Photographs 1982-1983

Barbara Bosworth

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Photographs 1982-1983

by

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"Our land is more valuable than your money. It will last forever. It will not even perish by the flames of fire. As long as the sun shines and the waters flow, this land will be here to give life to men and animals.... You can count your money and burn it within the nod of a buffalo's head, but only the Great Spirit can count the grains of sand and the blades of grass of these plains. As a present to you, we will give you anything we have that you can take with you; but the land never."

So spoke a Blackfoot chieftain in regard to his people's view of the land. In this age of "ecology" it is difficult to talk about the land without discussing the environmental factors of man upon nature. The ecology movement has given us more university programs and research studies, but these numbers and statistics have not taught the love and respect needed for a complete understanding of our tie to the earth. This can only come by direct association and observation of nature.

Central to my photographs is my sincere and uninhibited love for the land. In this paper I will discuss the development of my relationship with the land including the influences of some Native American concepts and how trees represent my connection with the mothering power of the earth.

II

I remember as a child of ten, visiting New England archeological sites and seeing the reconstructed Indian villages uncovered from the earth. I was curious about their way of life so removed by time and culture. Standing in the midst of the sites I could sense an inexplicable relationship with these ancient people. I wanted to find similarities between their life and my own to explain this connection. I concluded it was because they lived in a forest not unlike the Ohio forest.
I grew up in.

Later, when I traveled to the Southwest in my early twenties and saw the cliff dwellings of the Anasazi Indians for the first time, I experienced the same unexplained feeling with them. The familiar forest home was replaced by canyon walls, so this time I could not explain the feeling due to similar home surroundings. I began to look deeper for reasons to this connection by finding out more about their life.

Through writings of Native Americans, I learned more about their culture and found their inner life of thoughts and beliefs revolved around the land, as did their existence depend on the land. Their attitude of love and respect for nature was like my own.

My childhood home was in the hardwood forests of northeastern Ohio. The first eighteen years of my life I lived on my parents' wooded property. These twelve acres were a place for me to play with friends or to spend time alone, away from parental restraints. Because of this contact I learned to love the forest, not to fear it. I recall my maternal Grandfather and my Father would take me on long walks through the woods and show me things I could only read about in school. Each walk became a time to closely observe the life around my home. I could see for myself the place where water comes from the earth and a spot where the deer sleep at night. I saw remains of a struggle between a rabbit and the victorious hawk, and I discovered where the fox digs underground caverns and where the beaver builds a dam.

Each walk, whether alone or with my family, gave me greater understanding of the forest. The woods had a healing and reassuring effect on me. The concept of a "wild" land to be subdued and conquered grows out of ignorance and misunderstanding of a strange environment.

As a child I felt comfortable in the woods around my home due to
my familiarity with it. I knew where to cross the stream at high water and where the crawfish hide under the rocks in the stream bed and where the best grapevine to swing on was. I was never afraid of the life in those woods, except man. My only memory of being scared was caused by the unexpected presence of a group of hunters.

The basis of my relationship with the land is this bond I have with my home woods. Now, as an adult, living away from those woods my interactions with the land are attempts to gain the same intimacy with the woods wherever I am living. On my first walks through a forest new to me I am excited by the possibilities of what I will discover. This exploration takes me off established trails to look for the narrowest place to cross the stream or to find the deepest eddy for swimming.

As I spend more time in the "new" woods, my sensitivity and awareness develop. I become excited by all the possibilities of discovery. My responses go beyond the initial surface familiarity and I begin to sense the unique "personalities" and lives of the trees. It is not unlike what happens when I meet a person for the first time.

I remember how I felt when I discovered half of a strong, massive oak I was fond of had been shattered by lightning a few days earlier. One side lay broken and crippled while the other side, in contrast, seemed even more intent on living. I wanted to reach up to somehow soothe the wound to let the tree know I cared.

Because of my basic sense of caring for the life in the woods, forests have never appeared threatening or hostile to me. Even though I may not know the "new" woods with the same intimacy which comes from the eighteen years of contact with my home woods, I still can feel "at home". Again, it is similar to meeting a new person and after talking for only a few hours, feeling as if I have known her or him for years.
My notion of a non-hostile land is reinforced by the beliefs of Luther Standing Bear of the Oglala band of the Sioux Indians. "We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth as 'wild'....To us it is tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery...."²

My interest in the Native American concept of the land led me to work for the summer of 1979 in East Glacier, Montana, a small town located on the Blackfoot reservation. Here I met and became acquainted with members of the tribe. Although racism ran high and I was always an outsider, the children were open to me and I learned of some tribal beliefs through them. Once an eleven-year-old girl told me about her Grandmother, who lived alone on the prairie. The winter before, a blue bird had flown into her Grandmother's house and could not get out. She believed this to be the cause of the old woman's death. To me it seemed an odd thing to believe, but as I spent more time there I realized how deeply tribal life is tied to all living things and how such associations become a way of life.

I met an old member of the tribe in a small general store in Browning, Montana. This ninety-plus-year old man was trying to buy some new clothing but was becoming increasingly frustrated by the selection of only "white man's" clothes. When I showed concern for his problem, he told me about the clothing his people wore when he was a child and how it was designed to allow the air and rain to cleanse the body. He said he never got used to wearing long pants because they are "unhealthy". With a ready listener he was encouraged to continue about how he had no use for chairs or beds either because he preferred to sit and sleep on the earth. He could see and think clearer next to the mothering power
of the earth from which he received his strength and life. He believed the earth is the mother of all people and has a spirit.

The old man was angry about the way he had to live his life now and I felt as if I were being lectured by my own Grandfather about the changing times, but from those ten minutes in the general store I learned a lot about my own feelings toward the land.

His talk of a spirit present in the earth had a great effect on me. I began to think more about my own religious beliefs and to question the doctrines of the church I grew up in.

I was raised a Protestant. Every Sunday with my parents I attended service which consisted of sitting for an hour listening to a sermon with a group of people I did not know. These cold, regimented services were never comforting or reassuring. I never sensed a closeness to God while confined within the walls of the "sanctuary". To believe God was present in such a formidable place was difficult.

Going to church was a routine, as was the service. The rituals were the same each Sunday. The hymns we sang varied but the doxology always followed the offering which always followed the scripture reading. My participation became mechanical and meaningless. I followed the steps by rote, programmed by weeks of repetition. I became alienated from any divine spirit the services were meant to bring me closer to.

When I left home for college I no longer attended weekly services. Instead, I began substituting a walk by myself for the church. In the woods where I feel the warm sun or on a mountain ridge where I experienced the terror of being in a lightning storm, I can sense the presence of a divine power. I do not mean by this that I view my interactions with the land as a direct contact with God. Instead, I believe the land has a spirit and a life created by the same force that created me.
In school I was taught to view nature in categories. We classified and labeled life with foreign names. A child can not learn to love and respect the land through books. This can only be learned by direct association with nature. My Grandfather and Father knew this and showed me as much as they could. Children inherently love nature if given an opportunity to experience it. They are intrigued by things they see and want to learn more. Soon, through the process of formal education, their knowledge is arranged into categories and nature becomes a science.
IV

Trees have become for me a symbol of my association with the land. I love to stand close to a large tree to feel its strength and to stand over the subterranean roots solidly embedded deep into the earth. I sense a tree as having its own life force which explains the kinship I have with trees. At times I feel as one with them. They are born from the earth as are all living things including myself.

My interactions with trees comes from personal associations of my childhood. Trees are those special places I remember most. Either to climb up into the branches of the tallest one to reach the sky or to sit on the cool earth at the base protected in its shade from the summer's sun. My favorite tree was a giant sycamore at the edge of a bank over Lake Erie. From my private seat amongst its branches I could look out over the water and watch the sun set "into the lake".

Trees contain the mysterious, spiritual qualities important in my concept of the land. They represent both the strength and the nurturing power of the earth. The trees of my eastern woodlands are tall and strong. I am conscious of this power, not as a fearsome force, but as a protective one. They withstand the cold winds and hot sun so that I may enter their midst for protection from the elements.

Trees also represent the rhythms of the earth. I watch the trees give up their leaves every year and get them back again. From past experience I know these changes will continue. Through this assurance of continuity, I am aware of the permanence of nature. The earth will continue its cycles and it is from the earth that all life grows. Trees are a symbol of my optimism for an unbroken pattern of life.

Each tree arouses a different response in me depending on its age, size and environment. I respond with respect to a tree trying to hold
itself against an eroding cliff or stream bed, or one growing out of solid rock, for its perseverance to live. When I find a tree, tall and big around, I am aroused by its massive form. When I touch its strong trunk I can sense its powerful life force.

V

Thoreau, in his Journal dated December 30, 1851, describes how he watched the death of a pine tree. The tree "towered up a hundred feet as I afterward found by measurement, one of the tallest probably in the township and straight as an arrow...the most majestic tree that moves over Musketaquid...." The tree was killed by axemen for lumber. "A plant which it has taken two centuries to perfect, rising by slow stages into the heavens, has this afternoon ceased to exist....Why does not the village bell sound a knell? I hear no knell tolled. I see no procession of mourners in the streets, or the woodland aisles." Thoreau recognized, as I do, that there is life in a tree and he knew the sorrow from watching the destruction of that noble life.

In the woodlands around Rochester where most of the photographs for this project were made, I seldom find the giant trees of Thoreau's time. But when I do find one to photograph, I first spend time just observing the tree. All the space around the tree, the near/far relationships, are as important as the form itself.

Following a passage into a dense thicket or being in the midst of a grove of trees looking beyond to an open field gives the sense of penetrable space crucial to my concept of the protective woods. I want my photographs to present the forest as open and giving to anyone ready to receive.
Some of the color photographs were made in response to the dense growth. During my walk I had been following no path and found myself in the midst of tangled brush. I felt protected, not threatened by the wall of growth. (Slides 30 and 31)

Light is important in my notion of penetrable space; open and receptive. I think of light as a source of energy, as life-giving, even as a life-form on the same level as the trees. Light is another element of the landscape I can interpret to convey the sense of life and spirit in the woods.

A bright patch of sunlight at the end of a passageway suggests a spiritual presence inviting me to continue further into the space to enter into the ardor of the early morning sun. (Slide 21)

In many of my color photographs (Slides 12, 16, 41) the trees are shown reaching upward into the light to rejoice in its life-giving presence. In slide 12, the color of light shifts from a cool green surrounding the base of the trees to a warmer pink as the tips reach the sunlight. A viewer responds to these colors and feels the earth as a cool, refreshing place under the warm, seminal light.

In other pictures the soft, slightly misty light of early morning creates a serene atmosphere which communicates my concept of the protective woods. (Slides 1, 20, 34)

My black-and-white series of apple orchard trees is consistent with my concept of a giving land. The photographs were made after the "keepers" had cut and pruned the trees for more efficient fruit production. The severed limbs lay like corpses around the mutilated trees. As I walked through this orchard I realized how much the trees give us of themselves. I saw it as a sacrificing of their limbs for our gain. (Slides 48-53)
During one of my walks through the woods, I came upon a group of trees covered by some vines. I was intrigued by the delicate and intricate yet deadly intertwining of the vines. In this struggle for existence, the trees lend their support to the intruders which will gradually overcome them. Through the black-and-white vine series, I wanted to share with the viewer this sense of a silent struggle and intense power. (Slides 24 - 28)

My color photographs were made over the course of a full year. Through this I wanted to show the permanence of nature in her cycles. Color was chosen because of the wide variation in hues from season to season in the northeastern woods. Even the winters, normally considered to be only dead browns, is a season full of colors and of life. My color photographs of the winter woods, upon close examination, reveal greens of the reed-like grasses in the wetlands, and bright red markings in the bark of an old tree. Even the subdued yellowish-brown of the leaves still clinging to the oak becomes a bright color. (Slides 35-38)

I sense the forest in winter is not dead but full of life. The cycle is not broken then, but continues. The trees are awake, though silent, simply waiting for warmer weather to begin the next phase of their life cycle. This sense of life is emphasized in my photographs through the dancer-like gestures of the leafless limbs and the inclusion of the small, colorful patches in the undergrowth. (Slide 37)
The presentation of this body of photographs was held December 3 - 9, 1983 in the Photography Gallery of Rochester Institute of Technology, and consisted of fifty-three images in color and black-and-white. Slides of the thesis prints are included at the end of this report. The pictures included in the show were chosen from a larger group of negatives made during the year. As I made the negatives, they were contact printed. These 4 x 5 contact prints were used as a tool for determining which negatives would be included in the final show.

Editing, to me, is a continual process, constantly being revised. It was at this stage when the outside input of my board members was necessary as a guide to what other people see in my photographs.

Through direct representation of the subject matter I wanted to make my work accessible to the viewers. As stated in my proposal, "... I will attempt to arouse these latent experiences in the viewer." One editing criteria was to choose images which could be appreciated by an audience at many levels of experience. Pictures in which the light and colors used create a warm, pleasant atmosphere which may remind viewers of places they have been and want to return to, or which show the viewer something of the landscape they may not have been aware of. Yet these same images should go beyond simply a record of a place and should have a powerful and lasting impression on the viewer. Through editing, images were chosen with a delicate strength which may be missed during the first encounter but the subtleness of color and light brings a more experienced viewer back again, each time discovering more of the subtle details.

These fine details are important in my pictures. I used the 4 x 5 format to achieve greater clarity and detail in the enlargements than is
possible with a smaller negative size. The size of the finished prints was governed by this attention to detail. The black-and-white photographs were printed 11 x 14 to minimize loss of detail due to increased grain at greater enlargements. The color negatives held the fine details acceptably at 16 x 20, so the color prints were either 11 x 14 or 16 x 20. Those images in which the near-far relationships would be exaggerated to increase the sense of penetrable space were printed 16 x 20. Maintaining this sense of a three-dimensional space in a two-dimensional surface is crucial to conveying my idea of an hospitable land.

The prints were hung on the wall unmatted but framed. When pictures are surrounded by large white borders they become visually isolated from each other, making the viewer react to one image at a time. Without these borders, the effect of sequencing the pictures was more apparent.

Sequencing the photographs was another step in preparing the final presentation. Sequencing was to tie the images together in a visual order, relating one image to the next. On one wall the prints in slides 3 - 9 were hung. Black-and-white and color images were interspersed to help alleviate any monotony from repetition of subject matter.

To further break up the space of a long wall, a mixture of 11 x 14 and 16 x 20 prints was used. Prints of identical size hanging in a row exaggerates an already long wall, creating a space I find visually tedious. By altering print size and the spaces between prints, a more interesting flow was achieved.

For another grouping (slides 42 - 47) light was the unifying element, giving the whole wall a sense of heavy, late summer light.

Grouping the snow-covered landscape pictures (slides 35 - 38) together on one wall by themselves was to emphasize their subtle qualities.
The strength of these photographs is in their delicate color and lighting. The full effect of this is lost if the prints are viewed next to larger or more colorful pictures.

Gallery lighting was used to recreate the lighting in the images. By producing a lighting situation similar to that of the photograph, it was hoped to create an atmosphere for viewing which would allow the audience easier access for enjoying and understanding the images. The lighting for the wall of snow-covered landscape pictures was soft, diffuse and low level. This was used to reinforce the delicate lighting of the original scene. The wall with images 24 - 29 was lit by a harsh flood light directed on the middle images (slides 26 - 28) to repeat the harsh scene lighting. Because the images at each end of the wall (slides 24, 25 and 28) were made in diffuse light, the strong directional gallery light was allowed to taper off and was filled in with a small diffuse light at each end.
While I can not deny my European heritage and the value system of that culture as the basis for my lifestyle, I am aware of the influences from some Native American concepts of the land.

It is important for me to be open-minded enough to choose from outside influences ideas which reinforce my own beliefs or which can develop new values to guide my life.

From my schooling I gained a knowledge of nature on a scientific level. Yet this level of understanding does not allow a complete view of our tie to the earth. For this a direct interaction with nature is needed. As with Tantanga Mani, Thoreau had reservations about the need for science in all situations. In observing a natural phenomenon of "phosphorescent wood" he wrote: "I let science slide, and rejoiced in that light as if it had been a fellow creature.... A scientific explanation, as it is called, would have been altogether out of place here. Science with its retorts would have put me to sleep...."

Because of the contact I had as a child with the woods, I have an understanding of nature not obtainable through reading.

My photographs are a way for me to share this intimate connection to the land.
In discussing my photographs I wanted to express my ideas about the land and my reasons for the pictures I make. How these photographs fit into the history and aesthetics of landscape photography does not concern me here. I have chosen not to examine my pictures in the context of other photographer's work. This I will leave to others.
Footnotes


2. Ibid., 45.


Technical Appendix

All of the pictures for this project (except for one made with a 2½ camera) were made with a 4x5 Arca Swiss view camera between January 1982 and June 1983. The larger negative gave the added clarity and sharpness in the final print necessary for the intricate and subtle details important in my interactions with the woods.

The camera was fitted with a Zeiss Tessar 4.5/150mm. lens. This focal length was chosen because of its normal to slightly wide angle of view which renders the near/far relationships closely to the way I see. After February 1983, the pictures were made with a Fujinon W 5.6/150mm. lens. This newer design lens gave greater sharpness and shadow contrast to my negatives than did the old Zeiss.

For the black-and-white images I used Kodak Tri-X film. Exposures ranged from one to fifteen seconds. The negatives were processed in Kodak film developer D-76 diluted 1:1 with water in a tray. Development times were varied to control contrast. The vine series negatives were processed five minutes instead of my "normal" seven minutes. This was to reduce the effect of the harsh lighting. The negatives for the orchard series were processed to emphasize the gray, overcast lighting by preventing the sky from becoming too bright. By underdeveloping these negatives I was able to hold density in the sky of the final print.

The negatives were printed on glossy surface Portriga-Rapid developed in a modified formula of Dr. Beers' developer. I used a two-bath development. The first tray contained a low contrast solution while a second tray held a high contrast solution. The times in each tray varied depending upon the final result desired for each print.

For some of the apple orchard negatives I could not get enough density in the sky of the print even with underdevelopment of the nega-
tive. In these cases I pre-exposed the paper to white light to bring it up to its threshold density. To determine exposure times I exposed a test strip in one-half second increments with the lens stopped down to f45. I processed the strip normally. The time used for pre-exposure was one-half second less than the time of the first step to show just barely perceptible density.

After development the prints were rinsed in an acetic acid stop bath and then fixed. I used Kodak C-23 formula, a non-hardening fixer. This non-hardening characteristic reduces fixing time to two or three minutes, as well as allowing the prints to tone easier. The prints were then rinsed in Kodak Hypo Clearing Agent and washed.

The prints were selenium toned to intensify the blacks. I used Kodak Rapid Selenium Toner diluted 1:20 with Hypo Clear.

The color negatives were made on Kodak Vericolor Type L film. An 85B filter was used during exposure to balance the tungsten film to daylight. Type L film is manufactured for use with long exposure times making this film good for my large format photography outdoors where my exposure times range from one second to over a minute.

Most of the prints were made on Kodak Ektacolor 74 paper but Ektacolor 78 was used for a few negatives requiring a higher contrast. For the negatives too contrasty for the Ektacolor print material I lowered the contrast range of the negative by making a contrast reduction mask. This mask was made on Kodak Pan Masking film following standard masking procedure.

The prints were processed in a Kreonite color print processor. After processing by this machine I immersed the prints for thirty seconds in an eight per cent Ektaprint 3 Stabilizer solution.
Dr. Beers' Paper Developer

Part A

Water at 125°F (52°C) 3/4 gal.
Calgon (Sodium Hexametaphosphate) 8 gms.
Sodium Sulfite 4 gms.
Elon (Metol) 30 gms.
Sodium Sulfite 83 gms.
Sodium Carbonate 76 gms.
Anti-Fog #1 (Benzotriazole) 1 gm.
Water to make 1 gal.

Part B

Water at 125°F (52°C) 3/4 gal.
Calgon (Sodium Hexametaphosphate) 8 gms.
Hydroquinone 30 gms.
Sodium Sulfite 87 gms.
Sodium Carbonate 102 gms.
Anti-Fog #1 (Benzotriazole) 1 gm.
Water to make 1 gal.

Stop Bath

Water 32 oz. 1 liter
28% Acetic Acid 1/2 oz. 48 ml.

Kodak C-23 Fixer

Distilled water 3 gal.
Sodium Sulfite 81.6 gr.
Ammonium Thiosulfate Solution 3.8 liters
Sodium Bisulfite 118 gr.
Distilled water to make 5 gal.
Bibliography


Slides of the thesis prints are included here. They are numbered according to the order in which they were hung during the final presentation.
Thesis Proposal

Purpose
To share, through my photographs, the sensuality and mystery of the land.

Background
The smooth texture of tree bark against my face, my bare feet against the warm, moist earth, or the feeling of strength I get from looking at an old oak firmly grabbing the earth with its twisting roots. All these interactions, whether physical or emotional are, to me, the sensuousness of the land. The land to me has always been a place for walking, and I find myself returning often to experience these qualities of sensuousness. Yet my responses remain mysterious and intangible. Georgia O'Keeffe responds with a similar reaction when talking about her work. "The unexplainable thing in nature that makes me feel the world is big far beyond my understanding - to understand, maybe by trying to put it into form. To find the feeling of infinity on the horizon line or just over the next hill."  

My interaction with the land is through frequent long walks alone. As a child my "playground" was twelve acres of woods which I would retreat to often. Here my thoughts were my own, free to develop as I moved along. In walking I found a freedom from the constraints of daily activities. My thoughts would be stimulated by something I saw along the way. Often, in my mind, I would give members of the woodland community anthropomorphic qualities. If it were an old tree I had never seen before I would make up a story about its life. I learned from these
early walks that all things of the land have a life of their own and
how much of that I did not understand.

As I grew older, this relationship to the woodland remained, and I
began to explore these experiences through photography. My photographs
began as simple records of a place I wanted to keep; a memory of a
distant area that I may never return to. "I have used these things to
say what is to me the wideness and wonder of the world as I live in it."2
These early photographs were surface "snaps", never delving into what the
place meant to me, but they were the beginning of "trying to put it
into form".

Influences
My maternal grandfather, a painter, spent much time in the woods, painting
from nature, requiring hours of quiet observation. He would often take me
with him on these walks and would share his looking by telling me about
the things we saw. From my father I learned the importance of quiet
contemplation.

Photographic influences are many as my work is steeped in a long tradition
of landscape photography. Linda Connor, a contemporary landscape
photographer, has affected me through the primitive ambiance she creates in
her photographs of New England woodlands. This sensibility is a similar
one to the more formalistic photographs of Paul Caponigro, a photographer
who influenced my earlier aesthetic development.

Procedure
My aesthetic concerns will be directed by the desire to evoke a sensuous
response. Through the two-dimensional medium of photography, I will
attempt to arouse these latent experiences in the viewer. The work will
be accessible to the audience as my photographs will be a direct representation of my personal visual and emotional experiences. My photographs may only be a record of what I see, but they stand as a statement of my intimate relationship and respect I have for the land.

For this project I will use a 4x5 view camera to make both color and black and white pictures. The final body of work will include twenty to thirty 11x14 or 16x20 photographs.


2. Statement made by Georgia O'Keeffe in 1943.