

Series Number Three

Sleep

Photographs 1987 - Essay 2025

Eleven Photographs

Michael Nye

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. Soft air 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.

Our son Madison died two years ago. What I did not think about while working on this series is how far-away I would be from those moments now.



Sleep # 2



Sleep # 3



Sleep # 4



Sleep # 5



Sleep # 6



Sleep # 7



Sleep # 8



Sleep # 9



Sleep # 10



Sleep # 11