

SYNCHRONICITY

A Collection *of* Photographs



MICHAEL JOSEPH

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DEDICATION

To the one who first loved me.
Thank you.

“Synchronicity is the coming together of inner and outer events in a way that cannot be explained by cause and effect and that is meaningful to the observer.”

Carl Jung, Psychologist

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

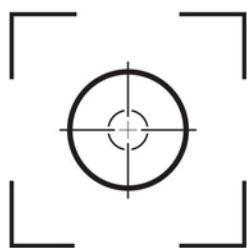
Peace + Love

To all the wonderful hands and hearts who contributed
to the making of this book, and to all that may encounter it.



CONTENTS

FOREWORD, by Anthony Scime	09
INTRODUCTION	11
SYNCHRONICITY	12
NORTHEAST	19
BELTWAY	55
DEEP SOUTH	83
MIDWEST	115
WEST COAST	153
INTERNATIONAL	193
AFTERWORD, by Jason S. Tosta	235
INVOCATION, by Reverend Antoinette L. Cave	237
CURRICULUM VITAE	239



FOREWORD

Occasionally, someone comes along to change your perspective on life, and shows you that today is magical, there is a whole world out there to explore, and anything may occur. A moment in time when we realize there can be truth, beauty and knowledge in everyday experiences. Michael Joseph has established an award-winning signature style of photography that captures an extraordinarily beautiful view of the ordinary. He is praised for his ability to present a combination of sophistication with a sense of drama from an otherwise barren, cold and isolated landscape of concrete and steel.

The process of photographing an object, not the object's innate value, makes it worthy of attention. The photograph plays with an illusion, alluding to the true nature and character of the subject. His interpretations of architecture and isolated objects render compelling thrusts and counterthrusts, sharp focus and detail, and offer a unique prospective flowing with symmetry and balance. The subjects are attuned to a unique perspective in which they lose any sense of function and become monumental forms.

Michael Joseph reveals a moment in time where lines, light, shape and shadows converge together, composing a striking art form of its own. There is an unexpected joy of discovery throughout each city including the breathtaking icons of New York City, the excitement of Chicago in pure architectural form, Miami in classical Art Deco majesty, Los Angeles as never seen before, and Paris in a fresh new way. An architectural detail freshly revealed in the space the eye easily dismisses in a crowded skyline, the juxtaposition of the natural and urbane, and the deep black-and-white contrast, these distinctive descriptions are all recognizably the work of a master photographer.

Anthony Scime, Creative Designer



INTRODUCTION

Synchronicity comprises a collection of 210 photographs that I made during the past thirty years from 1994 to 2024. In that amount of time, I have made many thrilling adventures to all 48 contiguous United States and several international locations. These images are my most memorable moments, patron favorites, notably published, and award-winning photographs. The book is divided into six chapters: Northeast, Beltway, Deep South, Midwest, West Coast and International. Each chapter opens with a short review of my photography, as written by a reputable individual within the art industry by way of newspaper, magazine, museum, and gallery.

My passion for photography began as a child while I watched my father magically make images appear before my eyes with his Polaroid camera. I was intrigued, and the impressionistic act exemplified creation, wonderment, and the joy of discovery. Now, I desire to bring a moving experience to the viewer of my photographs, and to present an extraordinary view of the ordinary. I enjoy traveling and making photographs, and together, the combination brings me a heightened sense of awareness. I have a natural attraction to metropolitan architecture, and I am seeking a new dimension that is inherent by light, shadow, time and space. It is an instantaneous event that occurs unknowing to the architects, planners and builders.

The art of photography is the medium of the moment. Seemingly as spontaneous as a snapshot, the image does not emerge mechanically from the camera, but stylistically from the mind of the artist. My approach is similar to that of a painter or sculptor, in striving for composition and aesthetic vision. It is not to get lost in the detailed technical process, but rather to simply behold beauty. On the surface, looking at photographs is compelling enough. However, seeing deeper into the imagery reveals a more thought-provoking symbolic message of inspiration and hope.

“I believe there is a place that exists within, a place of vision and clarity, where my life moves in agreement with a higher consciousness.”

Michael Joseph, Photographer

SYNCHRONICITY

It was an early morning in October 2000, and I was sleeping peacefully, that is until I was startlingly awakened by the telephone ring. I don't often intend to rise before the sun, and I certainly do not appreciate my dreamtime being disturbed. However, this call had a peculiar sound, like opportunity knocking. Indeed, it was. The owner of the Elaine Baker Gallery in Boca Raton, Florida, requested to look at my photography portfolio - right now! She's a very busy woman that deals exclusively with important artists on a regular basis. I understand that getting her undivided attention is precious, so I get up, get out and get going.

Sitting in her office, I watched closely, doing my best to conceal my anxiousness, as she flipped quickly through the pages. My portfolio at this period was minimal and consisted of about 30 photographs from various cities. Then suddenly, she stopped at a photograph of a Manhattan skyscraper, and exclaimed, "That's it. I want New York. You have a show, and it opens in two months. Do you have more images of New York?" Looking her straight in the eyes, with a big confident grin on my face, I reached out to shake her hand and said, "Yes, of course I do," hoping she didn't detect my sweaty palms or hear the slight crack in my voice. Slamming the book shut and tendering it back to me, I was then directed to return next week, and together we would select the photographs for the exhibition. Great, no problem, see you then, I replied.

I jumped into my Jeep and raced back to my studio, knowing that there were a few slight problems. First, I truthfully only had three photographs of NYC, the best one of those in the portfolio. Secondly, I didn't have a functioning camera. I recently returned home from a month-long shoot in Paris. On the last day there, my old reliable Canon AE-1 with 28mm and 50mm lenses (handed down to me from my dad) finally quit working, but only after serving me so well. I was fully conscious of what immediately had to be done. I went online and purchased a one-day roundtrip ticket to the Big Apple, departing early the next morning.

I was financially stretched at this period in my life - the cliché of a starving artist, photographer by day and waiter by night. Later that afternoon, I got together with my close friend David and told him about my current situation. He runs a consignment shop in town and is always willing to make a deal. He recognized my predicament as a prospect, of course to help me, and avidly himself. In the backroom a mutual agreement was made - an offer I couldn't refuse. It was short and simple, like what you would expect at a pawn shop, or a sit down with Don Luigi. A handwritten contract was written on whatever scratch paper or napkin was

available, and I proceeded to sign on the dotted line with aka Mr. Needful Things. Next, with cold hard cash in hand, I immediately went to my local camera shop, where the dealings would be, let's say, more upfront. They had just taken in a trade, a slightly used Canon EOS 3 with a 24-85mm Canon Ultra Sonic Lens, complete with original box and manuals. It was far more camera than I was familiar with, nevertheless, but the price was right. The pleasant sales associate at the camera shop told me "I deserve it, and it would only make me happy." That said, it was done.

I consider myself a "street photographer" with unconventional means and ways. I always keep my gear to a minimum, enabling me to move about unencumbered and unnoticed. I always prefer to travel light, with no checked luggage, just a backpack with a few articles of clothing, some toiletries, and the forementioned minimal camera gear. I never use a tripod and would buy my film in the city (airport X-ray machines can be harmful to film). The next morning, on the flight to NYC, I read the camera manual, learning this is a multi-functional camera with plenty of modes beyond my needs for today. For right now, I will manually set the shutter and aperture, my standard operating procedure using the AE-1. The extremely sharp auto-focus is a welcome bonus, and I will positively rely on the precise built-in light meter.

Touching down at LaGuardia, it was an unforgettable blue-sky day, the air was crisp n' cool, and the perfect autumn day was unfolding before my eyes. In weather-report terms, it was UCAV (Unlimited Ceiling and Visibility). With no baggage to claim, I quickly exited the terminal and got into a waiting taxi. I told the driver to head to a legendary landmark, known to most any amateur or professional photographer as B&H Photo. By 10 a.m. there's already a line forming outside waiting for the doors to open. I patiently wait for my turn to enter, and in a New York minute, I am ushered in and out with 10 rolls of pure magic: Kodak TMX Pro 100 /36 exp. I'm ready to go. Wait, I need coffee!

I sip and think, and sometimes I just sip. Getting into the right frame of mind is key. It's important that I walk at a slow pace and with a heightened sense of awareness. I begin seeking to compose shots from the crowded architectural landscape. I infrequently raise the camera to my eye to look through the viewfinder. I have used the same lens consistently and know what it will achieve. I don't shoot a lot of frames of film, and especially excessive angles of the same thing. I find it time consuming and difficult to edit later. Knowledge and understanding of the craft are far superior to guesswork. I have further committed to trusting my intuition, or what I like to refer to as my GPS (God Positioning System).

“Click,” “click,” “click.” I have it, I'm on, and I'm all fired up! It's nearly 11 a.m., I make the first shot, *Wall Street* (page 18), while jaywalking across a busy intersection and looking straight up between two modern monoliths. Elapsed time 250/f11. Everything's where it is supposed to be; light, shadow and me. I'm acquainted with NYC; I grew up in a small country town in Connecticut and made regular excursions here via the Metro train. It was only an hour's ride, and always adventurous. Aware of the sun's movement on this day, and how it would track across the sky, I decided to work from the north, and make my way south to the island's end. Mindfully, stepping away from the cacophony of morning rush hour, I took the road less traveled into Central Park. A peaceful stroll along a meandering footpath guided me to *Turtle Pond* (page 20), where I spontaneously captured a beautiful mirror reflection of trees and buildings, water and sky. I made several other photographs throughout the saunter and then vigorously exited back into the mainstream street hustle at Fifth Avenue. There, poised towards the heavens was *St. Patrick's Cathedral* (page 21). My first thought was how I would make a photograph of this that was unlike the hundreds I've seen before - that is the real challenge. I have disciplined myself to not overstate the obviousness of the subject by putting it in plain view on the center frame, but rather, to abstract it. To somewhat obscure it in such a way that it becomes reframed and requires you to concentrate when viewing it. I am committed to high contrast and emphasize form over function. I recall with this photograph that it was high noon, and I was trying to block the sunlight that was causing lens flare. Taking cover in a doorway across the street, I laid flat on my stomach against the warm pavement and would use the 28mm wide-angle lens at 125/f16 to capture it. And, since I was already on the ground, I figured it could not hurt to get on my knees, for a moment of silent prayer, to go along with thanking my lucky stars.

Speaking of stars, these two Midtown legends, *Chrysler Building* (page 22) and *Empire State Building* (page 23), resemble super models. They are captivating to look at and are exhilarating to be with. The method I follow here is much like how a fashion photographer approaches his work. That is, to persuade a relationship with the subject and take the time to initiate a deeper connection. Typically, there will be a certain unexplainable chemistry that happens, a oneness connection. Looks can be superficial and fleeting. People, places and things that are so grandiose and breathtakingly beautiful can have an overwhelming effect upon you. Such that in their presence you're not even sure how to act and things become awkward. I have found that instead of trying to take it all in, which can result in exhausting defeat, I go with the philosophy of less is more. It has been said that true art disguises itself in apparent simplicity, and good design is an exercise in restraint. I agree, and in my signature style of photography, I attempt to create the illusion of revealing and concealing simultaneously.

That said, exposure is the art of photography. Dialing in the correct camera settings can also be a challenge. A voluminous amount of my photographs are made during peak sunlight hours, and the bright sky makes up for a large area of the composition. This causes the light meter to be in constant flux, and I must continually adjust to it. Knowing what is tried and true, I ignore the sporadic blinking in my viewfinder, lock in the aperture and shutter at 500/f13, and gently press the button. I express my appreciation towards the talent with a sly wink and confidently walk off the set. Paradoxically, I'm often asked why there are no people in my photographs. I will keep the answer brief; I feel that people would be a distraction aesthetically to the composition and a separateness to the whole of what I aim to communicate symbolically through my photographs.

Meandering through the canyon of concrete, glass and steel, my external surroundings become surreal. My mind, body and soul are balanced and harmonized. I am deep in thought, almost in what can be described as a trance or meditation. This is perhaps similar to the mindset of an athlete, who through discipline and practice, miraculously performs a game-winning score at the buzzer. It's like being in a dream, and since you are the dreamer, you create whatever you want within it. I am not preoccupied with anything else, I'm in the moment. My thoughts are not further distracted with concepts of "will this photograph sell?" or "does this fit in with a particular series?" I foremost shoot for my own interest, and without trying to appease anyone in the process. Modestly expressed, I know what I like by knowing what I don't like. I have passion for being out in the city, doing what I love, and experiencing this divine energy flowing through me unimpeded by any attachments to the outcome. I have come to understand that detachment from outcome and external opinions are vital to creativity and free flow. A course in miracles.

It's late afternoon and I feel confident in what I have managed to shoot thus far. I take a moment to check on my film supply and see that I have seven in the can (film industry slang: finished film). I have three rolls of film remaining, and the city has plenty more to offer. Manhattan is made up of several individual districts and each provides its own distinct elements. There are places named Hell's Kitchen, The Village, SOHO, Chinatown, Little Italy, The Bowery, and The Battery. There's a lot to see and do in the city, and I must confess there's been one shot I'm intent on making on this day. The *Brooklyn Bridge* (page 31) is perhaps one of the most famous New York City landmarks. And, before I can even begin shooting, I take a moment to catch my breath and pause in awe of its magnitude. The conditions right now are as equivalent to the word perfect, as described by Webster - it's the golden hour. I feel deeply connected with everything, everywhere, and all at once.

This is precisely when and where unencumbered and unnoticed take precedence. It is also an occasion in which fearlessness replaces casualness. I know, to accomplish the extraordinary, I must go beyond the ordinary. In a word - trespassing (someplace I am not supposed to be, doing what I shouldn't be doing). The photograph *Crosstown* (page 27) is a prime example. I impulsively climb up, out, and onto one of the iron girders to a vantage point known only to the locals - the seagulls. From our perch, overlooking the East River, this opportunity requires the awaited use of the red filter. The applied effect enhances the unfolding drama of light and shadow. Safely back on the ground, and before the curtain of darkness completely fell, I would make one lasting photograph at the lower end of the island. It would forever change my life and become known around the world. However, I would not know this for some time to come. Keep reading and I will come back to further explain.

Making my way back uptown to *Times Square* (page 34). This photograph was the catalyst in my portfolio, which caused Mrs. Baker to exclaim "I want NY!" On Broadway, like a moth to a flame, I'm drawn to the twinkling lights and warm glow of neon. Nearby is *Radio City* (page 35) looking ever so enigmatic on this evening. The film that I purchased is primarily for bright light/daytime conditions, which allows for faster shutter speed, the advantage being you can hand hold the camera and make sharp and in-focus shots. On the contrary, the film is not for use in darkness/night...unless you desire blurry photos. I tempt fate and experiment with the final roll of 36. This requires a setting of 15/f5.6, and I use a readily available object, a parked black limousine (car hood) as a tripod, not only for stability, but to incorporate as subject matter. Inspiration, not imitation - this photograph is my homage to legendary NYC photographer Alfred Stieglitz.

I caught the red eye back home, slept undisturbed, and by mid-afternoon was ready to start processing the film and printing contact sheets. I have become a welcome regular at the photo lab in town, which specializes in developing and printing of traditional black-and-white film photography. Rory is a master in the darkroom and knows how to accomplish getting my unconventional photographic style - stark whites with deep black contrast. Preparing for an exhibition requires a process of steps. Step One: circle all the photographs that I like on the contact sheet. Step Two: print 4"x6" proofs of these. Step Three: look through them and narrow down the selection to make larger 8"x12" proof prints. Step Four: select from these prints to make final larger 36"x48" prints for the exhibition. And finally Step Five: sign the prints and deliver them to the framer.

Ordinarily, I would not touch the film for at least a month. I like forgetting about it and putting the photo shoot out of my mind. This is where the practice of detachment comes in. There is so much energy that goes into photography and travel that it feels good to shut down and decompress for a while. After some time has passed, I come back to the photographs with fresh eyes, and it's easier and faster for me to pick out the best shots. However, I must be cautious not to like a photograph only because of an emotion or pleasurable memory linked to making it. If I become attached to an emotion, I may select a photograph that is not fantastic. And the opposite can be true, a photograph I don't even recall making can be surprisingly amazing. If you have someone you can confide in and trust as an editor, a second set of eyes can be a big help.

Getting back to the Elaine Baker Gallery, where this narrative began. I humbly take my seat again at her desk, with her looming over me peering at my new portfolio of New York City. I could feel the heat coming down. OK, I must confess, I'm only having fun with you describing the stereotypical gallery owner as a *Darth Vader* type character. Honestly, that is the furthest from the truth. Elaine Baker is one of the nicest and sweetest people I have ever met. She is filled with kindness, compassion, and is sincerely passionate about art. She is thrilled to discover some new up-and-coming fresh talent (yours truly) and give them a start to a long and successful career. Together, we had an enjoyable time selecting the photographs and organizing all the details for the *New York, New York* premiere exhibition. The show was a huge success, in so many ways for so many involved, to which I remain forever thankful and grateful.

Fast forward, nearly one year later, an early morning in September 2001, and a phone call would awaken me again from my slumber. This calling had a certain vibration of somber news. It was September 11th. In my NYC film archives, there was a single frame waiting for its time. Truly, the time had come. It was that lasting photograph I mentioned earlier. The photograph titled *In God We Trust* (page 32) was made while walking from the Brooklyn Bridge over to Chambers Street, bound for the subway heading back up to Midtown. I noticed the silhouette of the cross upon St. Peters Church, and how it was juxtaposed with the glowing windows of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers in the background. I acknowledged this without breaking stride, that is until I hesitated at the entrance of the subway station stairs. The feeling, intuition, inner voice, call it what you will, said to go back and make the photograph. Obeying, I turn from the subway, retrace my footsteps back in time, to make the photograph. And to make history. However, that is another story, for another time.



NORTHEAST

Michael Joseph's dramatic black and white photographs can be seen in Fortune 500 companies located in New York City high-rise office buildings, a trendy South Beach Miami restaurant, on the set of Showtime's drama "Dexter" and now in the home accessories retail department of Bloomingdale's.

Joseph is a photographer best known for his striking black and white images of structures and architecture. His passion for photography began as a hobby, which he turned into a profession and a business. In the humble beginning, he borrowed his father's AE-1 Canon camera and went out making "cityscape" photographs. He had his film developed at a local photography lab, where the owner encouraged him to pursue making more photographs, that what he was seeing was a gifted talent and ability.

Joseph methodically created a signature style and several series of photographic works. He says, "As a self-taught artist, I had established my own feel for black and white photography and did not follow any rules or traditional guidelines. There would be no dos and don'ts, I just did what I felt was right for me. Much of my style was emphasizing high contrast." New York City has become the quintessential body of work for him, and the most recognizable of his work. His NYC photographs have been published in calendars, featured in television shows, held in important museums, and celebrity collections.

He feels fortunate that he has found himself in the right place at the right time. He has a memorial photograph of the World Trade Center titled "In God We Trust", that has become a very significant historical photograph shared around the world. Joseph credits his success in part to his divine passion. He also says, "You must know your purpose in life, if you know that, the meaning will be evident."

Lynn Peithman Stock, Go Riverwalk Magazine

Wall Street, New York City



Turtle Pond, New York City



St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City