

Series Number Nine
Cemetery Flowers

The Remember-er & the Remember-ed
San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico
Photographs 1989 - Essay 2025

Twelve Photographs
Michael Nye

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 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.

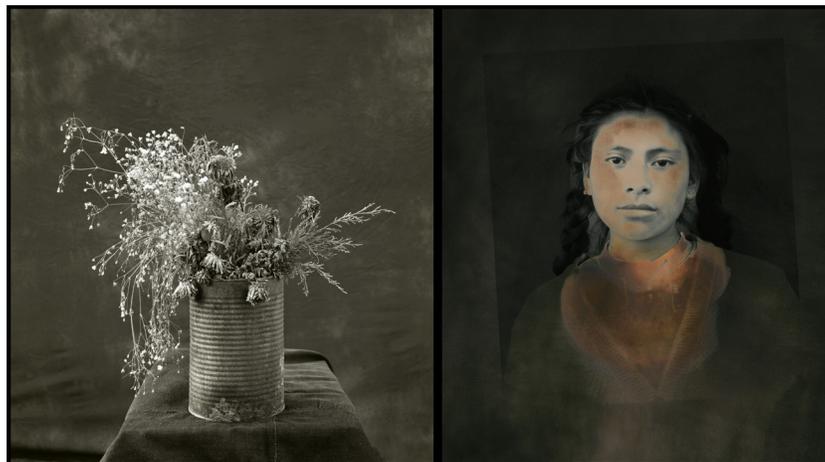
The most recent graves are enriched with a clarity of gratitude. Some are dressed with strange tokens – coins – cups and flowers. Others have prayer cards, apples and paintings of saints hanging from cemetery crosses. The older graves are unclothed, exposed and melting into vagueness. The earth is the 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 remembered?

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 goodnight. Beside their bed was one single cut flower resting in a vase.

Essay - August, 2025

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

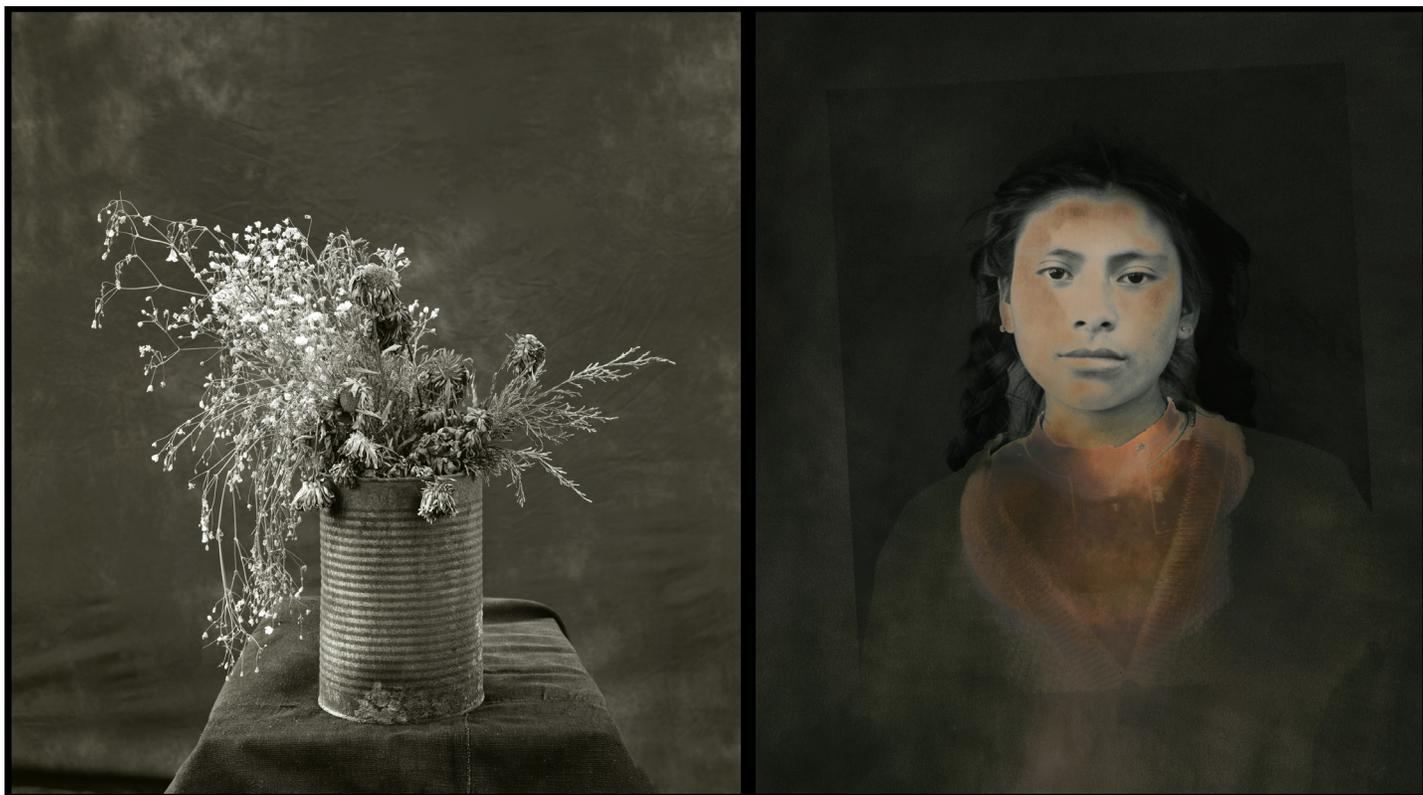


Flowers found on Graves: Six



Flowers found on Graves: Seven

Part II: The Remember-er & Remember-ed



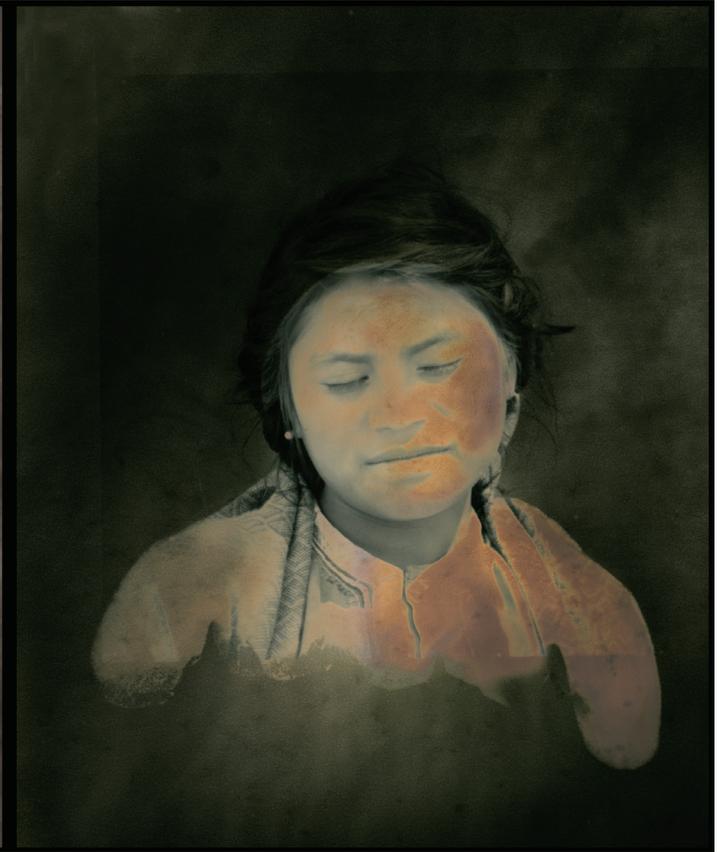
Remember-er & Remember-ed: One



Remember-er & Remember-ed: Two



Remember-er & Remember-ed: Three



Remember-er & Remember-ed: Four



Remember-er & Remember-ed: Five

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