

BORROWED TIME

Photographs by David R. Hanlon, 1990 – 2026



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An exhibition held at the Meramec Contemporary Art Gallery

August 27 – September 22, 2026

Through examples selected from four portfolios undertaken by the artist during thirty-six years of teaching photography at St. Louis Community College, this exhibition considers the nuanced character of environments that reflect our lives and memories, as well as the historical remnants that mark our period on this planet. Often utilizing extended exposures, these photographs seek to explore the representation of time as it passes across multiple generations.

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Natural Order

Photographic compositions involve making selections from larger areas of reality, and are often the endeavor of creating some new degree of visual order out of seeming randomness. With an ability to consider more carefully what can be created in the translation from a three-dimensional world to a flat print, the camera is a tool that allows these new impressions to be built in a variety of ways. I find working with subjects that allow for this challenge to be exciting.

Since 1990 I have been exploring varied degrees of order that can be seen in the ways trees and plants develop in the natural world. Both physical characteristics that define species, and the interactive relationships that can be seen between plants, are considered. While the often symbiotic relationships between things is important to this visual exploration, the manner in which the elements of an image can be seen as reflecting a living environment is also crucial. Within this focus on forested spaces it is also a goal to manifest their quiet, spiritual, and mysterious qualities. These areas continue to support the ecological balance of the planet, while also reflecting our origins and ancestral home.



Mission Trails Park
San Diego County, CA (2003)



Rueda-Seda #23
San Diego County, CA (1994)



Via Valarta #2
San Diego County, CA (1991)



Rueda-Seda #58
San Diego County, CA (2002)



Filtered Light
Kings Canyon National Park, CA (2003)



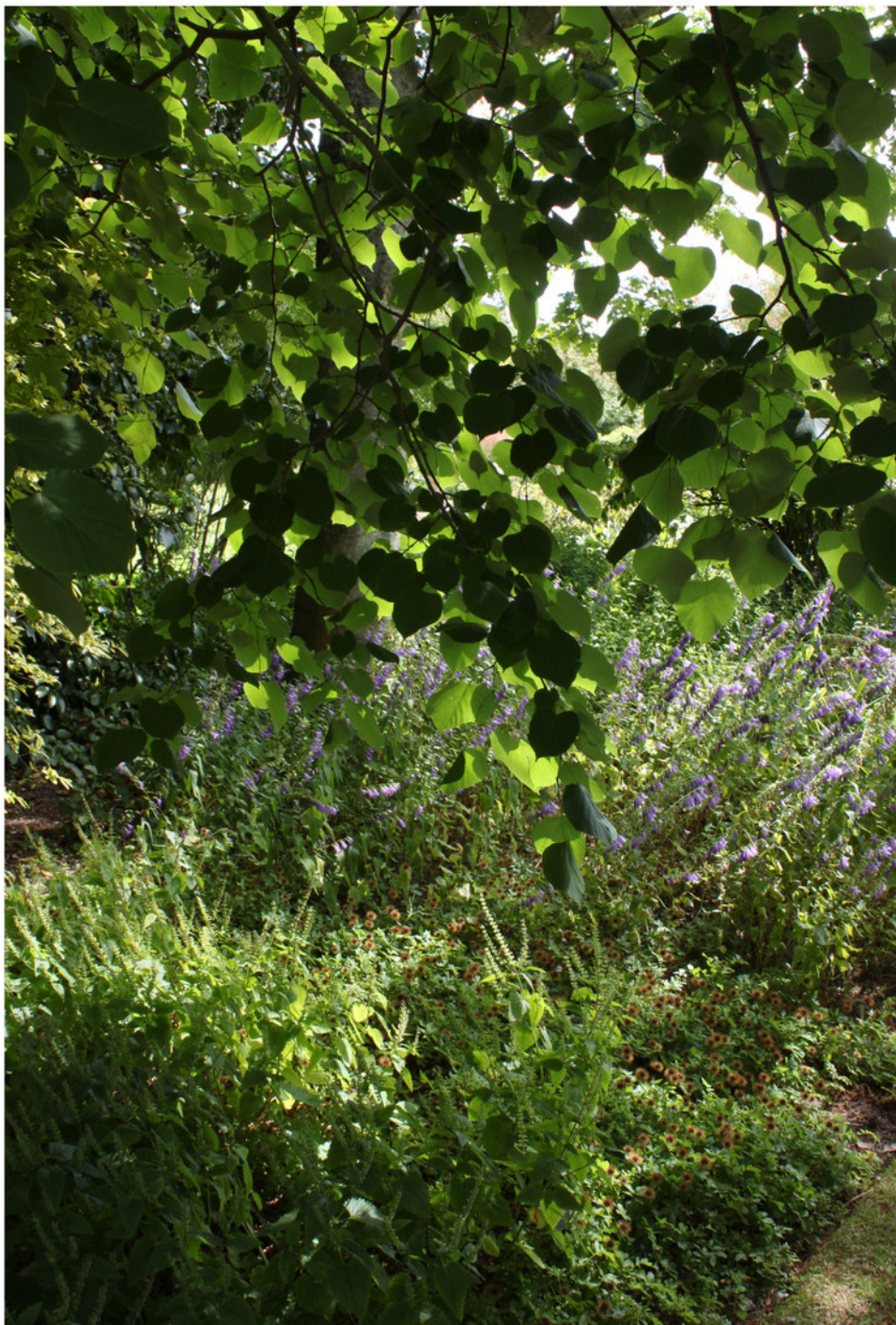
View at Weathersfield Bow, VT,
near the Grave of Leavitt Hunt (2004)



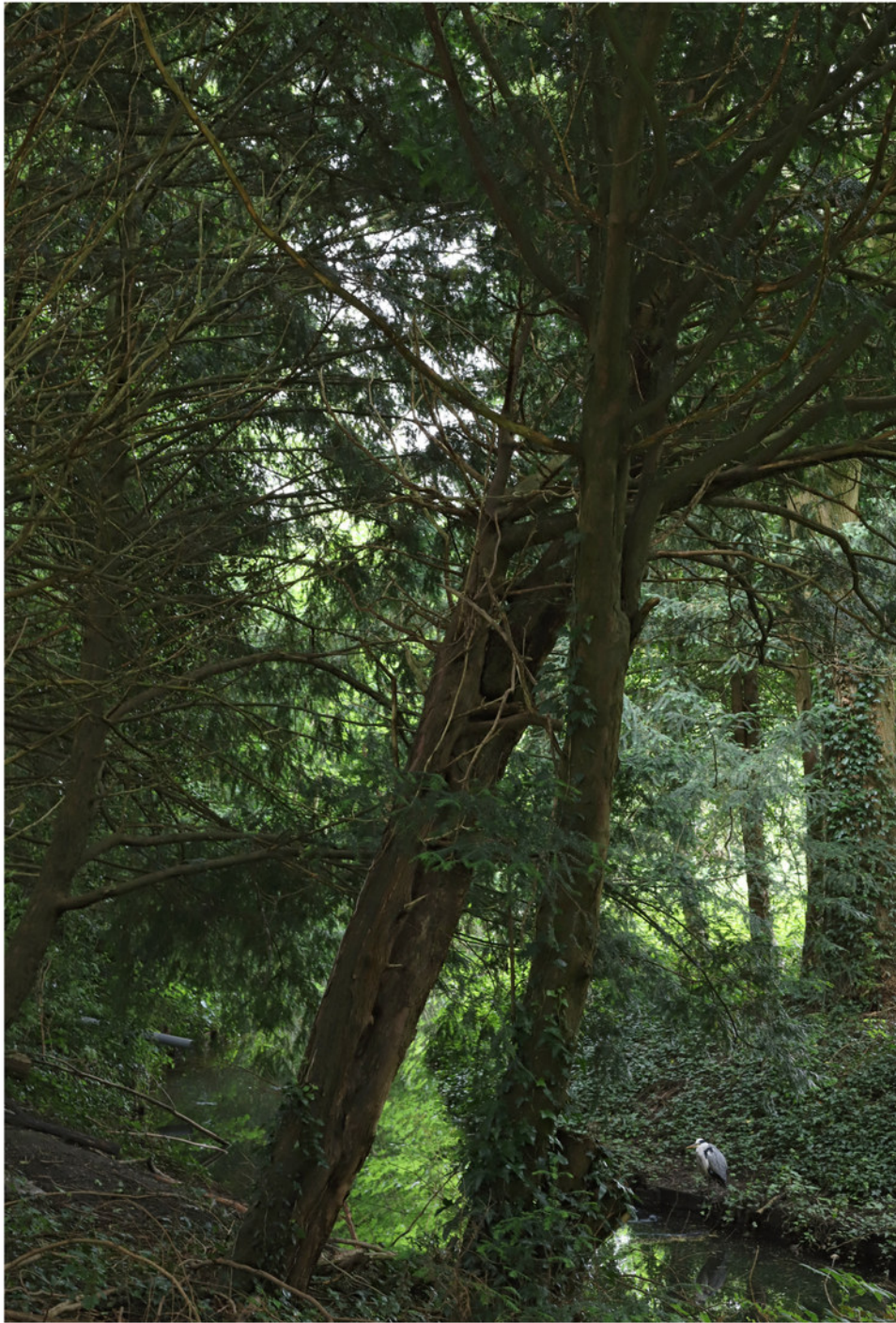
Highgate Cemetery East
London, England (2002)



Layered Study, Forest Park
St. Louis, MO (2022)



Along the Kinness Burn
St. Andrews, Scotland (2015)



Old Growth along Canal
Amstelveen, Netherlands (2024)



Het Amsterdamse Bos
Amstelveen, Netherlands. (2024)



Cottonwood Clearing
Rimrock, AZ (2025)



Verde River Forest
Cottonwood, AZ (2024)



The Wilderness #4
St. Louis, MO (2025)



The Wilderness #34
St. Louis, MO (2025)



The Wilderness #42
St. Louis, MO (2026)

History in Our Midst

When I was in grade school one of our most memorable field trips was across the Mississippi River to a large open area dotted with grassy mounds. The site held the remnants of the great ancient city of Cahokia, the largest urban center in North America from 900 to 1350 AD. I remember being impressed by the scale of the constructed earth features, especially the one hundred foot tall “Monks Mound,” and the strange tranquility of the area.

In subsequent years, studies in ancient history and numerous field seasons in archaeology rejuvenated in me an interest in Cahokia and the remnants of ancient Mississippian and Woodland period sites in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Would it be possible to create by photography impressions about the spirit of the places that were once important for indigenous peoples? Was it possible to still discern the relevance or sanctity of spaces where the historical remnants had been removed?

Beginning in 2007, I started to research and explore – first by studying the World Heritage site of Cahokia, and then the remains of ancient satellite communities on both sides of the Mississippi River. Seeing the transformation of mound sites in varied seasons and weather impressed different moods upon the places. I have also come to the understanding that the spiritual relationship that the Native Americans understood between the land and the sky is still present at the sites in the region, along with the echoes of the hundreds of thousands of people for whom these places were central to their lives.



The largest man-made historic structure in North America, Monks Mound is the imposing central feature of a key religious and urban center of ancient times. Enlarged over a period of more than two hundred years, it reached the form we see today about 1200 A.D. (Cahokia)



View from what was once was a large ceremonial plaza, where the ridge-top Mound 56 is seen in front of the larger platform Mound 60 (Fox Mound). Both were probably associated with burial rituals nine centuries ago. (Cahokia)



A conical mound on the southern edge of the Grand Plaza, Mound 59 (Round Top Mound) retains much of its original shape and is more than forty feet in height. It has not been professionally excavated. (Cahokia)



Mound in Section 3 of Calvary Cemetery. This parcel of land, and that of adjacent Bellefontaine Cemetery, remain among the few areas of the second terrace above the Mississippi River not developed over the last two centuries. (City of St. Louis)



Spot where "Big Mound" used to stand, on Broadway north of Mound Street.
Once St. Louis' most prominent landmark, the mound and the contents of
its burial chamber were removed in the spring of 1869. (City of St. Louis)



View of O'Fallon Street from Collins Street, looking towards where "Little Mound" was located. In 1833 this tumulus was hollowed out to act as a water reservoir for the growing city, before eventually being destroyed in 1856. (City of St. Louis)



The southwestern portion of Sugar Loaf mound, which has been on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River south of St. Louis for more than one thousand years. The site was re-acquired by the Osage Nation in 2009. (City of St. Louis)



French settlers gave the name “Côte Brillante” (meaning *shining hill*) to a mound located on the land that now comprises Sherman Park. Remnants can still be found, despite ongoing development projects. (City of St. Louis)



More than twenty-five Mississippian-period limestone box graves were discovered on this portion of the property of Notre Dame Convent in 1957 during excavation for a new building. (City of St. Louis)



Area in Forest Park where a group of nine mounds once existed, near the original location of the River Des Peres. They were excavated in 1901 and were found to contain pottery, projectile points, and some skeletal remains. (City of St. Louis)



One of the Twin Mounds in Pere Marquette State Park, looking west. With overviews of both the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, the bluffs northwest of Grafton contain many similar small and medium-sized mounds. (Jersey County, IL)



Remnants of a small mound on the Mississippi River bluff
above Riverview Drive, looking east. (City of St. Louis)



Creve Coeur Lake, utilized by people of the Hopewell and later cultures.
A second century A.D. occupation site and ancient burial area
have been uncovered on a bluff near this spot. (Maryland Heights)



Terrain in the Bonhomme Creek archaeological district, which includes sixteen registered sites from the Late Archaic and Woodland periods. (Chesterfield)



Site of the Baldwin Farm mound, behind the old family homestead on Lackland Road. Thomas Baldwin recalled frequently finding relics there as a boy in the 1880s. (Overland)



Mound from the Mitchell group, a collection of sizable burial tumuli noted first by William Clark in January 1804. The rest have since been destroyed by railroad and highway construction. (Madison County, IL)



The last remaining mound of a group of eleven that were built along the edge of Grassy Lake between 500-800 A.D. during the Late Woodland period. Industrial and residential building have eliminated the others. (South Roxana, IL)



The Pulcher site, south of Cahokia, was the location of a long-occupied Middle Mississippian village. Graves, garden beds, and house foundations have been uncovered here, within an area containing ten mounds. (Dupo, IL)

Studies Abroad

My first decade working with a camera allowed many opportunities to spend time exploring subjects in the United States. In 1989, though, a chance to travel to England provided an experience that helped cultivate many new studies and ideas. Interesting people, notable historical sites, and a different urban fabric expanded my intellectual and visual perceptions. The following spring I joined an STLCC archaeology field class taught by Dr. Michael Fuller and Neathery Batsell Fuller, working at the ancient site of Tell Tuneinir in northeastern Syria. This archaeological program I was involved with annually until its conclusion in 2001, allowing a much deeper exploration and understanding of a people and history very different from ours.

Participating in two other STLCC field courses in North Macedonia preceded the four study abroad classes that I taught for the College in both England and the Netherlands between 2013 and 2024. These periods of work, and a 2014 cultural exchange program with photographers in Nanjing, China, allowed opportunities to immerse into the present and past of a variety of cultures. In Europe, the Middle East, and in Asia, time is an entity that is measured and experienced differently than in America. The elements of ancient stories, art, and traditions are persistent, mixed with a pace of life continued by generations upon the same stage.



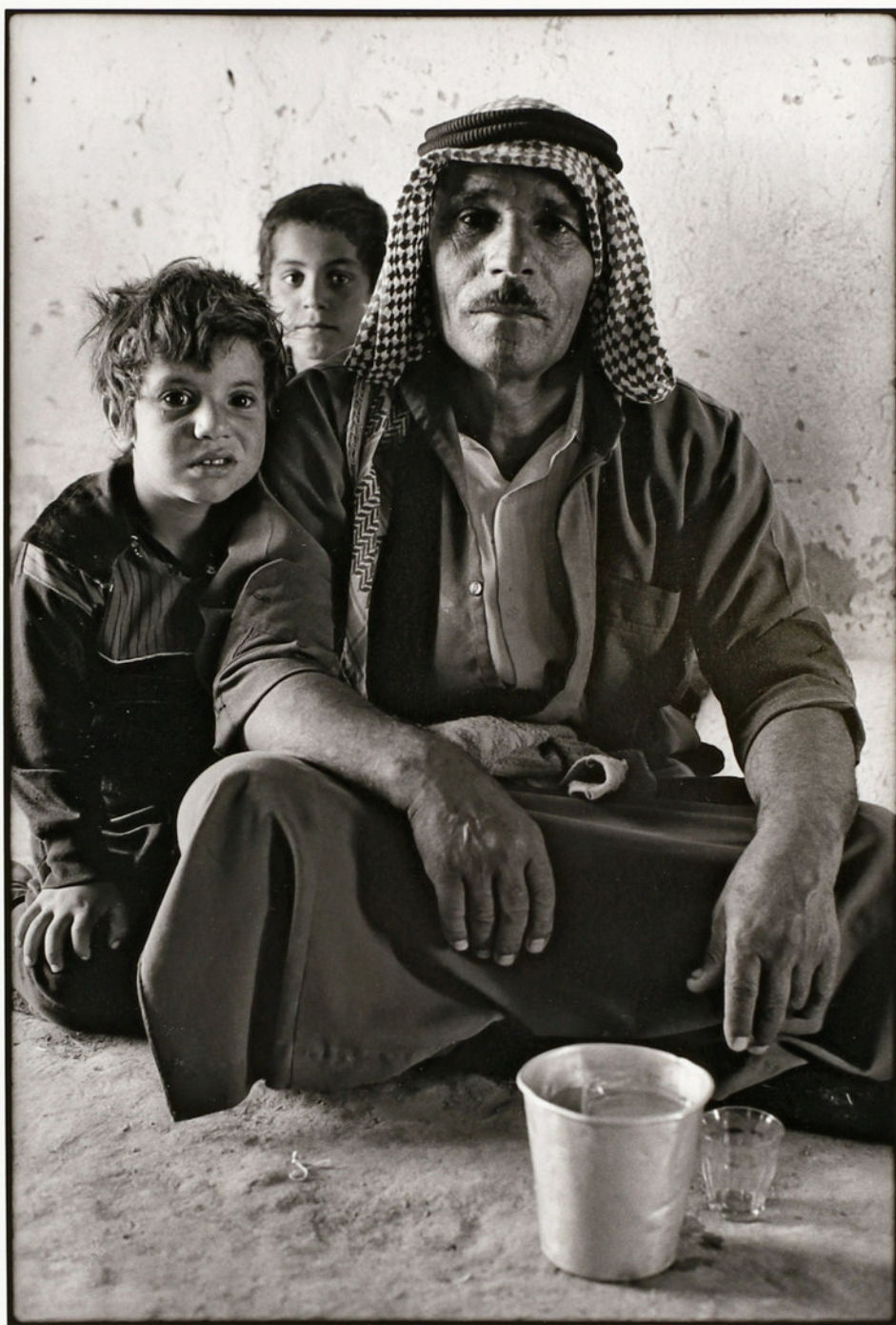
The Citadel
Busra, Syria (1990)



Khadr (with fighting stick)
Tell Tuneinir, Syria (1990)



Shimsa and Children
Tell Tuneinir, Syria (1990)



Hammid with Boys
Tell Tuneinir, Syria (1996)



Huhmeda in Eid Dress (with henna adornment)
Tell Tuneinir, Syria (1990)



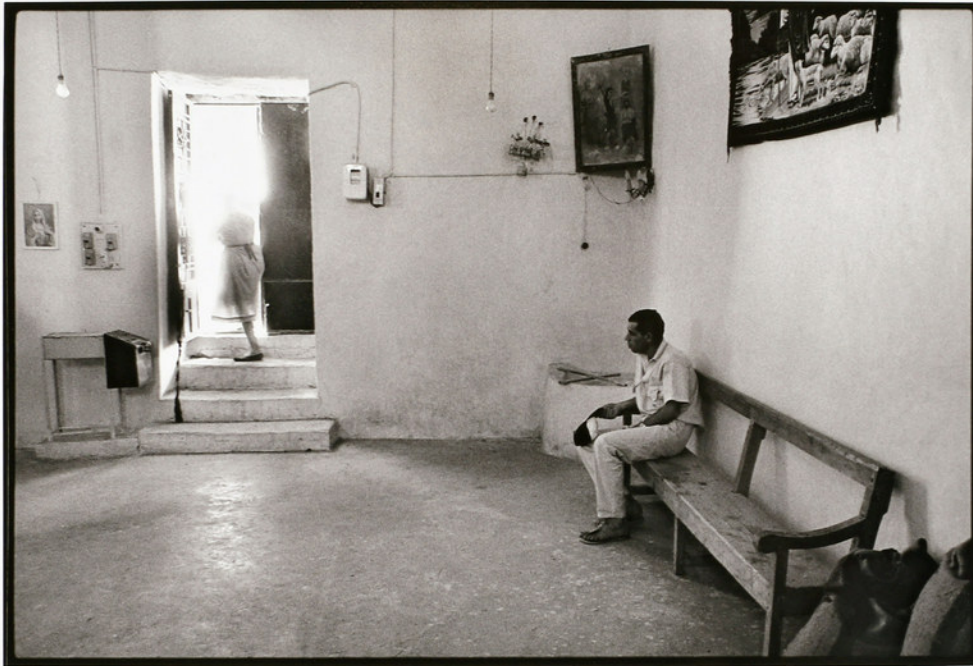
Two Young Men at Khabur River
Syria (1993)



Gathering for Eid al-Fitr
Tell Tuneinir, Syria (1992)



Raasma, Alia, and Wurda
Tell Tuneinir, Syria (1992)



Church of the Virgin Mary
Barabeit, Syria (1990)



Communion Bread, Cathedral of St. George
Hassake, Syria (1998)



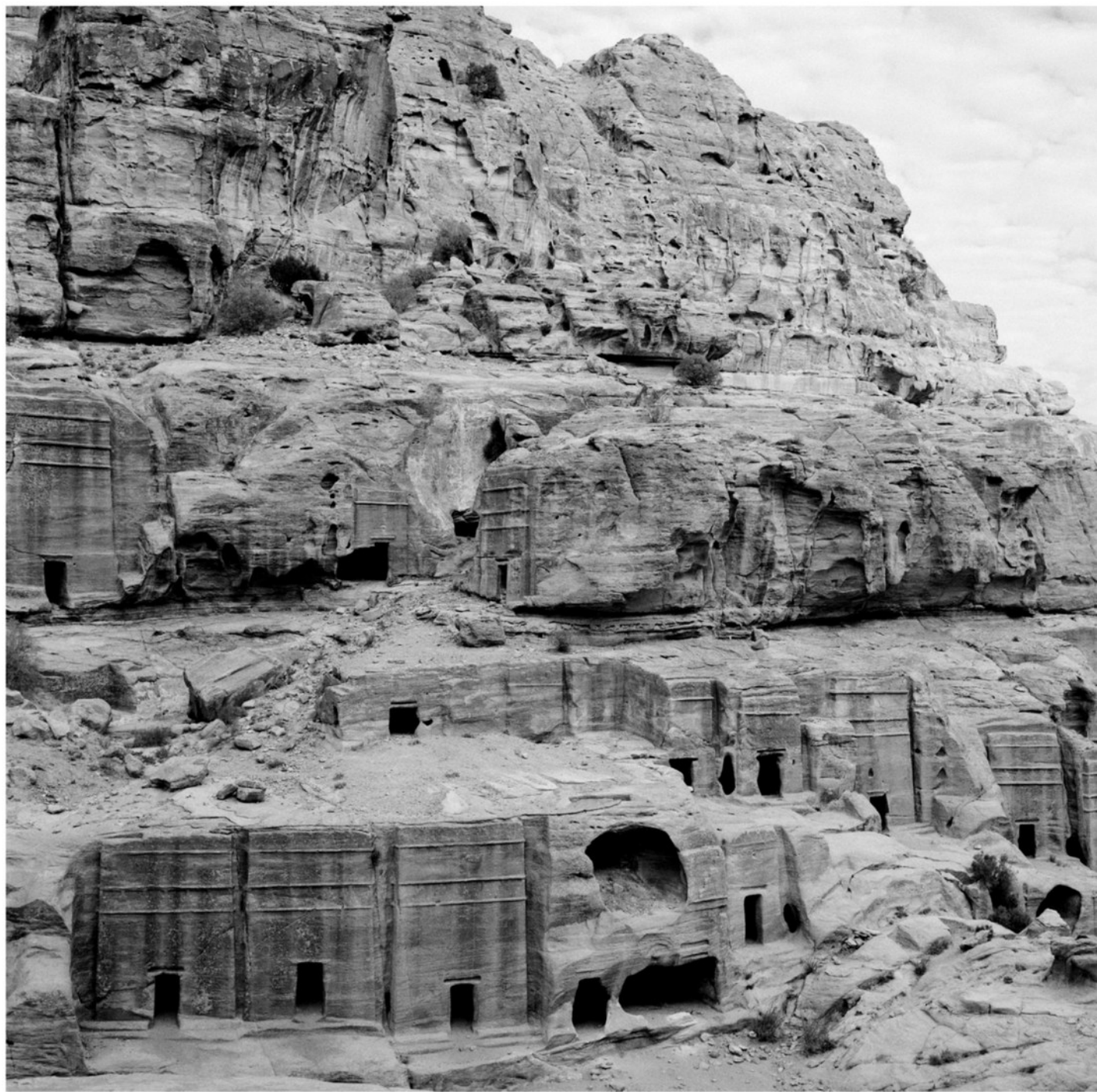
Schoolchildren in Nestorian Church
Tell Tamr, Syria (1993)



Among the Ruins
Palmyra (Syria) 1995

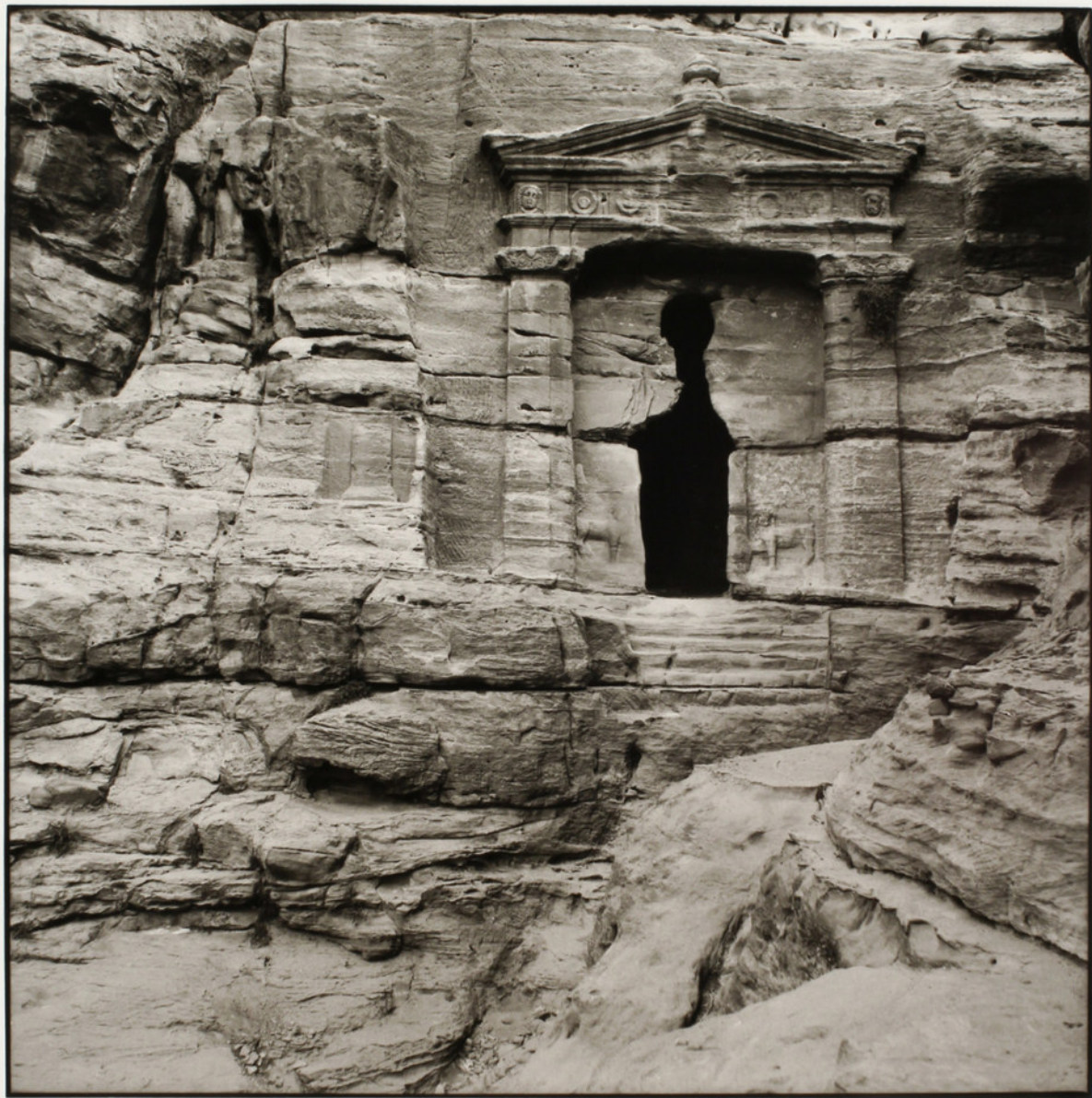


Umayyad Mosque Courtyard
Damascus, Syria (2000)

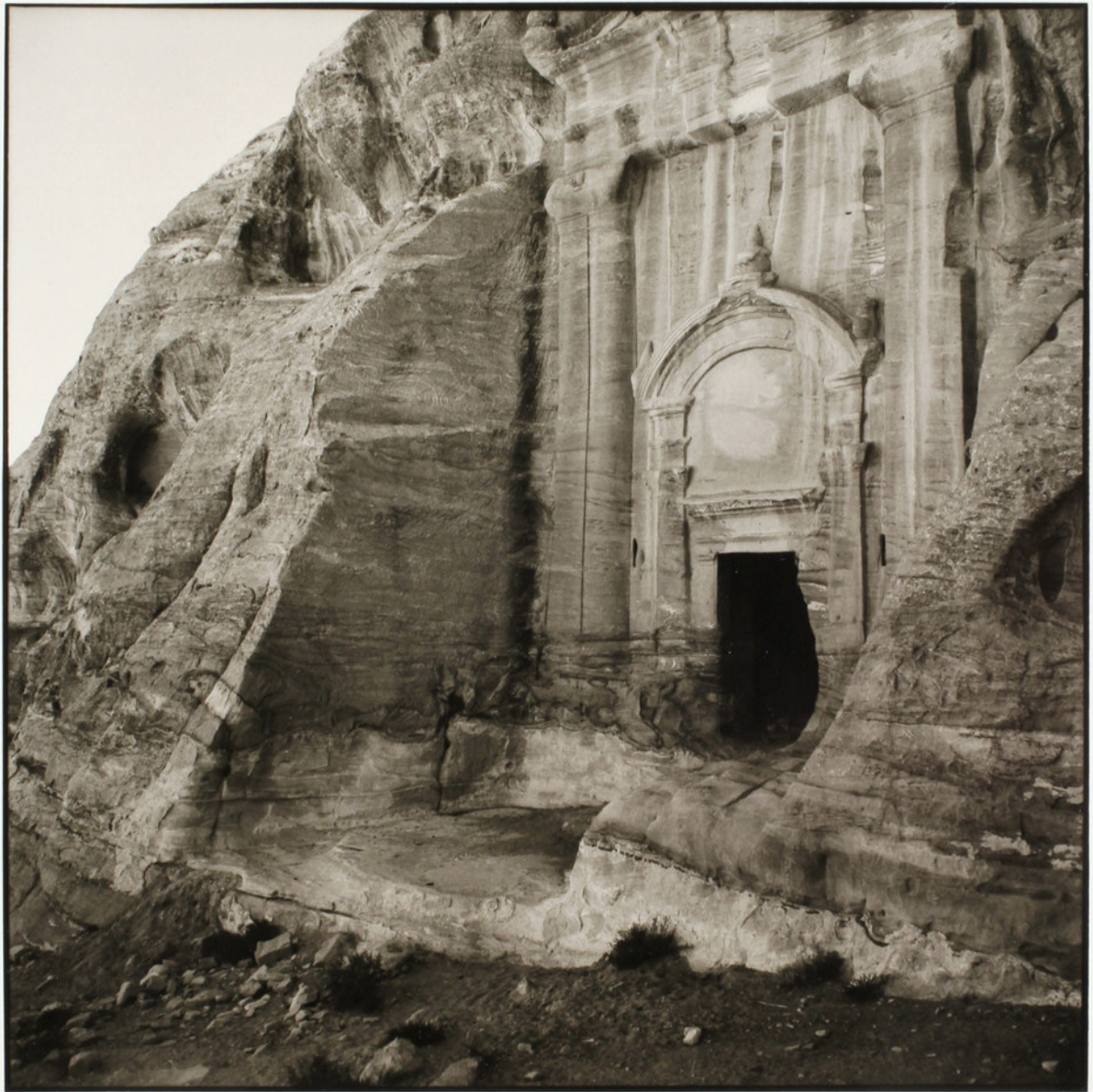




Streets of Facades and Theatre
Petra (Jordan) 1996



Lion Tomb / Triclinium
Petra (Jordan) 1997



Renaissance Tomb
Petra (Jordan) 1997



Area outside of Sacristy, Church of Our Savior
Kuceviste, North Macedonia (2008)



14th Century Fresco, Monastery Cave Church
Kalishta, North Macedonia (2008)



Doors of Patrons' Stalls, Church of St. Bavo
Haarlem, Netherlands (2024)



Nave of Cathedrale Saint-Martine
Utrecht, Netherlands (2023)



Kitchen of Rembrandt's House
Amsterdam, Netherlands (2024)



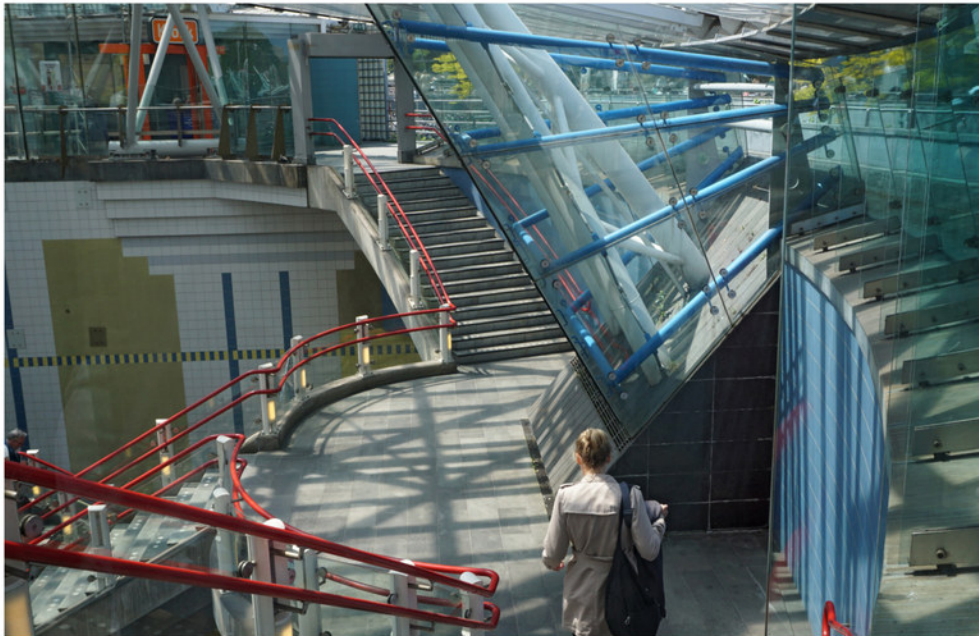
13th Century Chapel, All Saints Church
Biddenden, England (2025)



Library, Lacock Abbey
Wiltshire, England (2018)



Interior Portal, Church of St. Mary
Veljusa, North Macedonia (2007)



Transit Station
Rotterdam, Netherlands (2023)



Office Guard
Nanjing, China (2014)



Reflection at Hongcun Village
Yixian County, China (2014)



Bank Office
Nanjing, China (2014)

American Interiors

Many recollections that I have of earlier parts of my life involve the character of rooms and architectural spaces that were part of everyday experiences. Much of what we remember about our past and have as a shared experience with family members are based on places we have visited or occupied. These environments that we encounter or create for ourselves, in the areas where we live and work, are contexts that also provide a viable and insightful means to look into cultural or personal identities. This photographic project that was initiated in 2003 sought interior spaces to visually explore, reflecting ideas about what makes them distinctive and what histories they may contain. The decorative trends and functionary requirements of the individuals that inhabited the areas may be evident, but the response to the spaces also reflects upon our own stories.

Most of these rooms and enclosures will outlive us. They may be transformed in their adornment multiple times over generations. The memories and marks that we place on these spaces during a specific period, however, is a primary interest of this project. Often the subtleties of light and shadow act as a foundation for feelings and impressions. Other rooms give evidence of how people created order, even after they have left us. These environments reflect the fabric of our lives, relationships and memories.



Parlor of the House where Lincoln Died
Washington, D.C. (2004)



Living Room at Night
Irving, TX (2014)



Hotel Room
Sharonville, OH (2005)



Mixed Light
Rochester, NY (2009)



Kitchen
Cincinnati, OH (2015)



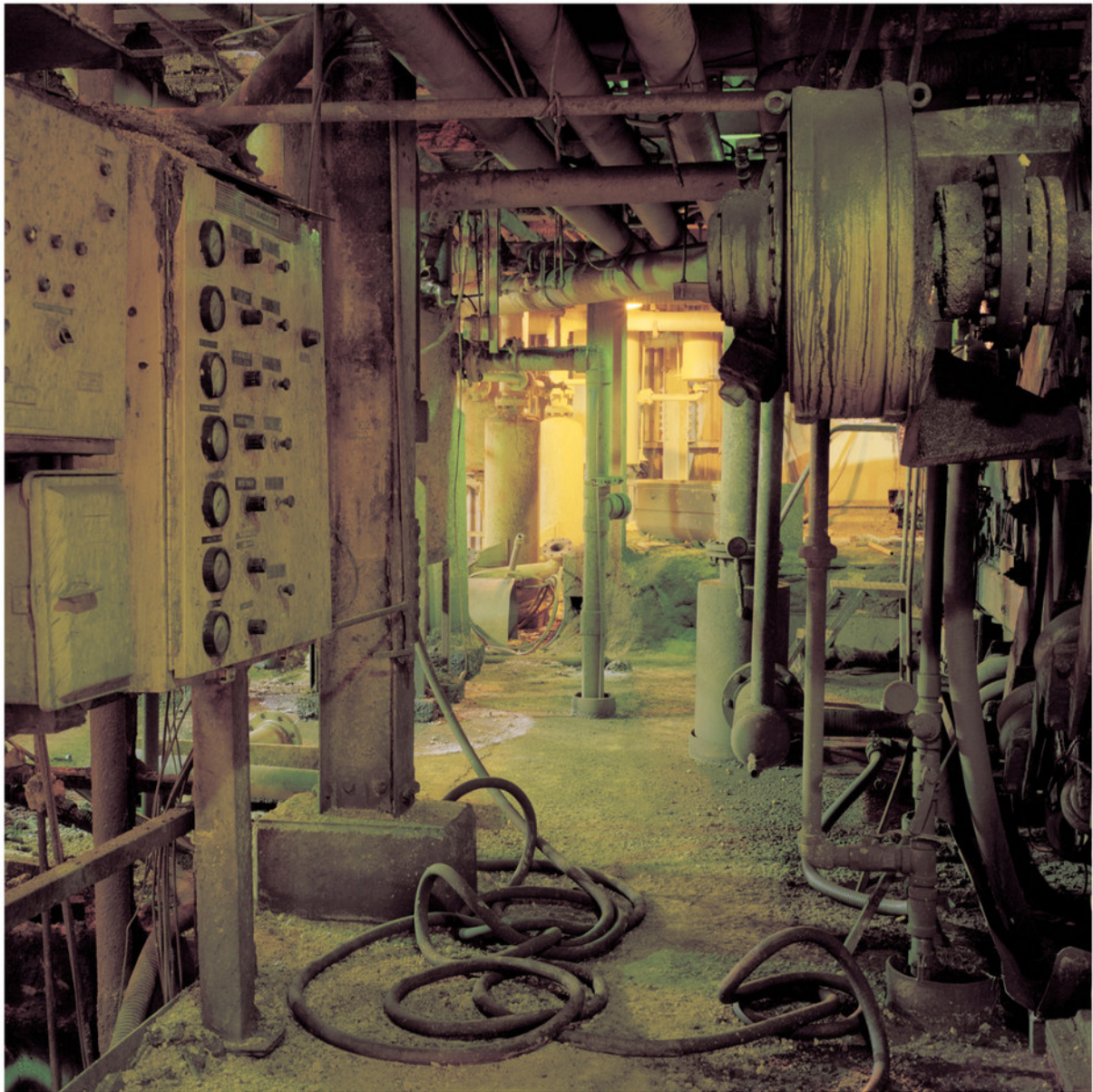
Sixth Floor Office Space
St. Louis, MO (2005)



Library Study Area
Minneapolis, MN (2006)



Side Chapel in the Church of Ste. Genevieve
(2022)



Iron Oxide Refining Plant
St. Louis, MO (2018)



Museum Interior
Philadelphia, PA (2010)



Side Table in Cabin
Godfrey, IL (2021)



Entrance to Ballroom
St. Louis, MO (2019)

