

Series Number Eighteen
Moments Not So Powerful
Photographs 1993 - Essay 2025

Seven photographs
Michael Nye

Chiapas Streets

Moments Not So Powerful

These photographs are moments that occurred at the very beginning of a long story. It is the soft, ephemeral beginnings that make powerful endings possible.

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 78 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.

Time 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.



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