



▲ *The Step of a Dream*, 2002 (analog photography, B/W negative).

So Near, So Far, So Alien, So My Own

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Today's world is an interminable mosaic of realities changing at an impressive pace. The days are hurried: there's too much information, too many images and experiences of all kinds; the mixture of emotions we feel about love, friends, places, social contrasts, political changes, environmental problems, cultural transformations and even globalization. We are constantly adjusting to new technologies, new governments, economic outbursts, in a complex combination of the speed of our own lives and that of the world. We barely have time to take a pause, make a space that would let us assimilate it all. This causes that sea of loneliness and depression so characteristic of Man in the modern era.

Actually I didn't plan my road to photography, although I wanted to do it for a long time. I had always loved images, perhaps because they brought me closer to nature. That's why I decided to study biology because I wanted to be in the places that I saw in photos and documen-

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▲ *Shawl Girl*, 2002 (analog photography, B/W negative).

society. So, I discovered a rural Mexico that nobody tells us about, even if we know that it's there, abandoned and transforming itself by leaps and bounds. Above all, poor, with production that barely supports a family; marked by marginalization, spurring migration to the cities and the other side of the border, to the United States. It's a countryside that cannot find its place in this fast-moving world, which may have left it behind, even though it feeds that world, which cannot live without it.

This is where this perception of what is my own and what is alien, what is near and what is far starts from. When I was in the countryside, I realized that that nature, those towns, those people are my own, as though I carried them within myself, as though the poverty reconciled us again with the essence of the human condition, so closely linked to the struggle for survival. I could only feel them as a forgotten part of myself. But at the same time they are alien because I didn't know them personally, neither them nor their universe.

taries. But the whole thing still hadn't come full circle: once I had become a biologist, those landscapes, those other realities awoke in me the need to create images to be able to share my experiences.

Being close to nature transformed my conception of life and the world. Somehow, I remembered what my hurried day-to-day existence had made me forget: the sun, the sky, the air, the mountains, the trees, the earth, the silence. That overwhelming silence that really speaks and asks, and when it does, you want to find yourself in the noise of the city because its questions make you uncomfortable. That same silence, that other times allows you to see clearly what before had seemed so confusing. In those immense open spaces surrounded by mountains, I once again felt fragile, small, mortal; I located my relationship to the universe, the world; a tiny body with so much inside it, so much to do and express.

However, in this country, landscapes are rarely uninhabited; nature is not an isolated element; rather, it exists in communion with

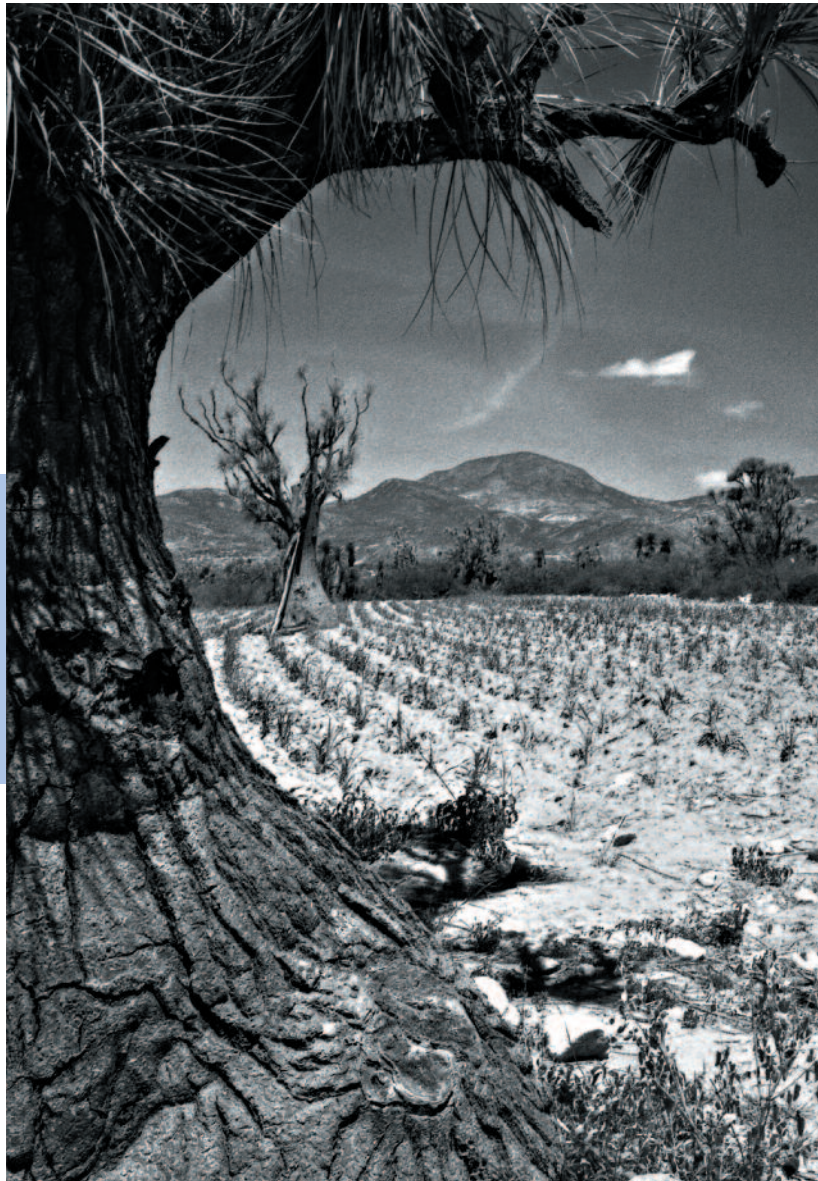


▲ *Before the Rain*, 2001 (analog photography, B/W negative).

Also, I had no idea of what Mexican cultures involved, discovering that each one had its own language, its own customs, its food, its natural resources, its sacred places and its fiestas.

When I perceived this vacuum born of my own ignorance, I realized I was alien to those towns, so completely far from my day-to-day existence. From that duality this photographic work was born. I intended to show what that combination of nature and people awakens in me. To do that, I had to get closer. Some of my photographs were taken in a Cuicatec community in Oaxaca and others in a Popoloc community in Puebla; both these cultures are little known by anthropologists.

I felt above all the urgent need to record daily life so it would not be lost and forgotten, so we could place new value on the opportunity to look, to live. In that countryside where nothing seems to happen, changes occur that are reflected in the disappearance of languages, customs, caused by the times, by migration.



▲ *Field with Elephant's Feet, 2002* (analog photography, B/W negative).

When we can do almost nothing, we content ourselves with just bearing witness, but I didn't want to be a passive witness who steps aside to let things happen. These images are a search and an attempt to express, to communicate what this situation brought about in me and I wanted to provoke in others.

This series is my first work as a photographer. With it, I discovered a universe new to me, while for others it is a well-worn path in Mexican photography. Today some photographers say they are tired of images of the Mexican countryside, and a gap seems to be opening up between those who do direct photography and those who do constructed photography. The change from analog to digital photography is advancing by leaps and bounds. It is said that documentary photography is in crisis, and there are still those who criticize digital work because it is very manipulated by computer.



▲ *Tehuacán Landscape*, 2002 (analog photography, B/W negative).



▲ *From Your Field*, 2002 (analog photography, B/W negative).

This complex dilemma is confusing at first, but then it motivates us because it shows that the way forward has thousands of possible routes. Documentary photography invites us to propose new ways of making documentaries, perhaps experimenting with a hybrid of direct and constructed photography so that instead of widening the distance between the two kinds of photographers, the photo, its substance, can be renewed, reborn and transformed, finding a language of this time, recreating and using all the tools: direct, constructed, analog and digital. At bottom, the important thing is that the basic questions about what we feel, think and want to say through images find their own way forward toward the answers. Those answers will only be validated by time, by people who, when they look at the images feel, share and confirm for us that snapping the shutter at that precise moment was indeed important. **MM**