Mexico:  
Between Life and Death

Since 1993 I have photographed in Mexico during ten short trips (eight to 14 days per trip), primarily in small towns and villages and often during festivals (Day of the Dead, Easter, Independence Day) that highlight the country's unique relationship to death, myth, ritual and religion.

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Mexico is where the real merges with the imaginary, the living with the dead and the half-remembered with the once-sensed.

My photographs of Mexico are more of an illusion than a representation of reality. I am committed to the world embodied in a fraction of a second, to the ordinary made transcendent. The images show fragments of what Mexico is, a country of incredible contrasts and contradictions. Mexico is about piercing light and deep shadow, of hot stillness and quick explosiveness, of massive tradition and creeping progress, of great religious belief but with corruption as a way of life. It’s a land of vibrant life and dancing skeletons, a country next to ours yet so far away, a country with more than 50% of its population under 20 years old but where old age is revered.

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When I am in Mexico, I am a stranger photographing in a country strange to me. I hear words I cannot comprehend, I see things I don’t understand, I view acts of kindness and violence, I smell new odors; I walk down small cobblestone streets I don’t know. I react intuitively; this works to my advantage because it eliminates my biases, my intellectualizing, my pondering and frees me to act and react quickly, without mind filters. Later is for thinking. Now is for shooting, moving, being physical, getting to the right spot at the right time. When in Mexico, I am dizzy with new experiences and free to go anywhere and to do anything. The feeling is of endless possibilities. I am restrained only by my own limitations.

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My aim is to pierce the ever-present mysteries of this multifaceted county, to illuminate our understanding through the exploration of Mexico’s special alliance with life and death, and to reveal one man’s fascination with Mexico’s culture, people and endless contradictions.

Coney Island:  
Fantasy Without Illusion

Coney Island is different than any other amusement park I know. It’s multicultural with people of all shapes, sizes, colors, languages and behaviors. There are no forced enjoyments of phony facades. Coney Island is grimy and authentic, honest and straightforward. It hits you in the face with full force.

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It stays in my mind long after I’ve left, like a movie or song that I can’t seem to get out of my head. The only illusion is the easy life it seems to promise with its eternal sun, sand and ocean. It’s where you bring yourself fully into play rather than being passively manipulated. It’s a place where it’s all up to you, where you can see the world as it really is, and so know yourself as you really are—or ought to be.

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Coney Island is a cultural icon of contradictions and complexities, a fantasyland of the past with a seedy present and an irrepressible optimism about its future. It’s the poor man’s Riviera, the real Disneyland. It’s where human polar bears still cavort, mermaids parade, the snake charmer offers up her albino python and burly men and woman stuff themselves to the max at Nathan’s famous hot-dog eating contest every Fourth of July.

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Coney Island is deeply embedded in my soul; I go there to find renewal and inspiration, to meet new people, to witness the astonishing mix of humanity and to make photographs. Is it any wonder that photographers are constantly attracted to Coney Island? In the ever-gentrifying milieu of New York City and America, Coney Island remains an oasis of decay and funkiness—but not for long—hope and joy, uninhibited behavior and visual stimulation. It has engaged my mind and eye for over 30 years. I owe it a great deal. It has endlessly captivated me, tickled my fancy and helped me understand my fellow man, made my life richer and fuller. If only the rest of the world could be a little more like Coney Island.