

KOKORO

VOL 1, NO 4 • APR 2015

KOKORO

Wandering Through a Photographic Life

*An Image Journal
with Commentary, Meditation, Philosophy,
and Unanswered Questions*

Brooks Jensen

Brooks Jensen



Perhaps Lafcadio Hearn will not protest too much if I paraphrase (almost word for word) from *Kokoro*, his 1895 book of Japanese life. He explains this important Japanese term far better than I ever could:



“The entries comprising this volume treat of the inner rather than the outer life, — for which reason they have been grouped under the title *Kokoro* (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also *mind*, in the emotional sense; *spirit*; *courage*; *resolve*; *sentiment*; *affection*; and *inner meaning*, — just as we say in English, ‘the heart of things.’”



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GONE

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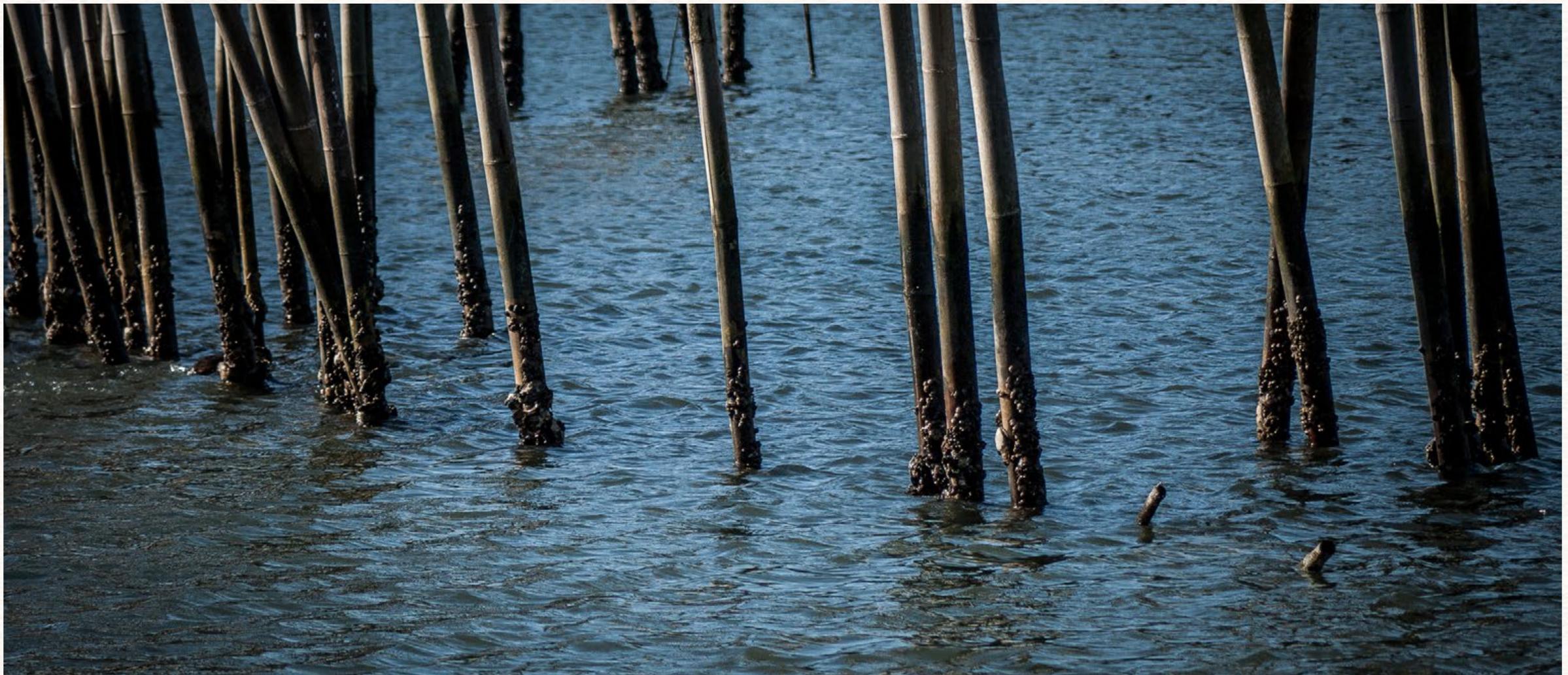


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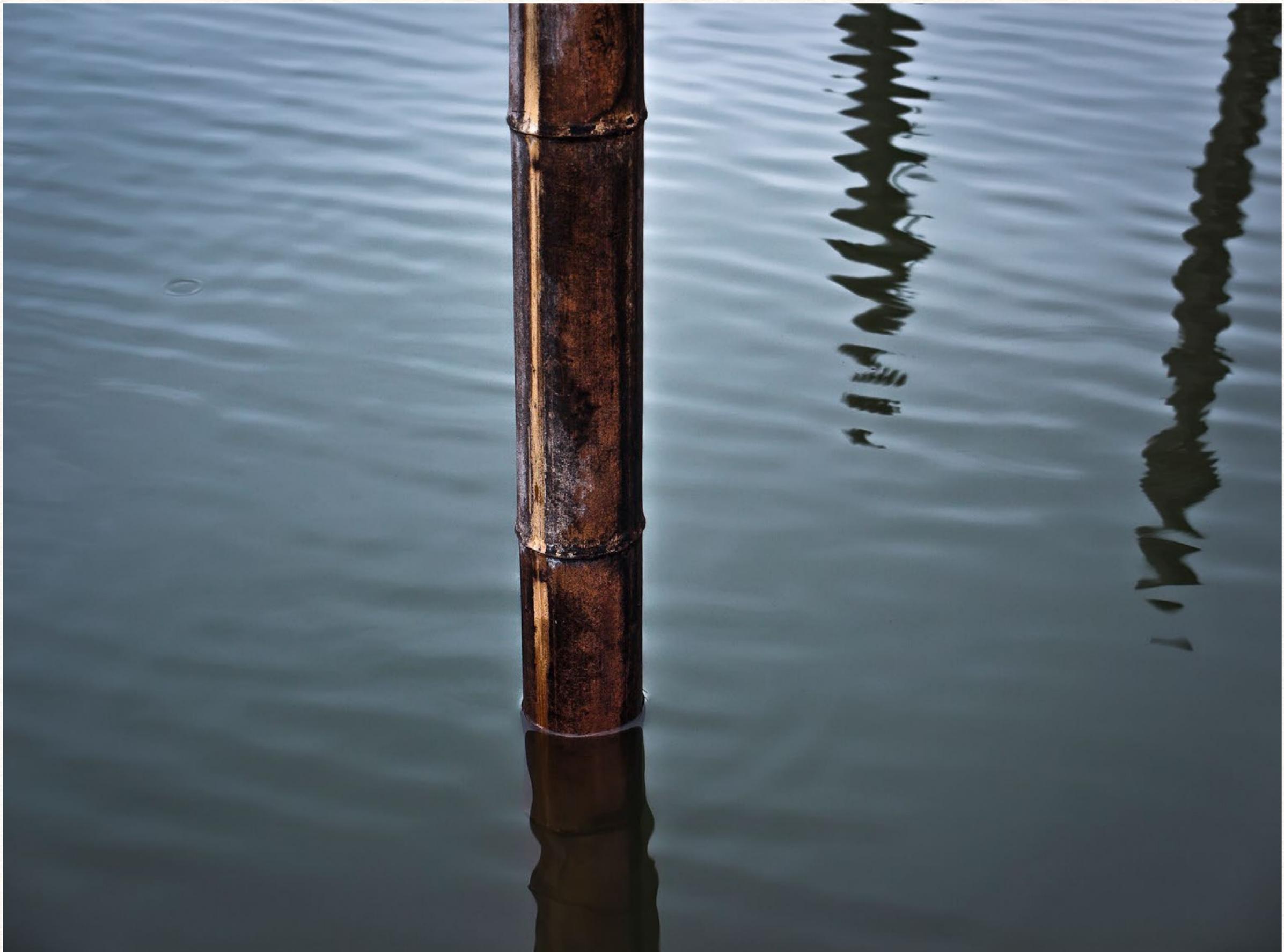
A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication

The notes on my map read simply, “Good potential.” I’d passed this little fishing village in a protected inlet in 1990 during my first trip to Japan. I noted its name, *Rikuzen Tomiyama*, but didn’t stop. Funny how certain places can make an impression all out of proportion to logic.

Beyond explanation, it was just *calling*. I knew I wanted to return, and 19 years later I finally did so, for a single morning of photography.

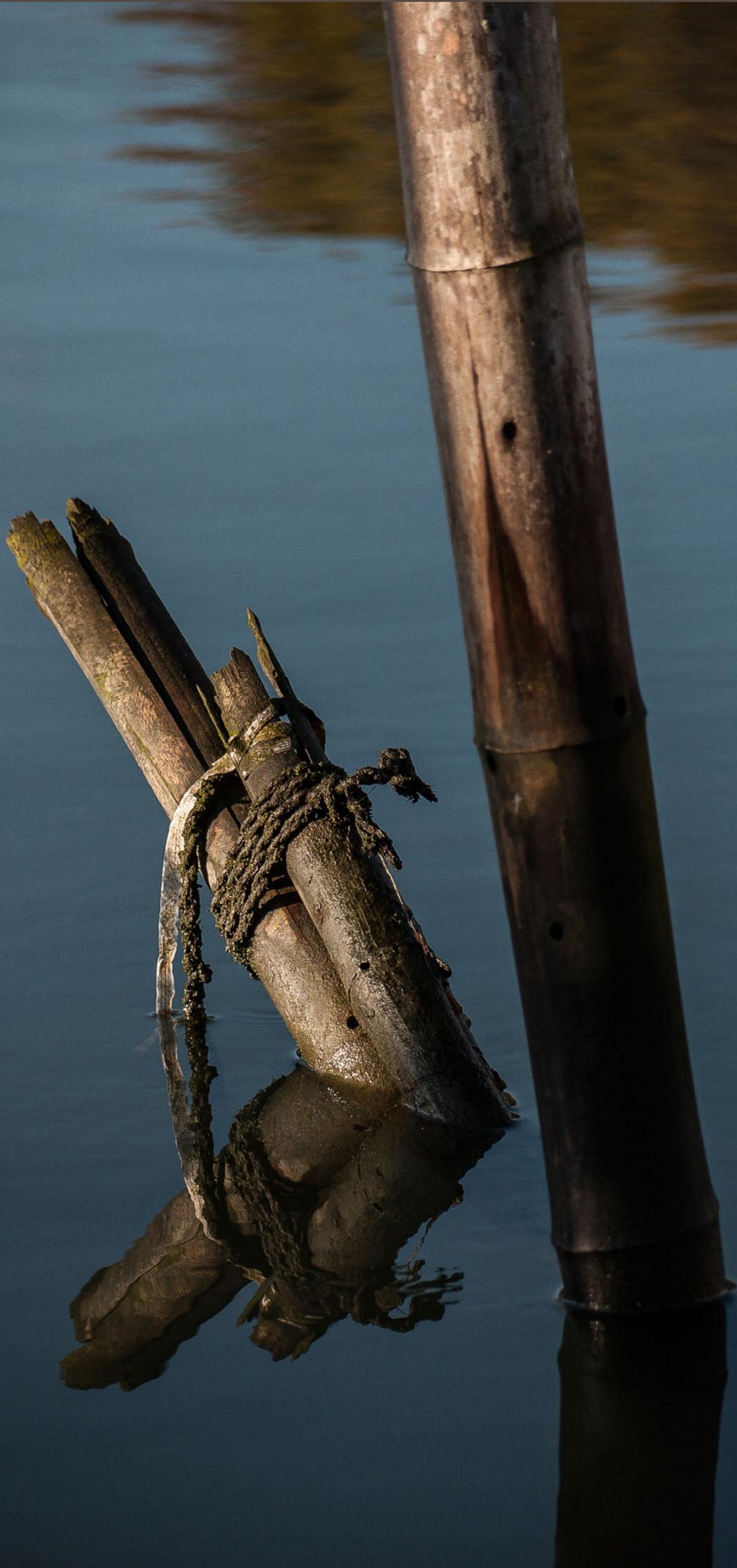


What first attracted me were the bamboo used both as mooring and for the oyster beds.





















Then the boats and their reflections in the water.







辰光丸



宝 仁 丸











And finally, once the day had broken and the workday begun, the people who bring the oysters to market.











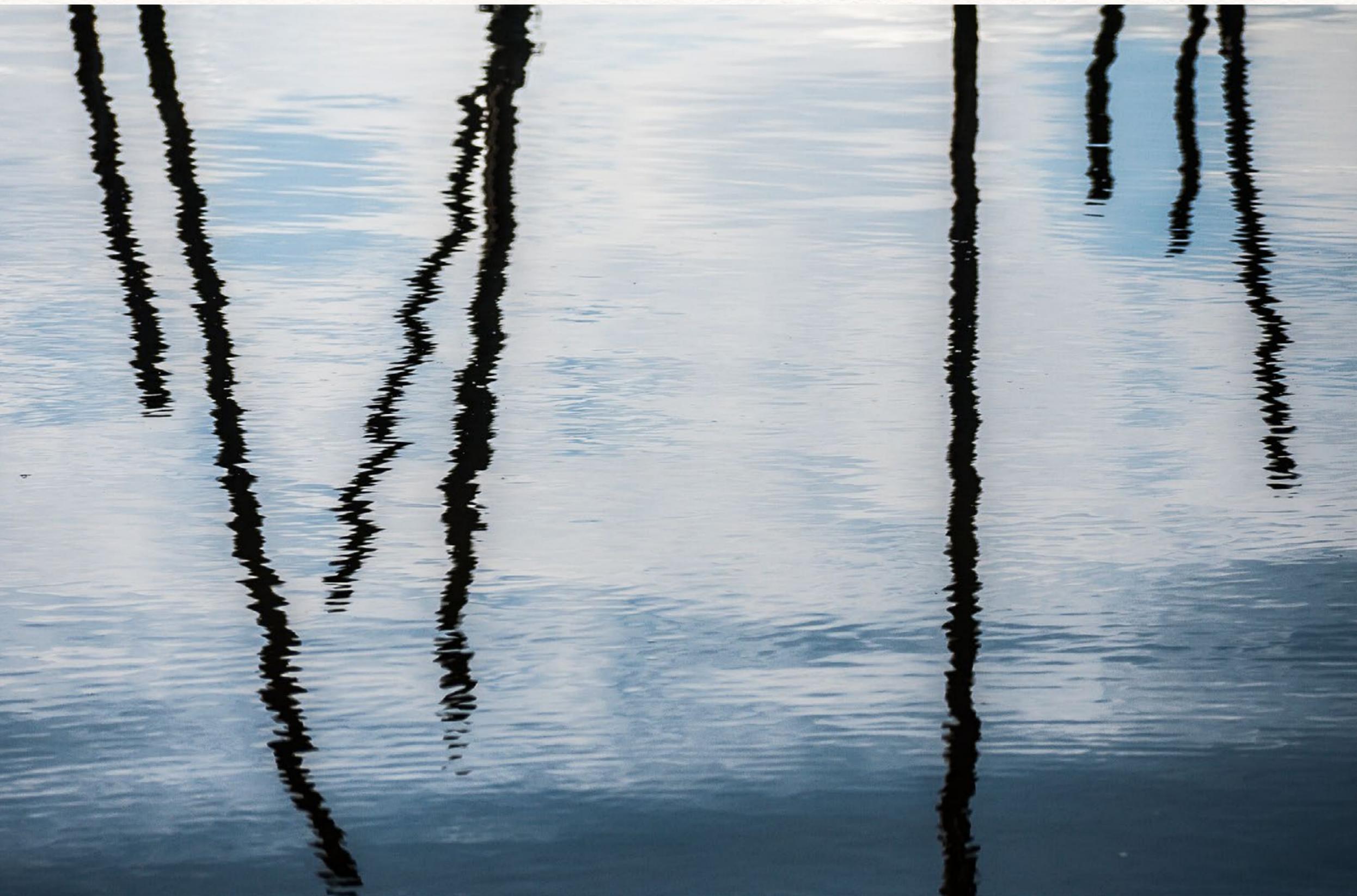


*Four hundred seventy-nine days later,
it was all gone — washed away in the
Tohoku tsunami of March 2011.*

Gone in moments,
with only 30-minutes warning from the earthquake
to the 30-foot wall of water that took everything in its path.



I choose to remember Rikuzen Tomiyama
as I found it that one glorious morning,
before *Higashi Nihon Daishinsai*, the Great East Japan earthquake of 2011,
before the tsunami that devastated the coastline of Tohoku,
before the tears of Japan and the world fell for the 15,891 dead,
6,152 injured, and 2,584 people still missing.



AND ELECTRICITY



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A few weeks ago* there was an article in the newspaper about the Guinness Book of Records' oldest living person having passed away at the age of 112. The article contained all the standard obituary data and was rather dry and uninteresting. Then I read the last line. It struck me as hard as the proverbial two-by-four between the eyes:

"In her life she had seen the invention of computers, television, telephone, radio, the internal combustion engine, *and electricity.*"

My God! I thought as I reached for the recline button on my first class seat in the Lockheed L1011 jumbo jet in which I was a passenger. She witnessed the electrification of our homes and the electric light bulb — and here I was traveling at 550 miles per hour at an altitude of 35,000 feet somewhere above western Kansas. What changes *in one lifetime!*



* From a dictation recorded August 5, 1989

Imagine observing those kinds of changes in the span of one's life! I reached for my portable computer where I could review some of my photographs of a bygone era and capture some thoughts about the speed of change in our society. As I stared at the keyboard, all I could think about was that last line of the newspaper article — *"and electricity."*













Everywhere one looks, all one sees is change.

This in itself is astonishing. Our language bamboozles us into thinking this is not so. For the sake of convenience and communication clarity, we've invented the particle of speech known as the *noun*. But, in reality, the concept of a noun is one of the greatest myths perpetrated by man. As hard as we might look, we will never find *a thing* in the world. There is only *process* — activities, actions, movement, creation, and dissolution. All existence is a verb, be it on a long or a short time scale. All the great sages and mystics throughout the ages have repeated this idea.

In our age, it is not the *existence* of change that is so difficult to comprehend; it is the *rate of change* that is unfathomable.



AS WE ARE



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As a photographer, I know the truth and wisdom of Anais Nin's famous quote,

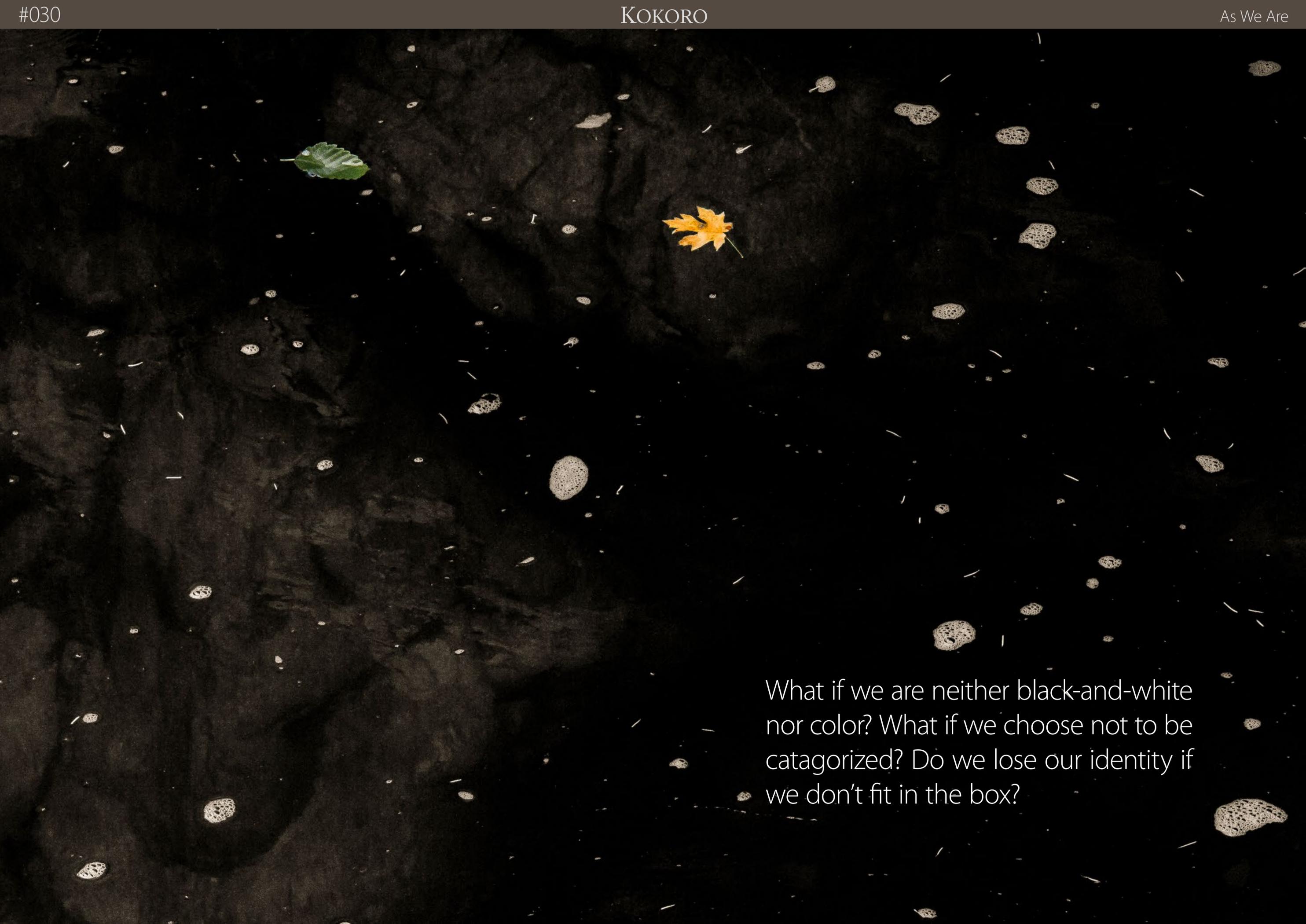
*We don't see things as they are;
we see things as we are.*



What if we see differently?





A dark, textured background, possibly a piece of fabric or paper, with a green leaf and a yellow leaf. The background is covered in small, light-colored, circular spots and fibers. The green leaf is on the left, and the yellow leaf is in the center. The text is in the bottom right corner.

What if we are neither black-and-white
nor color? What if we choose not to be
catagorized? Do we lose our identity if
we don't fit in the box?





Or can we just be as we are
— and see what we see?

HOME BASE



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She was only six years old, but she knew how to hide as well as anyone, even the older boys. Darting across the open school yard, she glanced behind her every few steps with an expression that mixed concealed laughter, anticipation, and a certain sense of urgency. She knew it would not be long before the boys stopped counting and began their seeking.



She found a sagebrush that was sufficiently larger than she and darted behind it, panting, then crouching, waiting. All ears now — quiet — straining desperately to hear beyond normal human range. She took great pains to forcedly regulate her breath so that its noise might not prevent her from hearing even the faintest crunch of one of the boy's footsteps.

Across the way, she could hear Mary and Susan giggle as they tried to conceal themselves behind the chimney of the little one-room schoolhouse. They would be caught far too easily. The chimney was much too obvious of a hiding place and much too close to "home base" — the merry-go-round. She knew her hiding place was better, but even so, it would require every ounce of her courage to wait patiently for her chance to spring for home if one of the boys were to come past her hiding place from the front side.



There. What was that? One of the “seekers” running on tiptoes toward her? No, just a scared jackrabbit dashing for cover. Safe, still, all ears once again.

More giggles as the less-talented girls got caught before they had a chance to run for it, or were caught by the faster boys.

She knew her chance was coming near. She leaned down to peek under the edge of the foliage just in time to catch a glimpse of Michael’s boot noiselessly coming round the back side of her sagebrush hiding place. She could feel her heart deepen and quicken its pounding and rise right to the top of her chest. It was now — or never.



With a jump, a squeal, and a rush of adrenalin, she sprinted toward safety, her legs straining to stretch every last quarter-inch from each stride. Michael shouted and burst into the race right behind her. She felt her shoes dig into the dry desert dirt and the ends of her pigtails thumping against her back as she picked up speed. The summer sun warmed her arms and her cheeks. Her breath came quickly as she pressed her face to the wind and the race. She heard the steps of first one, then two, now three, four, five boys chasing her in a desperate race.

Just over the din of her own breathing and footsteps, a chorus of high-pitched voices encourage her with a cheer of, "Run, Sissy, run!" intermingled with a contrasting, lower-pitched chorus of "Get her, Michael, get her!" from the boys. With a final burst of speed and girlish pride, she reached "home base" just ahead of Michael's final lunge for her elbow. Her slap on the merry-go-round sent it spinning in a victory dance and her laughter could be heard above all the cheers of her fellow "hidiers."



OCTOBER SEAS



Our days march on. Life progresses. But on occasion,
we pause — and visit the sea.

Brooks Jensen

A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication

Originally published in November 2005 as a folio of twelve prints.



Aware of it or not, the sea, the surf, and the wind all dance, rush, and pound the shore every moment of every day and every night, not waiting for us to notice, not caring if we do. It is a rhythm of cosmic endurance. Wave after wave, tide after tide. A rush in with enthusiasm, an ebb with reluctance. Hour after hour, century after century.



The same shapes and forms, but no two waves ever the same, never making an aesthetic mistake. They say every seventh wave is larger, but counting is fruitless. Countless waves like the grains of sand they create — beyond counting, beyond measure. Day after day, waves to drops to spray to waves.



A gust of wind, a steady gale, a moment of calm, another gust. Sunrise after sunrise after sunrise. Carving, circling, rising, rushing. Moonrise after moonrise, storm after storm. There is magic in the pattern. Clouds, then rain, then sun, then clouds. The never-ending cycle repeats, never tiring, never changing, never needing to change.



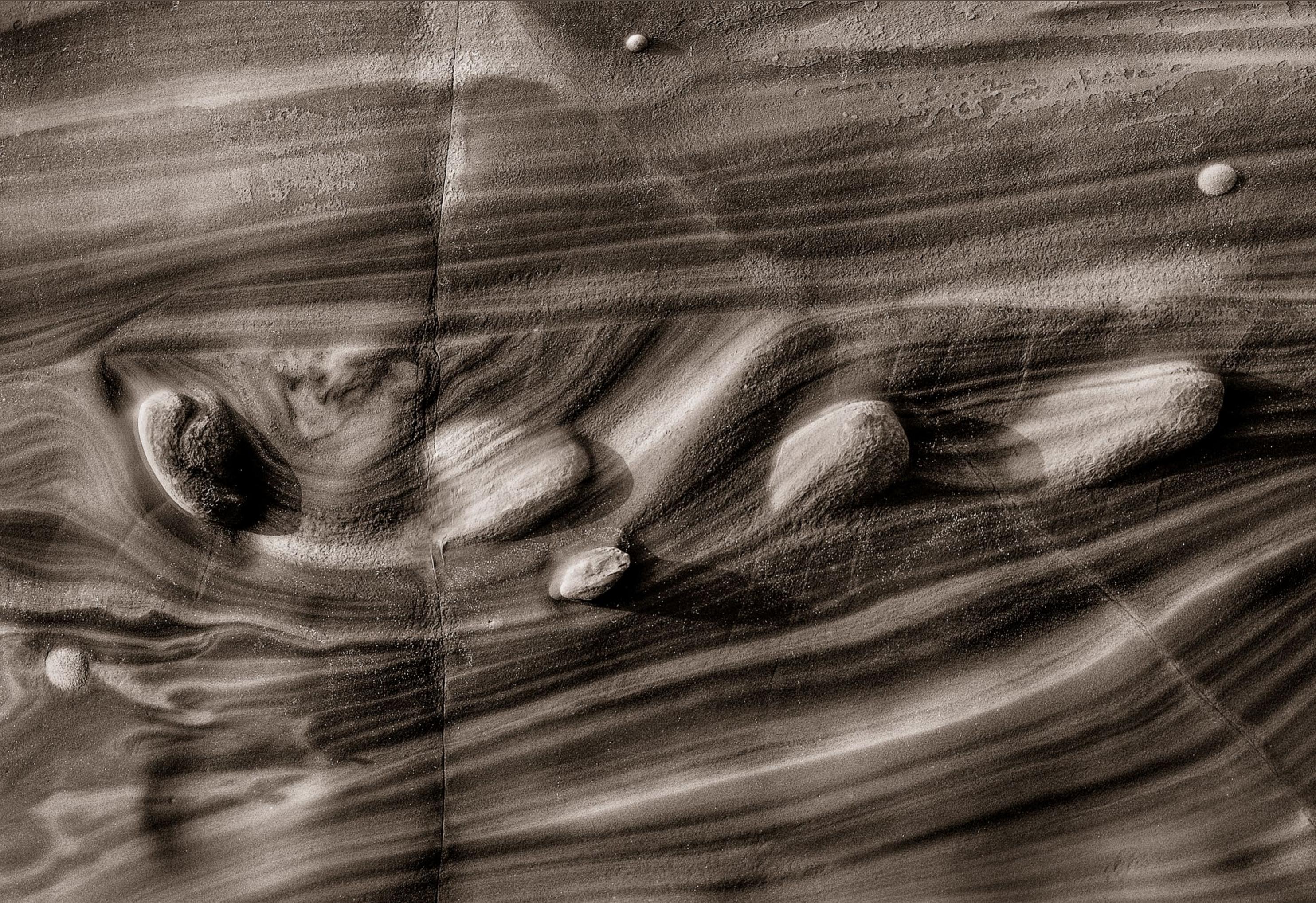


It draws us — it draws me. I can hear the surf far inland beyond the reach of sound. I know the same sun that shines on me here shines on the sea, too. The rain that surrounds me here is the same rain that fell from the cloud back to the ocean — and then the cloud comes to me; the same rain that falls on me runs back to the ocean to do it again. The cycle repeats — sea, wind, surf, cloud, rain, back to the sea. Day after day, life after life.













Dedicated to the memory of my friend, Chris Anderson, who was supposed to accompany me on this trip, photographing the wonders of the Oregon Coast. We miss you, Chris.

THE BAMBOO CUTTERS

OF JINYUN XIANDU, CHINA



J Brooks Jensen

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There were some 200 photographers — mostly Japanese tourists — photographing the spires and scenic views of Jinyun Xiandu from the “photo spot” on the bank of the shallow river. A stone walkway allowed costumed villagers to dutifully lead the miserable-looking water buffalo across the river and back, across and back again, pausing now and again for the benefit of the photographers. Each trip was met with a whir of camera shutters and admiring applause from the tourists. I couldn’t get away fast enough.

After lunch, I walked upriver and crossed on a stone bridge. Unexpectedly, I found some workmen harvesting bamboo and immediately recognized them as the actors from the water buffalo scene. In their work clothes and away from the tourist photographers, I felt I’d found a genuine corner of China not constructed for the entertainment of foreigners. Fortunately, they kept busy while I admired their skill and dexterity.

I have no idea what had become of the water buffalo, but I’m sure he is one of the most photographed creatures in all of China.

















I couldn't get away fast enough, but I not before I made one photograph just to prove I was there. You didn't think I was kidding, did you?

HILO PALMS



J Brooks Jensen

A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication



We humans are creatures that yearn for order wherever we see chaos. How else could we explain those constellations in the night sky — our projection of pattern onto the chaos of the stars? We crave order so strongly that we will *create* it, even if it means we plot mythical Greek figures in the night sky that don't really exist there.

But when order *does* exist, we find it perfectly seductive. Perhaps this is why trees and the world of nature attract us so strongly. There is a pattern in a tree or in a leaf that satisfies our soul on a spiritual level — an amazing feat for something supposedly unintelligent. (How can we see such wondrous life and doubt the intelligence of existence?) A walk in the woods has soothed many a worn worrier.



Order in the chaos is welcome, but pattern in *overwhelming detail* is the ultimate aphrodisiac. Listen to any bit of music you are inclined to enjoy and you'll find there is such complexity! Mozart was right — there were not “too many notes” as the Sovereign claimed. It is the very complexity in abundance that we enjoy.

And in precisely this combination is the dance of life — abundance of detail in patterns of grace, uncountable strands of DNA in concert, performing a pig, a whale, a tree, and me. In my youth I cursed the cowlick in my hair; now I see an Archimedes spiral that rivals the forms in so many delightful shells. The Nautilus and I have something in common!



I have never been a great fan of palm trees. In my limited experience, palms were stick-like weeds with crudely-formed, tufted tops found along the freeways of southern California. Clearly, I had never been to Hawaii. Recently, during my first visit to those balmy islands, I learned how limited my experiences had been.

There they were — the palms! — overflowing with life in a ravine near Hilo. What complex beauty! They were jazz brought to life in an explosion of jiggity details and repeating, graceful arcs that make a chord of wonder for a photographer's eye. No, not a chord — a *forest* of chords. I was entranced. I did not need to project an imaginary constellation onto the fronds; they were true constellations in biology. Limitless details held in wondrous, repeating, and detailed patterns that can only come from living logic.









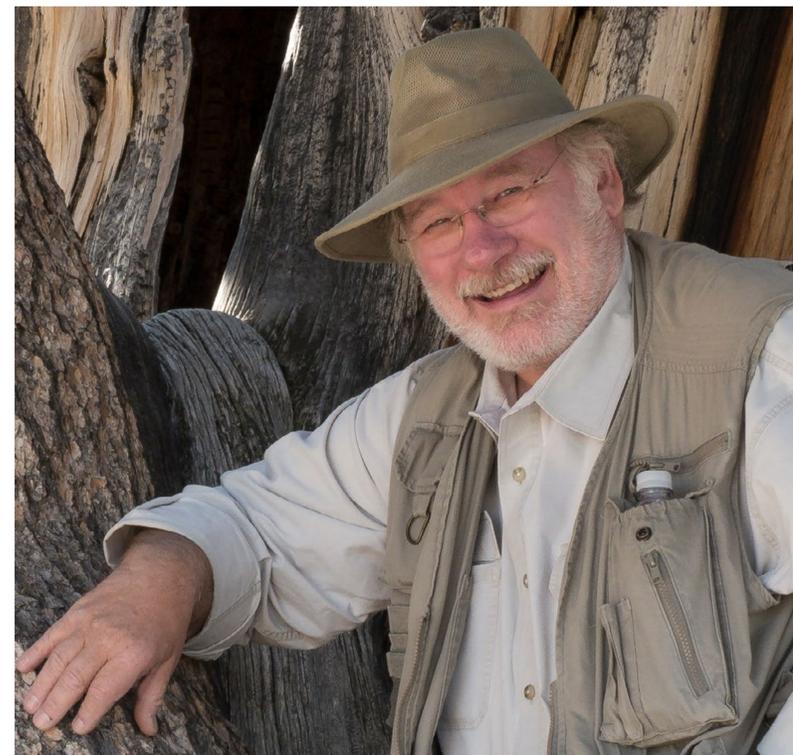




As I photographed, I discovered I was not just breathing, but breathing *deeply*. Unconsciously, the sea breeze and the forest breath were refreshing my soul. I tried to stay focused on the photography at hand, but I could not let go of the impression that the palms were gesturing to me — waving a greeting and welcoming me to the islands. Of course, I knew I was simply projecting a different form of constellation. Nonetheless, for an hour or so, the palms of Hawaii and I had the most pleasant conversation — one complexity of ordered pattern to another.

Support the artist!

For over 30 years, Brooks has shared his photographic lessons, failures, inspiration, creative path — and more than a few laughs. If you've enjoyed his free *Kokoro* PDFs publications, or been a long-time listener to his free audio commentaries (his weekly podcast *On Photography and the Creative Life*, or his daily *Here's a Thought* commentaries), here is your chance to tell him how much you appreciate his efforts. Support the artist!



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[You can donate to support Brooks' creative life using this link.](#) Thanks!



Brooks Jensen is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist's books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 73 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly world-wide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 900+ podcasts are available at [LensWork Online](#), the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with *LensWork Extended* — a PDF based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of seven best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); and *Looking at Images* (2014); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next book will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)*. A free monthly compilation of of this image journal, [Kokoro](#), is available for download.

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