoshan region in Yunnan Province.

Series Number Twenty

unplanned & unforeseen

San Cristobal de las Casas -

Photographs 1994 - Essay 2025

Nine Photographs

Michael Nye

unplanned & unforeseen:

nine photographs

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. Is it ever possible to see what is directly in front of us?

Unplanned & Unforeseen

"Watching" and listening" are both about being present.

Photographing in the streets of San Cristobal was an exercise of exhilaration and wonderment. 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 sideway 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 - March, 2025

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Unforseen - One



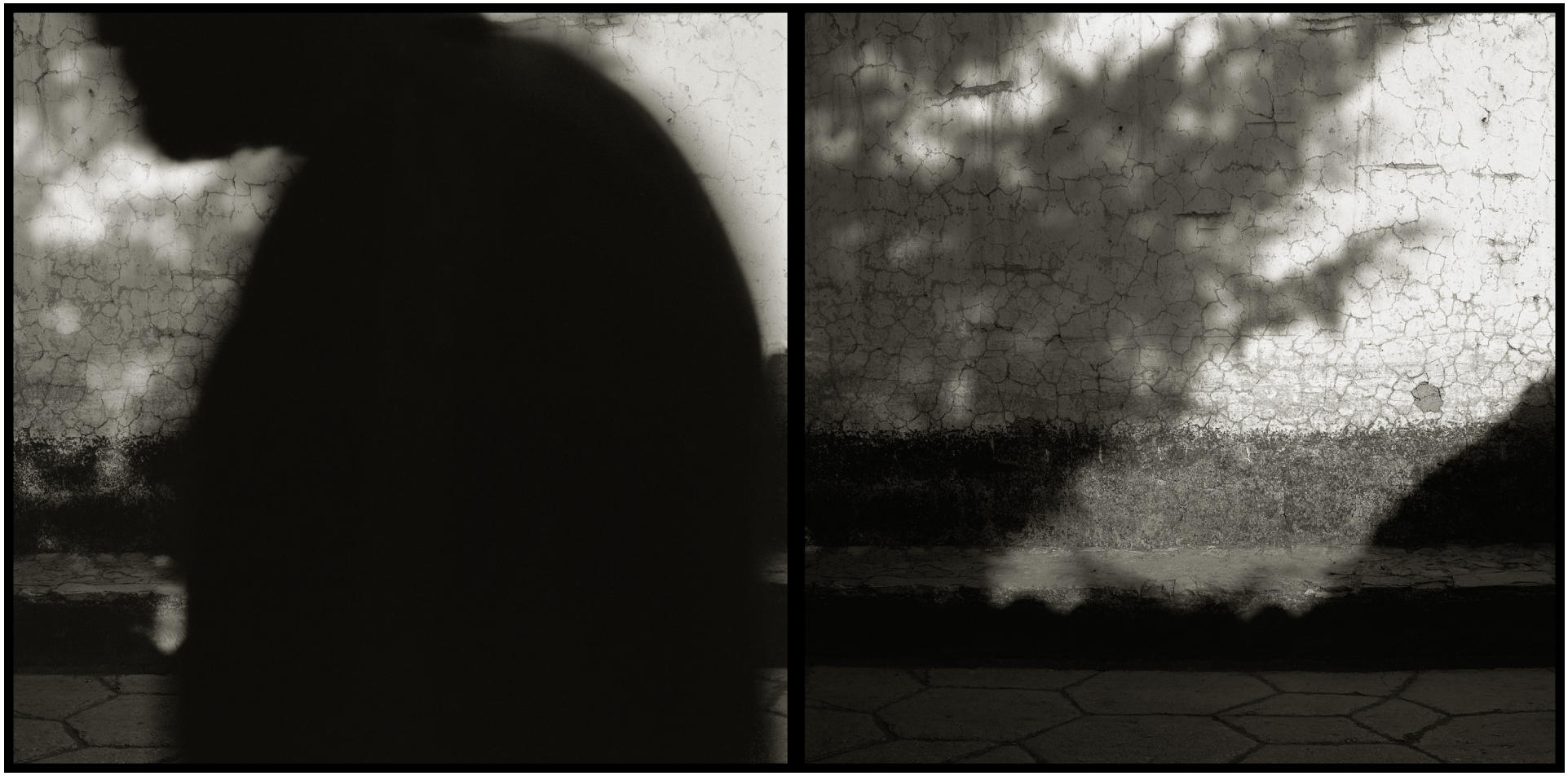
Unforseen - Two



Unforseen - Three



Unforseen - Four *



Unforseen - Five



Unforseen - Six



Unforseen - Seven



Unforseen - Eight



Unforseen - Nine

Series Number Twenty-One

Provideniya, Russia - Siberia 1994

Thirty-Three Photographs

Essay - November, 2023

Michael Nye

Provideniya, Russia - Siberia 1994



On a map, Russia, Siberia and the Far North of Alaska look like two fingers almost touching. I found a bush plane and pilot that agreed to fly me over the frozen Bering Strait in the Arctic from Alaska to Russia in the middle of winter. On the other side was a small village named Provideniya.

We landed on a strip of ice on the edge of a frozen lake. I met a tall, serious Russian soldier who said to me in broken English, "If you spit it will freeze before it hits the ground". He was being kind, telling me to be careful.

Two weeks before I landed in Siberia, and on my flight from Seattle to Fairbanks Alaska, I was sitting next to a young man wearing a white T-shirt, sleeves rolled up to his shoulders. He had several tattoos of faces on each arm. Outside the temperature was below zero. He was silent except he was drinking too many beers. Finally, the stewardess said, *"I'm sorry I cannot serve you any more beers".* We started talking. I asked him, "Where are you going?" He said, *"I'm going to the top of the world. Point Barrow Alaska.*" He had been an automobile mechanic and lived in San Diego with his mother and had never traveled outside California. Last week he won Lotto, four million dollars. He told me, *"The first thing I wanted to do was to stand in snow on top of the world to see what it looked like. What would it feel like? I wanted something that nobody could take away from me. An experience."*

Flying over the Bering Strait into Siberia in winter, my imagination was a heavy unmovable object. Where would I stay? Would it be safe to work here? The small plane landed on snow and ice.. When white is everywhere, your eyes adjust to white's elegance and sophistication. The frozen bays and lakes take on a bluish white while the distant Chukotka mountains are a warmer, softer golden white. I did not have a passport or visa with me (and the bush pilot would not return to pick me up for three weeks), so a Russian soldier in uniform requested that I give him my gold wedding ring as security.

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Walking across the frozen lake toward the village of Providyenia, with 80 pounds of equipment, I worried about whether the ice would hold my weight. Appearing out of nothingness and fog was a 60-ton military tank stumbling slowly across the same frozen lake toward the village settlement. The tank appeared to be a still black and white photograph.

Siberia has been a part of modern Russia since the 17th century. It stretches from the Arctic Ocean to the borders of Mongolia and China with an area of 5.1 million square miles. Siberia is known for its long, difficult winters, as well as a history for cruel Russian prisons and labor camps. Provideniya is a former small Soviet refueling military port situated on a fjord sheltered from the Bering Sea. The settlement consisted of Siberian indigenous Yupiks, Inuit Chukchi peoples and Russian soldiers and their families. There was no internet, no social media at that time. Communication was limited. The population and economy of this small village was in decline.





East of Provideniya

I stayed in a four-story concrete structure. The higher the floor the warmer the space. I had a small simple room on the third floor. Through the walls I heard a couple laughing. First a man and then a woman. It was comforting.

At dinner one night I took only one bite from my thick slice of brown bread. The next morning at breakfast, I found that same slice of bread, missing one bite on my plate.

It was so cold outside. Every day it was between 15 to 35 degrees below zero, (fahrenheit). No one talked or complained about the icy earth and sky. Frozen air was welcome here on the top of the earth.



Provideniya, Russia



Provideniya, Russia

I wanted to make a series of portraits of those I met. A portrait is inherently participatory. It is about time but not one moment in time. It is not kindness but it is akin to kindness in some way. Seeing a face tells little about a hidden heartbreak or hopefulness or jubilation. But still, ----Imbedded in each portrait is an inventory of extended conversations. Each person in front of the view camera is holding a private thought. Light breaths and waits. There is calmness and quietness that occurs just before the shutter is released. Who speaks first afterwards? .

Nadia, the wife of a Russian soldier and Tanya a former ballet dancer, helped me work. They wanted to practice their English. Over dinner one night with her family, Tanya told me she was a ballet dancer for many years in Khabarovsk. *"Now, I still dance but only at night when my eyes are closed."*

We found an abandoned room on a second floor of an old concrete building as a temporary photography studio. There was no heat inside. Plaster and paint found their slow drip, drip to the cement floor. The only light arrived from small windows facing the mountains to the northeast. Nadia and Tanya suggested that we walk around the cold icy pathways and into various buildings and invite individuals into the temporary studio. We walked into a bakery. The smell was of warmth and safety. Nadia talked to several women, bakers, dressed in all white. Nadia told them in Russian, "*This man is a famous photographer from Chicago"*. I told Nadia that I was not famous and not from Chicago. She said, "*No one has heard of Texas, but some have heard of Chicago.*" With no expression on their faces the woman agreed to meet us in the studio. (Siberia # 5)



Siberia # 5

I brought with me an 8 x 10 large view camera and sheet film. I taped a dark backdrop to the cement wall. It was so cold that my light meter would not operate. As a result of the low sunlight, I constructed a small soft brace that would fit behind a person's head to reduce movement. The camera's shutter exposures were between 1 to 15 seconds.

The impulse to photograph does not come from the eyes but from a desire to connect with others. Every portrait begins with words, and then attention moves toward the delicacy of light. During the first week a family carried their very ill mother up the stairs to have her last portrait taken. From the windows in the studio, I spotted a Russian soldier getting out of his tank. He had just returned from a 17-hour trip across the icy tundra. In front of the camera he said, *"I am hungry and tired and cold."* (Siberia # 24)

During the second and third week, soldiers, an Inuit hunter, a teacher, students, children, an army mechanic, families of Russian soldiers, bakers, medical doctors found their way to the temporary studio on their own. Some of the women wore makeup and beautiful fur coats. They looked like they had stepped out of a movie set in the 1940s or 1950s. Everyone asked me questions through a translator. "Why are you here? Is your home attached to other homes? Are there green plants or trees near your home? Why can't you speak Russian?

There was a small orphanage on the edge of town near the cemetery. The caretaker told us that they wrapped the baby's heads in white linen cloth. They were required to take three or four naps each day to stay warm. I photographed three older boys who were living in the orphanage. (Siberia – Orphanage # 19)

The cemetery leaning on the side of a mountain was a birthday cake with white frosting. The gravestones poking up through the snow were candles. The faces on the stones never grew older.



Cemetery



Cemetery Stone

Village: Novoye Chaplino

I was offered a ride on a military transport truck over the tundra to Novoye Chaplino on the coast of the Tkachen Bay near the Bering Sea. This small indigenous village was founded in 1958 as a result of merging ancient coastal villages into one. (Several of the villages merged were a thousand years old.) Most of the villagers were Siberian Yupik peoples. I visited a school and the children sang songs and danced. They laughed at my clumsy feet and voice. Their song was a story about longing, and a cry from one distant place to another. They warned me not to hike out into the frozen tundra alone because of the polar bears. At recess the children slid down icy hills in their school shoes, crouching low for more speed.





Village: Novoye Chaplino

Several days before I returned to Nome, Alaska, I met Nicolai who owned a snowmobile. After dinner, the last light from the sky was melting. Nicolai said, “We go anywhere you point.” The snowmobile took us over frozen lakes and rivers and along the edges of mountains. Even at night, even without the help of the moon, the mountains and lakes took on a careful golden glow. The earth appeared more moonlike than earthlike.

I can’t ever remember feeling so cold. It is possible to experience both biting pain, and awe at the same moment. We finally stopped in the middle of a frozen lake and looked back toward the village of Provideniya and all of its shimmering and twinkling lights. The smoke from the coal burning chimney pipes

was a straight line vanishing into black. Nicolai brought out some vodka and we drank from the bottle. He told me stories about the Siberian prison camps. Nicolai quoted a famous Russian poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, "*When truth is replaced by silence, the silence is a lie."* Never before and never again will I experience such an intensely wild and mysteriously majestic place. Appearances have no borders here. My feet and hands and eyes were numb. I pointed with my arm to Provideniya and said, "Let's go back."

Essay - January, 2025

LAST NOTES:

The bush pilot from Nome, Alaska made periodic deliveries to Provideniya. I had an agreement with the pilot that I would send him copies of all the photographic portraits (over 120 portraits) and he would deliver them to the two women that helped me work while I was in Provideniya. Nadia and Tanya. I received word that they were all received and distributed. Every person and every place is a map to somewhere else.



Siberia # 11



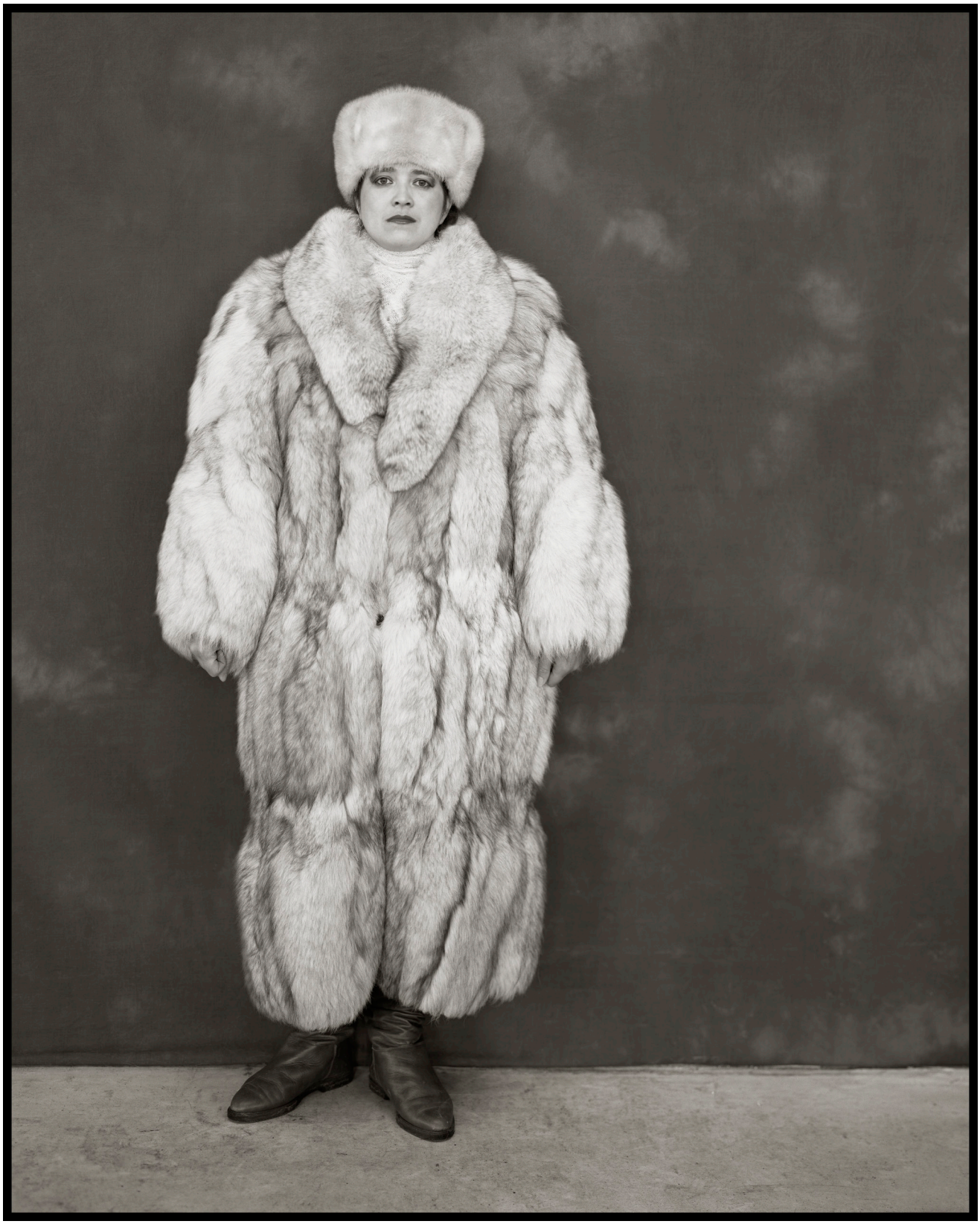
Siberia # 12



Siberia # 13



Siberia # 14



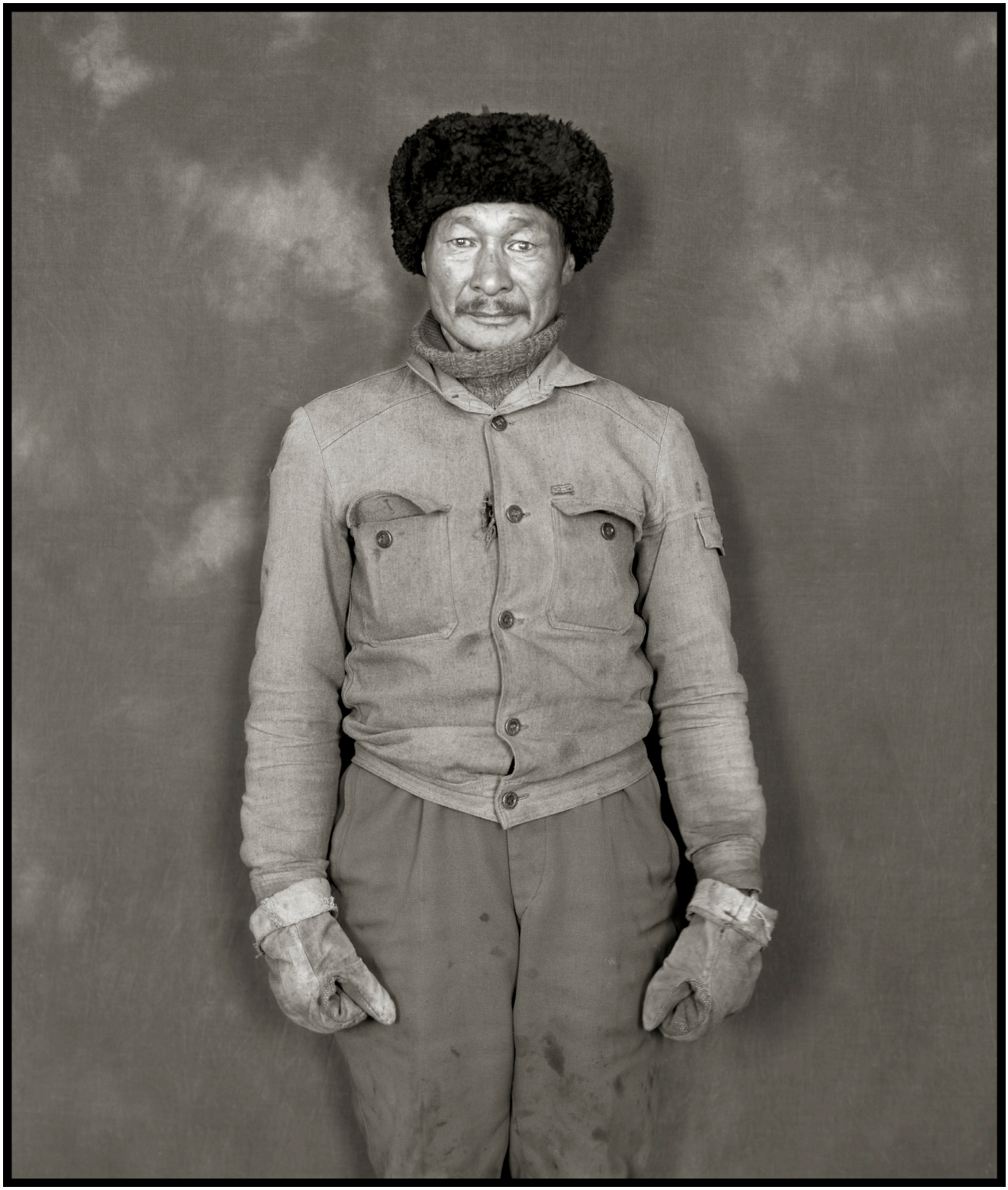
Siberia # 15



Siberia # 16



Siberia # 17



Siberia # 18



Siberia # 19



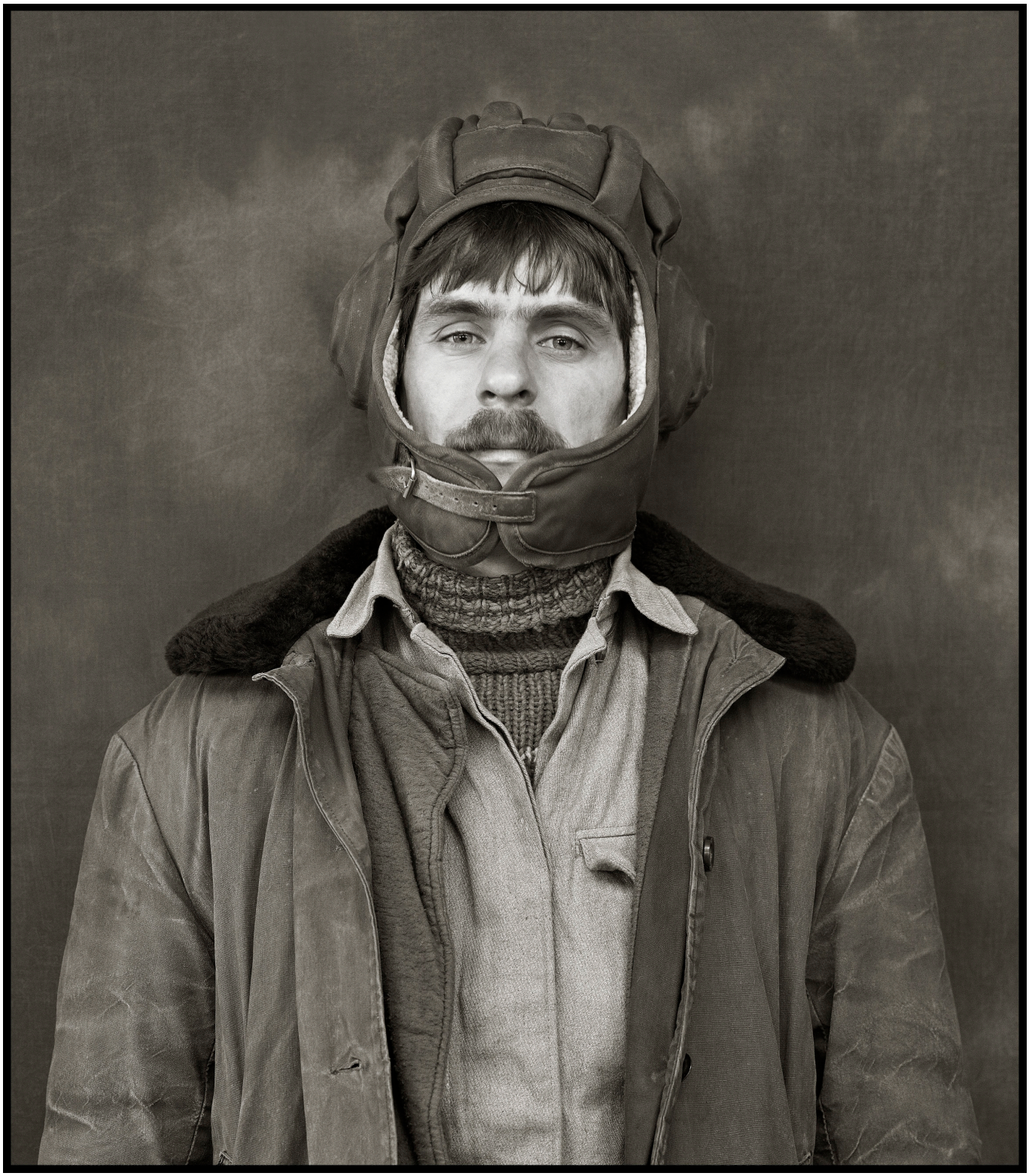
Siberia # 20



Siberia # 21



Siberia # 22



Siberia # 23



Siberia # 24



Siberia # 25



Siberia # 26



Siberia # 27



Siberia # 28



Siberia # 29



Siberia # 30



Siberia # 31



Siberia # 32



Siberia # 33

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.)

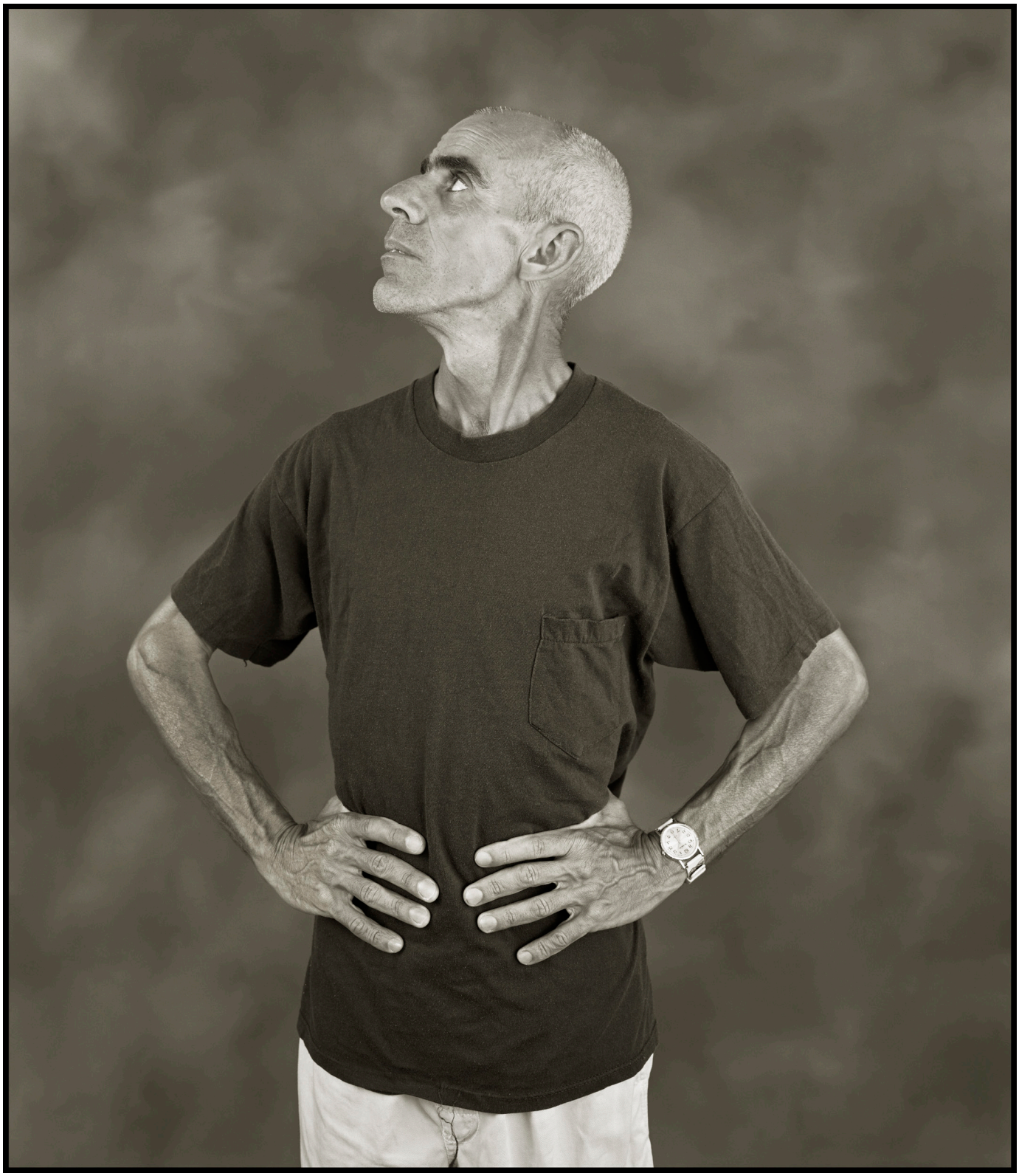
Touching glass leaves fingerprints. Each person in this series is a train traveler. Their focus is not on the present but on somewhere else. Many people expressed comfort, having the glass to lean against. The individuals in these portraits are not being looked at -- by us. Rather, they are the ones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



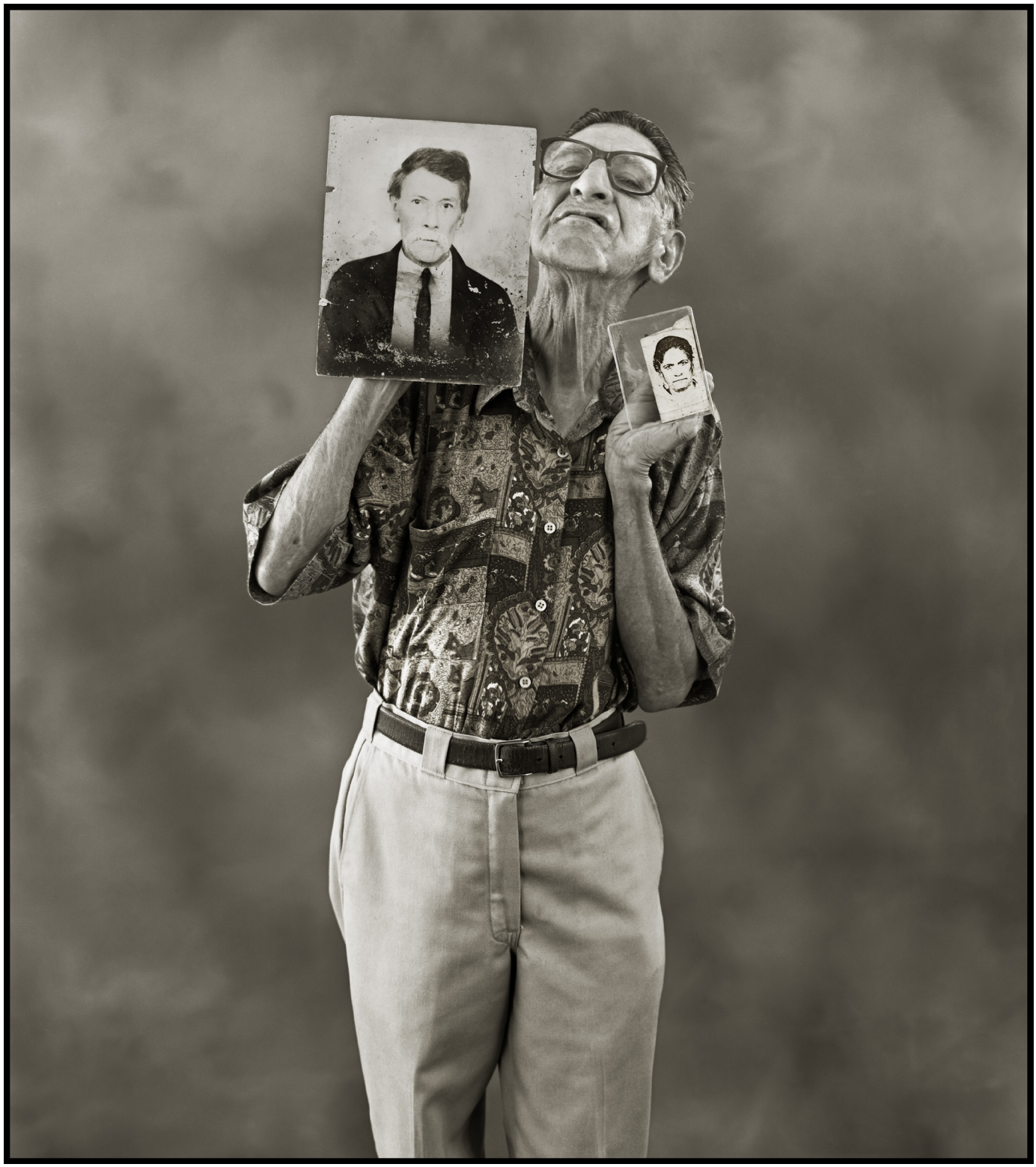
Against the Glass - Three



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 - Twentry-Three

Series Number Twenty-Five

Blackfoot Nation

Browning, Montana & Cardston, Alberta - 1995

Twenty Photographs

Essay - January, 2024

Michael Nye

Blackfoot Nation

What is life? It is the little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.
Blackfoot Proverb.

Origin Language Myth:

> *After the flood, an old Man mixed water with different colors. He whistled, and all the people came together. He gave one man a cup of colored water, saying, "You will be chief of these people here." To another man he gave differently colored water, and so on. The Blackfoot, Piegan, and Blood all received black water. All the people that drank black water spoke the same language. All other people spoke different languages. This happened on the highest mountain.*

No one really understands the life of another person. Too many days, too many moments, too much has happened. What room does regret and heartbreak rest in? In what drawers can we examine restitution and atonement? During heavy rains in Montana and Alberta some in the Blackfoot tribe failed to cross the Belly River in safety. Large trees on the river banks fell, limbs cracked and their branches and leaves followed the river's rooted trail.

Many of the histories written about the Blackfoot Nations by European Americans and Canadians are incomplete and the horrible injustices and discriminations are invisible to its readers. I feel certain that some of my ancestors participated in this collective nod toward territorial acquisition. I am aware that I have benefited from a system that my ancestors built at the expense of others. Memory is slippery, words are not images and emotions live in darker, deeper and private places.

The indigenous people occupied the North American lands for at least 20,000 years. The Blackfoot Confederacy, (Niitsitapi) is a historic collective name for three related groups, the Siksika (Blackfoot) the Kainai (Blood) and the Pikani (Piegan Blackfeet). All three shared a common language and way of life. Today, the Blackfoot Nations occupy regions in Alberta, Canada, and Montana in the U.S.

A story doesn't have to have an ending. It is the language (Blackfoot or Siksika) that gives context to a particular history. In 1995 I traveled to Browning, Montana and later to Cardston, Alberta to photograph during the North American Blackfoot Nations Indian Days festival. It was a celebration of remembering.

I read about their traditional territories, mythologies and nomadic life. I read about the consequences of smallpox epidemics, the role of alcohol and Christianity, the repatriation of language and the 1870 Piegan Blackfeet massacre of women, children and the elderly. The colonial encroachment was a trespass, like a tide filling a void.

When I was in Cardston, Alberta, I was the only non-Blackfoot native person present. A Blackfoot elder told me that the words, "transitory" and "permanent" have the same meaning. I was treated with such kindness. The celebration and drumming and dancing was in a large open field just outside of town. The sky had a window where the moon was watching. At one point the music stopped and a man walked up and handed me a stack of 50 or 70 one-dollar bills. Everyone turned and watched. This gift turned me into stone. I was told, "In every celebration we give money to someone. We do this for ourselves, not for you. It is our reminder that money is not important. What is essential is the holding-on and remembering our stories."

This short series of portraits was a result of wanting to be there. To have conversations. To be closer temporarily and to know more. A cold wind blowing the leaves of the prairie grasses is an ancient song. What right did I have to be there making photographs? Can a photograph reveal a history of injustices or regret? History is suspended above and below us as it drifts and broods.

In every portrait one side is hidden. However, in these portraits everything is hidden except each person's willingness to be seen and to be present.

Essay - January, 2024



Blackfoot Nation - One



Blackfoot Nation - Two



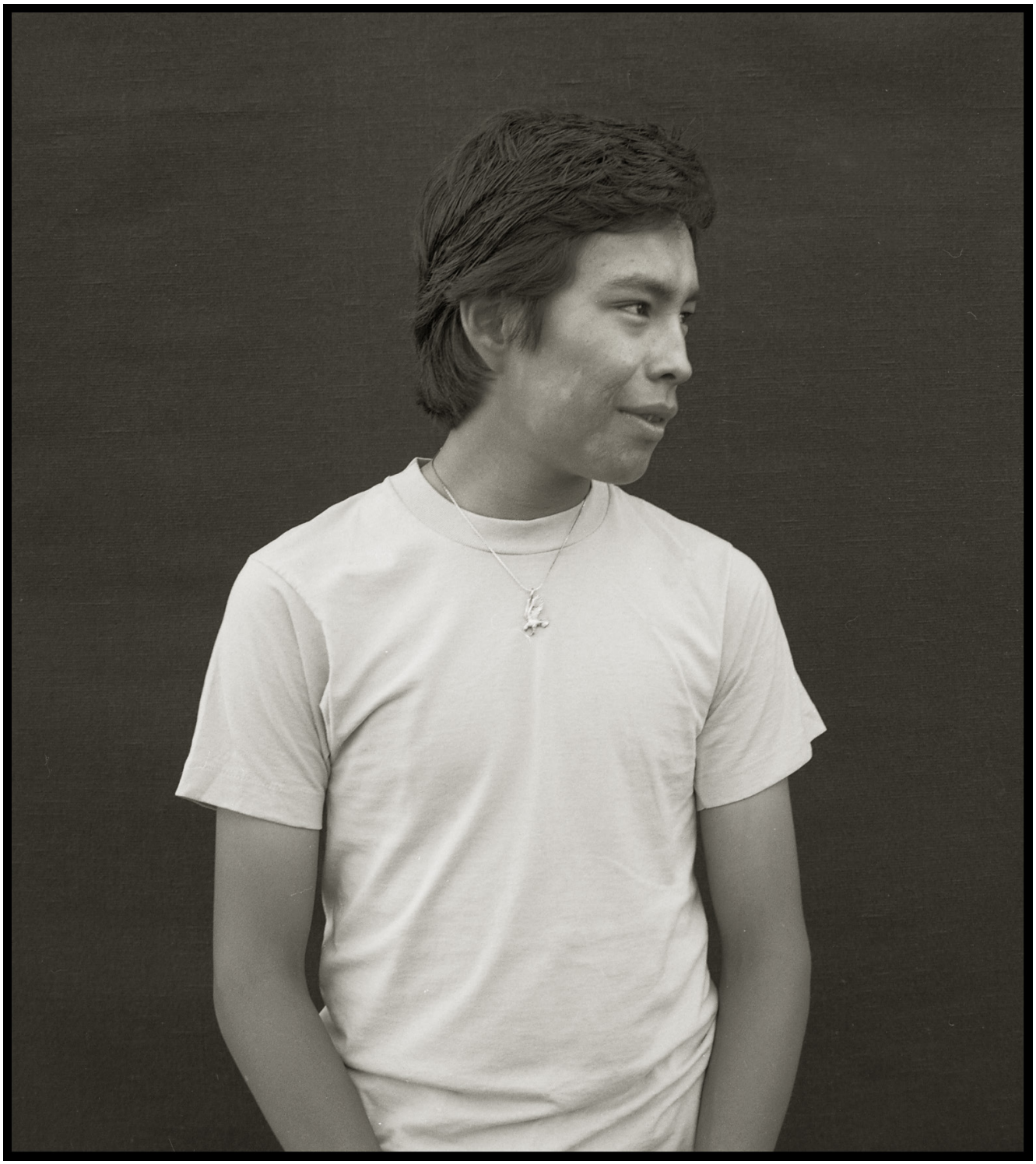
Blackfoot Nation - Three



Blackfoot Nation - Four



Blackfoot Nation - Five



Blackfoot Nation - Six



Blackfoot Nation - Seven



Blackfoot Nation - Eight



Blackfoot Nation - Nine



Blackfoot Nation - Ten



Blackfoot Nation - Eleven



Blackfoot Nation - Twelve



Blackfoot Nation - Thirteen



Blackfoot Nation - Fourteen



Blackfoot Nation - Fifteen



Blackfoot Nation - Sixteen



Blackfoot Nation - Seventeen



Blackfoot Nation - Eightteen



Blackfoot Nation - Nine



Blackfoot Nation - Twenty

First Photographs

Series 00

1976-1986

Eighteen Photographs
Essay, October 2024
Michael Nye

First Photographs: Series 00

It is the nature of the world to change. On a bluff overlooking Corpus Christi Bay, my childhood friend, Janet Moody and I watched a thunderstorm at night moving across a stage. Each lightning strike appeared to be one moment in time. When did we finally stand and run for protection from the downpour? The next morning, the water in the bay became a still smooth glass reflecting only sky. There was one world above and another world below.

I became a photographer not by taking pictures but by looking at other people's photographs. I thought of photographs as puzzle pieces. Photographs are strange ways to re-visit the past. Memory can be reduced, amplified, minimized, exaggerated or romanticized.



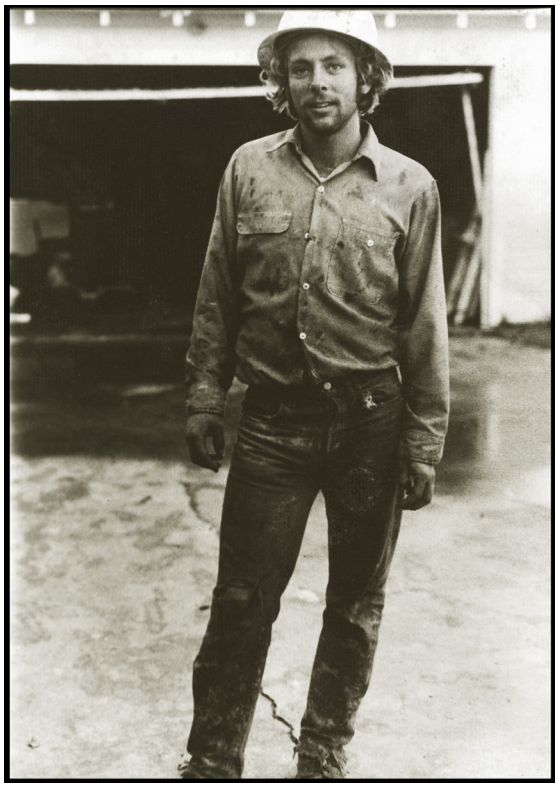
Above my desk is a small portrait of a young woman that I found in a flea market. I don't know her name. She is dressed in a uniform, white blouse, military cap, and a large letter "A" sewed onto her left sleeve. She is looking into the camera with a strange confidence. Her uniform revealed that she was a part of the US Army Signal Corps, known as "Hello Girls" in World War I. Many considered them to be the first women soldiers. They operated the telephone switchboards while under bombardment on the front lines. There were 223 women in this division and they connected 150,000 calls a day. On the back of the photograph, in her handwriting she wrote: "My passport picture taken in uniform – August 3, 1920 – Paris." How many grief-stricken voices did she hear? How many emergencies can there be in one day? On August 3rd, 1920 the War had ended. A new life was the only thing in front of her.

In law school, my Contracts professor on the first day of class slammed his fist against his desk, "*Boom" and said, "NEVER, NEVER use your intuition, always use reason.*" Why choose between these two helpful neighbors? It was in law school that I first went to a photography exhibition at a Houston Museum of Art. There were black and white photographs made by Imogen Cunningham, Paul Caponigro and several by Paul Strand. It wasn't the content but the way the photographs felt that was so powerful. Shades of deep blacks were stark utterances against the ranges of whites and melancholy grays.

That same month, I purchased a simple used camera, enlarger, trays and a small book, “How to make a photograph”. Walking along Galveston beach with my camera changed the way I thought, changed the way I paid attention and changed the way I looked at light and shadows. I thought, “what visual moment will I try to hold onto? I thought about the relationship between the shutter and aperture, the speed of film, the quality of photographic paper and how much dark do I need in my makeshift darkroom?

First photographs: 1976-1982:

In my tiny darkroom in Houston, a photograph resting in water had a beautiful glow and magnetic pull. My first success was a photograph of my brother Patrick. It was summer, and he was just back from working a fourteen-hour shift as a “rough neck” on an oil rig. The photograph was a testament to tiredness. I photographed water dripping from a drainage pipe. A man sleeping on the beach in Galveston. A nurse comforting a young girl at a funeral. A family at a 4th of July fireworks celebration.



Patrick

My wife Naomi and I brought our first home on South Main Avenue just a few blocks south of downtown San Antonio. Our backyard and neighborhood were the area where Santa Anna’s army camped before charging the Alamo in 1836. I was working as an attorney for the 4th Court of Civil Appeals. On the weekends, Mexican love songs tiptoed inches above the San Antonio River. Our large walk-in closet was converted into a darkroom. I memorized three of Ansel Adams’ technical books. The Camera, The Negative and The Print. I studied the history of photography. I purchased a densitometer to measure the optical density of negatives. On a 22-mile bike ride with our young son, Madison we stopped to rest and eat a cold apple. Photography began with the same hunger and lusty desire.

Photography teaches that experience is best understood by paying attention. Every photograph holds a secret and a wish. I photographed a silver fire hydrant a few blocks from our house. With my camera on a tripod, I waited in the middle of the street for the light to soften. I dodged honking cars. One man yelled and shook his fist at me as he passed. How many people watched the weeds grow up secretly around this water hydrant sculpture? Perspective only needs experience. (Fire hydrant - Series 0 - One)



Series 00 - One

In the darkroom, time loses its memory. I finally made a transition from full time attorney and eventually to full-time photographer. My father did not speak to me for two years. He said, “Why would anyone want to become a photographer? He meant well, but who doesn’t dream before falling to sleep.

The philosopher Moritz Schlick wrote, “Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity.” Philosophy and the Arts are closely connected to this notion of doing. Over a three-year period during the 1980s, I wrote letters (before computers, emails and the internet) to four photographers and one historian I admired: (Ray Metzker - Corlotta Corpron - Manuel Alverez Bravo - Fredrick Summers and Beaumont Newhall) “Can I visit with you about your work and about the nature of photography?” Everyone wrote back saying, YES.

I spent the afternoon with Ray Metzker, (1931-2014) in New York City. He told me about his teachers, Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. He embraced photography as “An experiment”. He brought out some of his photographs, setting one and then another on an easel. He said he embraced complexity over simplicity. His cityscape photographs were dramatic. Some of his photographs were solarized, some torn, some were collages and others in high contrast. As we sat in his New York apartment, traffic and pedestrians moving below, Ray Metzker was pushing the boundaries of perception, trying to find out what he did not know. He told me as a directive, *“Don’t be careful”.*

To photograph is to encounter. I met with Corlotta Corpron in Denton, Texas. (1901-1988) She served me green tea in her living room. She sat on a bright red sofa with one of her large photographs of light above her on the wall. She said, “When you fall in love with something, it is all you see. I fell in love with light.” She photographed light bending on stones, light twisting against walls and imaginary angles, the elegance of light. She told me that Alfred Stieglitz, (one of the most influential photographers in the early 20th Century) wrote her a letter wanted to exhibit some of her work but he died before the exhibition. She was a teacher and mentor to many women photographers. She gave me one of her light photographs. She told me, “Investigate light”.

To brush up against something leaves a mark. I met with Manuel Alverez Bravo twice. (1901-2002) The first time in his office at a museum in Mexico City and the second time, (Naomi and our son Madison were with me.) at his home in his neighborhood, Coyoacan. He was alone in his large house. In his darkroom he had been printing small platinum contact prints. The tiny prints were hanging up to dry. He was gentle and present. I asked him many questions about specific photographs he made. (Striking Worker Killed, 1934) many others. Bravo felt deeply about his community, his culture and aspects of ordinary life. He made photographs for 70 years. He told me, not as advice, but as an imperative, “*Photograph what you care about.”*

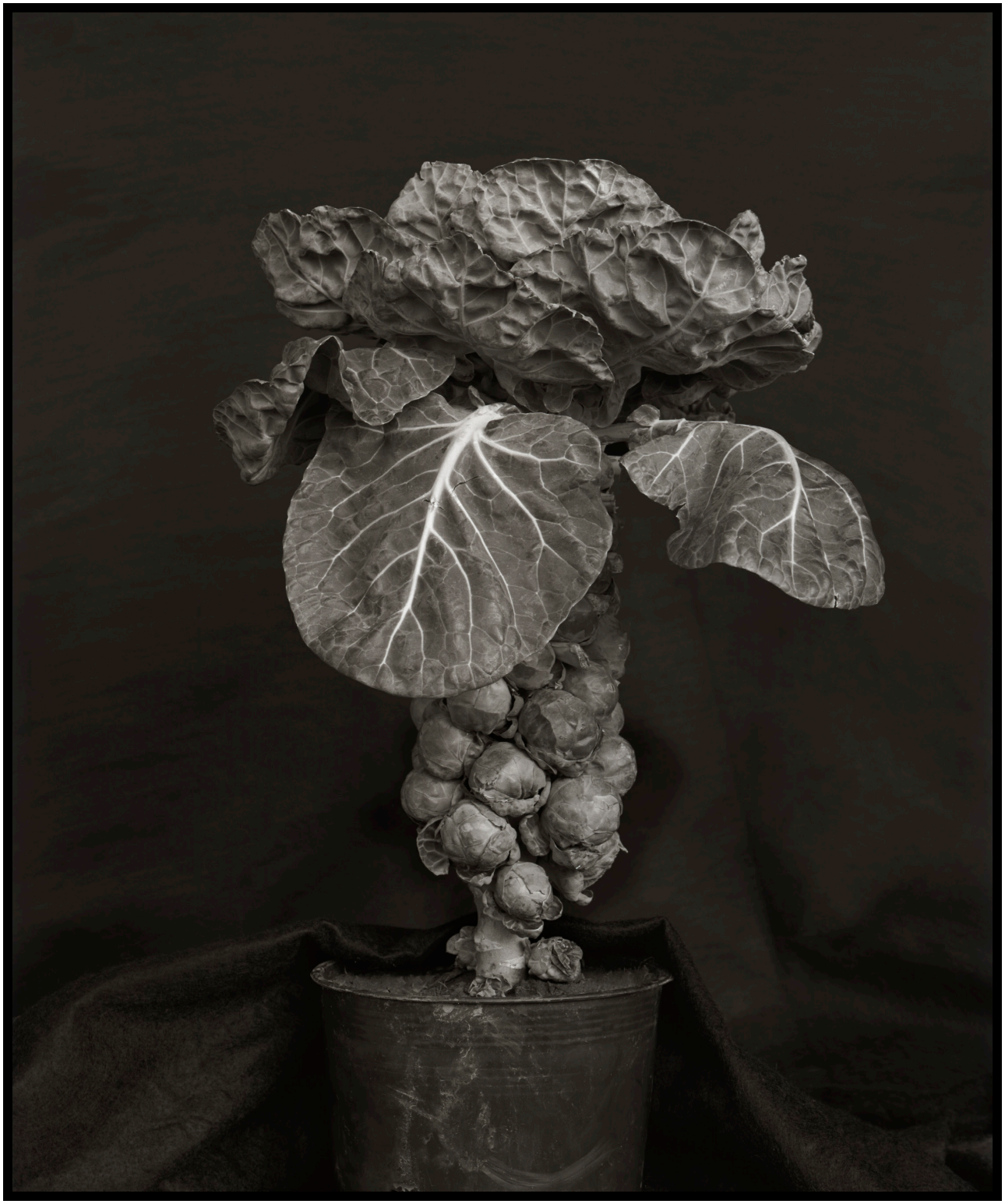
What is forgotten is lost. I met photographic historian Beaumont Newhall in Albuquerque, New Mexico. (1908-1993) He was attending a conference on, "The life and responsibilities of a Curators". In a small office we talked about the work of wife, historian Nancy Newhall. She died in 1974 from injuries received on the Snake River when a tree fell on their rubber raft. I asked about his friends, Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston. We talked about the nature of photography. He said, "*To write about photography one must understand the optical and chemical laws which govern its process. What is unique about photography is its inherent qualities."*

I arrived in Prescott, Arizona in the middle of a heavy snowstorm. I called Frederick Sommer, (1905-1999) from a pay phone at a convenient store. Fredrick and his wife Frances were so gracious and kind. Over lunch in their small warm kitchen, he asked me, "*Why are you a photographer? Are you committed?"* Sommer was born in 1905 in Italy and raised in Brazil. He spoke five languages and studied landscape architecture. He was both an artist and a writer. He was uncompromising. He wrote about fate and evanescence of chance. Many of his landscapes were devoid of contrast, nudes out of focus, he drew musical notes and then photographed them. He experimented with grace and elegance. He told me he was experiencing depression and was losing his enthusiasm. He wondered out loud, *"Where does passion go and how can I find it again?"* He told me, "*Think about verbs, not nouns."*

In the mid 1980s, one of my first exhibitions was at the Galveston Arts Center. At the opening, a woman came up to me and said, "*I was in the process of repairing the foundation of our home when one of the workmen found an old metal box buried deep into the earth. We hoped it might be a buried treasure*". It turned out to be a rusted metal box of 5 x 7" glass negative plates, wrapped in a melting cloth, portraits from 1910s to 1930s. She gave them to me. They were a treasure of riddles and complexity. Every photographic portrait is a paradox because of the realization of THEN and NOW. Holding them up to light for the first time in decades, I saw women, men and children looking so alive, moving, wanting to be seen and to breathe again.

Essay - October, 2024

First Photographs: 1982-1986



Series 00 - Two



Series 00 - Three



Series 00 - Four



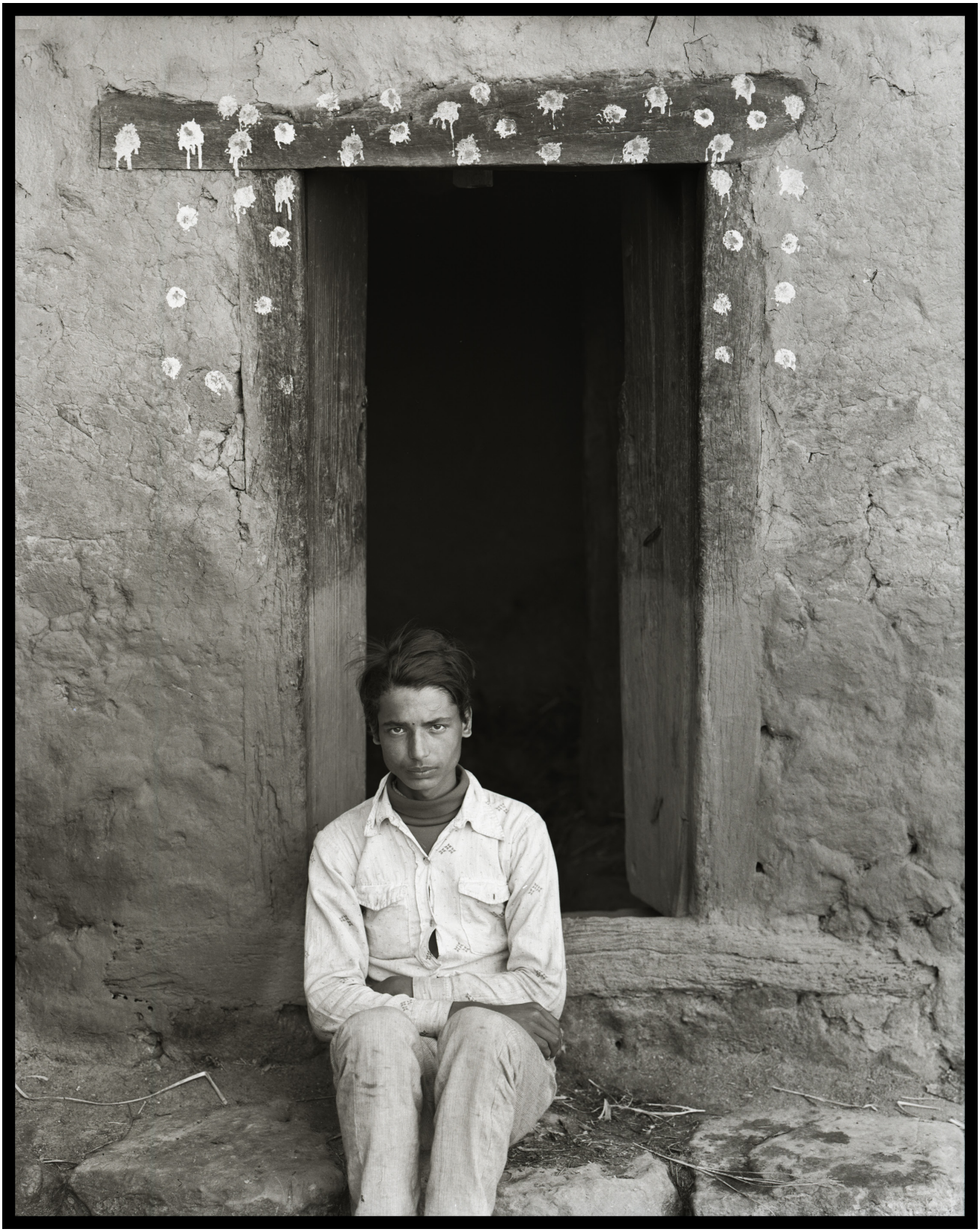
Series 00 (Laura) - Five



Series 00 - Six



Series 00 (Laura's last Halloween) - Seven



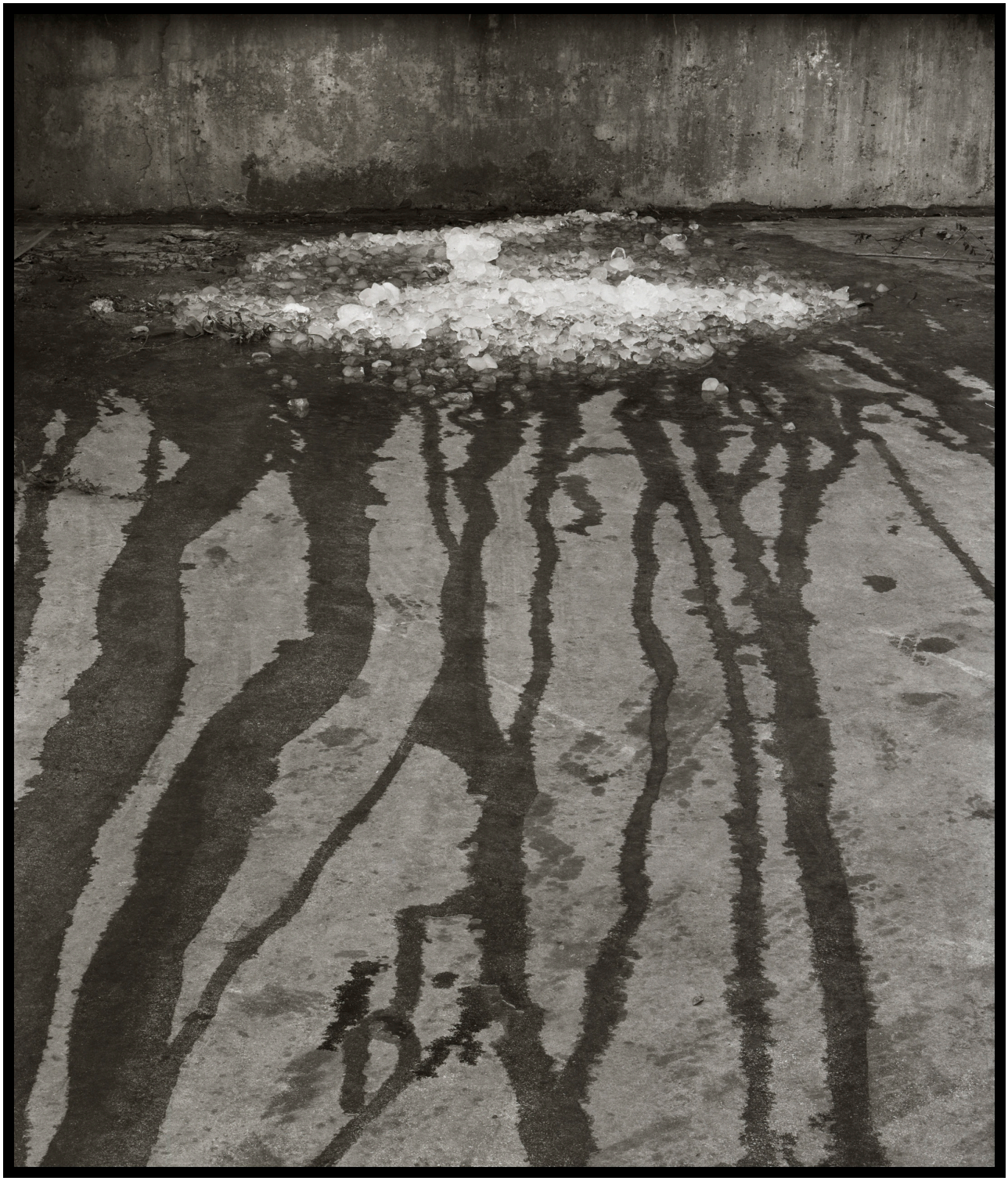
Series 00 - Eight



Series 00 (Bangledesh) - Nine



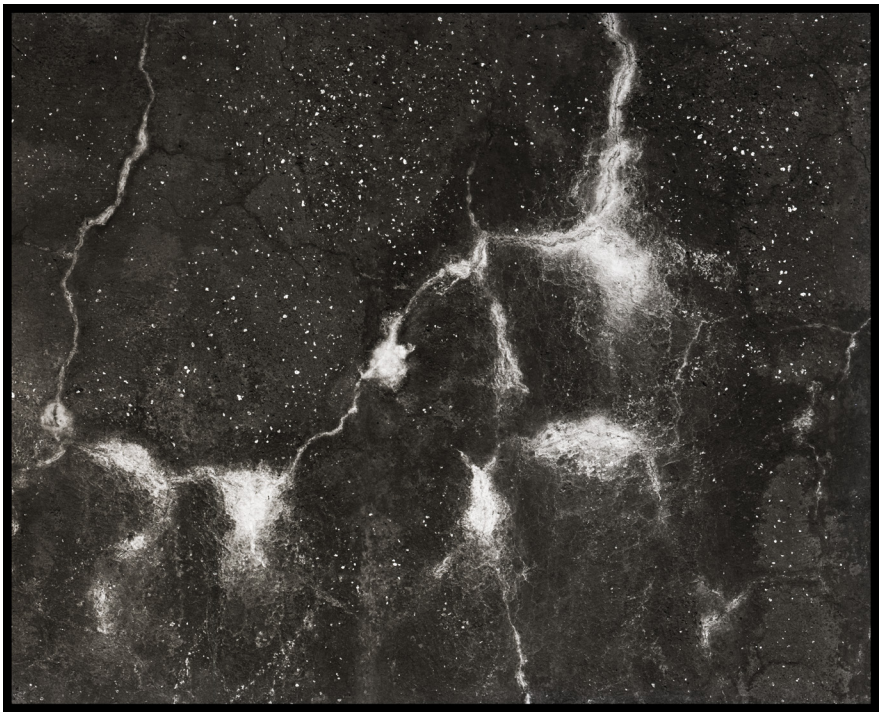
Series 00 (Bangledesh) - Ten



Series 00 (melthing ice) - Eleven



Series 00 - Twelve



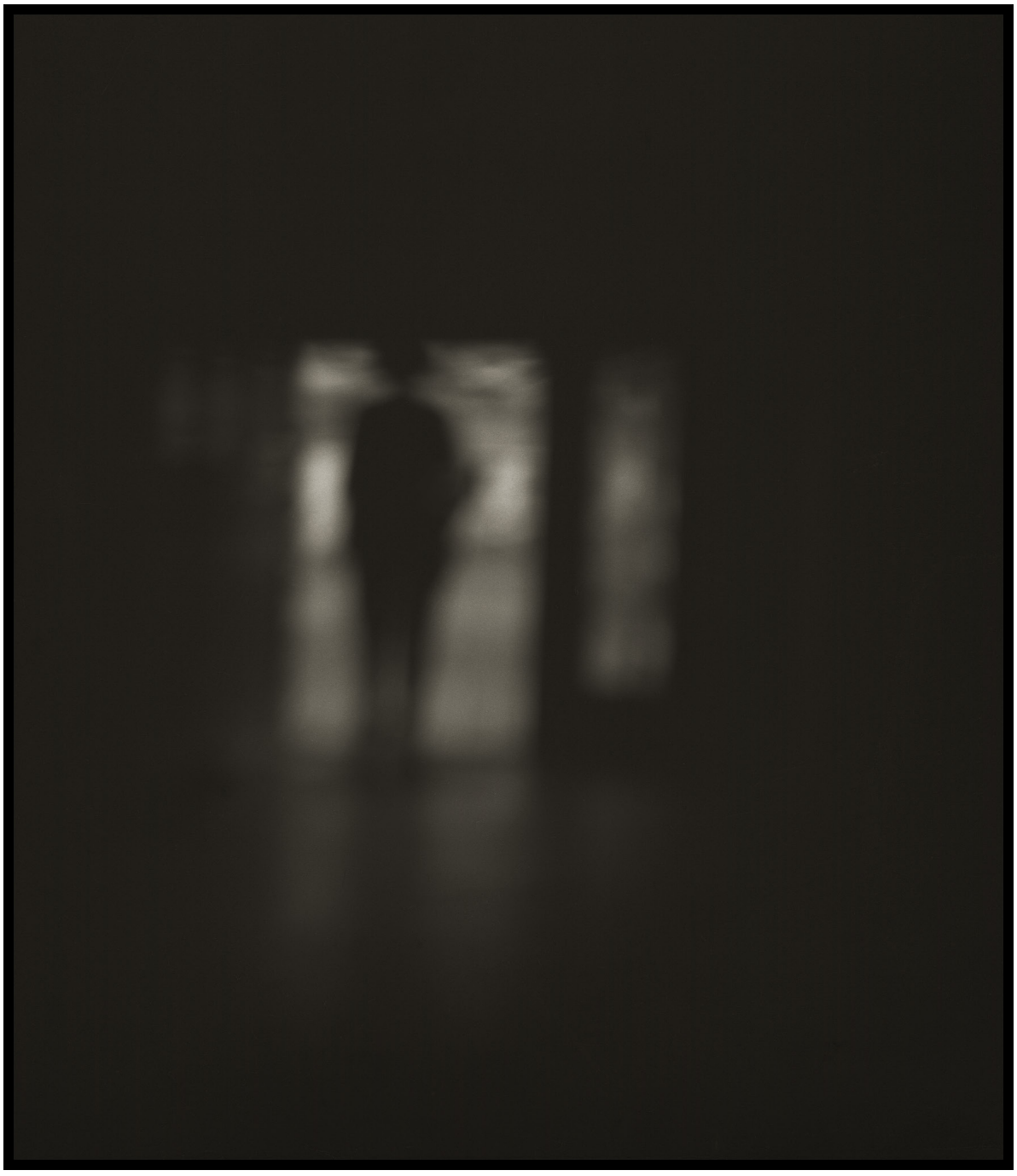
Series 00 (wall 1) -Thirteen



Series 00 (wall 2) - Fourteen



Series 00 (Naomi's knees) Fifteen



Series 00 - (Self Portriat) Sixteen



Series 00 - Seventeen



Series 00 - Eighteen



Series 00 - Nineteen