



CHRISTOPHER BROWN - PHOTOGRAPHS

Fine prints of the Western American landscape



BOULDER CREEK WATERSHED

Boulder Public Library

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Loren Eiseley said, "If there is magic on this planet it is contained in water." and this magic is magnetic.

Everyone has a personal mental notion of water inside his head. It may be poetic inspired by a poem such as *Ladore*, or literary, from Twain's *Huck Finn*, or visual, derived from some piece of art which has stuck with you. Close your eyes and make a quick check of what image comes to mind when you think of water.

Art and reality interact and influence each other in elusive ways. We expect (representational) art to represent reality. What we don't realize is that we unconsciously expect reality to match art! Landscape art, (painting and photography) have set our notions of what nature looks like, and as we think about or look at the landscape-most often we imagine or expect to see something that looks like this notion.

Chances are your mental image of a watershed may be in this show. Hopefully the rest of the art will be different from that, expanding and stretching your notions and thereby enriching your life with something new. If you find yourself thinking: "That doesn't look like what I think a watershed is..." you are at the boundary between your notion and the artist's notion. Feel free to step across and share the experience!

"Straight" photography is the art of seeing what is simply before us. We each see the world in our own personal way, and a photographer is committed to expressing his personal view in his prints. Consider for a moment straight photography as the art of seeing what is in front of us, outside us, and painting as the art of presenting images from inside the artist's head, putting them outside, in front of us. Photography shares a personal view of the external, physical world, exploring it, and teaching us how to see. Painting can explore an internal, personal world and share a view of that world by externalizing it.

Both become art if the result is metaphorical, and the viewer's experience is emotional more than documentary. However, the experience of resonance which many photographers report suggests that he is just looking around for external views which match/resonate with internal views already in his head; and thus there is more in common between painting and photography than one might suppose.

I find water endlessly interesting, variable, and unpredictable to photograph. Some photographs are about the water and some are about what the water sees: reflections of light and other things; or a combination of both. Moving water changes. When we look at moving water, we sometimes see it with soft eyes: the water is smooth and flowing. A long shutter speed accumulates and merges the shapes into a record of its flowing over time, like soft eyes. When we look at falling water with hard eyes, and move our eyes with the motion of the water, we might see individual droplets and unusual shapes frozen in time. An unusually fast shutter speed will capture sculptural shapes, which only exist for a thousandth of a second, and then are gone forever. Even with a fast finger on the shutter, it is often impossible to know exactly what the film will record at the precise moment of exposure.

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The prints I have included in this suite are just several glimpses of moving water that I have passed by in my rambles about. One common element is that the shapes and textures of the water are caused by its movement over rocks, in a continuously changing interaction between the soft and the hard.

I often think about Lao Tzu's poem:

"What is more fluid, more yielding than water?
Yet back it comes again, wearing down the rigid strength
Which cannot yield to withstand it.
So it is that the strong are overcome by the weak,
The haughty by the humble.
This we know / But never learn...."

Water nourishes us. It is an essential biological and spiritual resource. We must treat it with utmost respect. I love to look at water, listen to it, photograph it, sleep by it, travel on it in boats, over it on skis, and drink it! It's a source of endless fascination, amusement and contemplation. If I am reincarnated, I want to be a water molecule. I can go almost anywhere and be almost anything. I can fly through the air, flow across the ground, and travel through people's bodies. I can be an icicle, a snowflake, a drop of rain, a cloud, an ocean, a lake, or a river. "If there is magic on this planet it is contained in water."

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