

Richard Misrach

Exhibition:
3 thru
31 July

Artist's reception
6 July
8-10 pm

Richard Misrach was born on July 11, 1949. He has lived in the Berkeley area for the past 12 years. He attended the University of California, graduating with honors in 1971. The following year he received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to continue his work on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. As a result of those efforts TELEGRAPH 3 A.M. was published by Cornucopia Press in 1974. A second publication, A PHOTOGRAPHIC BOOK, containing images in our current exhibition, was released this last spring.

Since 1974, Richard Misrach has been awarded a second grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Ferguson Grant, Polaroid Corporation grant, Guggenheim Fellowship and a commission from American Telephone and Telegraph Corporation.

His photographs have been in numerous group exhibitions and one-person shows, including "Mirrors and Windows" which originated at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and is now showing at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

DAVID FAHEY: Could you elaborate on your formal treatment of monumentalizing subject matter in your photographs. Most of the views depict the central focus in the middle of the frame. Is there an explanation in which this characteristic serves a purpose?

RICHARD MISRACH: If I were to generalize the nature or position of my work at the present time, I would consider them studies--focused concentration of specific details of both overt subject matter, as in the desert of jungle vegetation, and photographic form. The former is about a personal iconography, the latter is

about limitations, properties and implications of the medium itself. The notion of the "good eye" as it implies the decisive moment or candid photography seems irrelevant to me; I'm rather interested in a persistent concentration or even meditation on pictorial information as it is so literally transcribed from the real world. McLuhan says "All space is pictorial." In one sense formally the way I'm dealing with this kind of centralized icon is kind of a response to Winnogrand or Friedlander. I use the metaphor of them drop kicking a football through the goalpost. They kind of always bounce the football off the edge, but they still make the score. I just make sure I kick it right through the center of the thing so you can see exactly what I'm talking about. Essentially the cactus photos are like botanical studies...the forms are isolated in a way where you can just look at them in a way that you can't do in the real world. I've centered them for that reason. I've used a static format, which is the square, to create a symmetry, a geometrical sort of relationship between the information that you find in the picture and that icon, or that centralized object, that becomes the subject matter. Even though there's information on the outskirts it becomes less prominent.

"Profoundly meditative, mystical, an aura of the primeval, unbridled drama of nature, hallucinatory images, spiritual, atmospheric evocativeness" are phrases used to describe your photographs. How do you respond to these interpretations from various critics across the country?

That's definitely their response.

How do you feel about ten people responding in ten different ways, or do you feel they're all

basically saying the same thing?

I think they're saying essentially the same thing...a certain kind of hit from the imagery...and I think that's legitimate. It seems very logical that that response is there, and I can get into that, but to me photographs are more about...let's put it this way--they're as much about that as they are just looking at studies of plants, studies of tonality.

Are you dealing with man and his relationship to nature, or man and his relationship to experiencing nature?

Post-facto I can decipher the photographs, and I can decipher them in a number of different ways. One of the ways I would do it is talking about the way the photograph appropriates nature, the way I did it, the formal means that I used. When you look at the photographs you very much have a feeling that the person photographing through the viewer has control over this environment. It's a subtle thing. It may be a little eerie, a little bit mystical...it has a whole realm of possible experiences.

Do you interpret your photographs literally or metaphorically?

I take them literally, but I photograph certain subject matter which has certain meaning to me, and I'm applying certain formal things to it. I'm coming up with a pictorial expression, but ultimately I'm more concerned in how it comes to look the way it does than I am in evoking some sort of mystical response. The mystical response that people have to my work has nothing to do with any kind of mystical experience that I might have in making the work or being in the



desert. In other words, the photographs are not records, like when somebody photographs a car accident you get certain information from the picture that responds somewhat literally to the event. Any mystical event that might have gone on while I was there you cannot find in the photographs.

Can you elaborate on what you consider formal problems?

Formal problems essentially have to do with the way the media affects pictorial expression. In other words, when you photograph a cactus whether you use a telephoto lens or a wide-angle lens, a square format or a 35mm format, silver prints or color, whether you tone your prints...all those things are materials of the medium that will affect ultimately your expression or the kind of evocation or the meaning of this kind of experience. For instance, I'm photographing the ground a lot now and the subject matter is essentially looking at the ground we walk on and becoming aware of things that we're constantly trespassing on and experiencing without even visually becoming attuned to it. So you can do that, but you can do that in a million different ways...using a square format as opposed to a rectangular format, or a triangular format, or using a wide-angle lens or close-up or distance, all those issues...how far, what point of view, what perspective you have on these things transform the innate subject matter itself. In other words, the ground is one thing and the photograph about it is obviously something very much different. Once you do that you change the meaning of the picture of the ground.

You change the meaning of the subject in the picture?

No, you don't change the meaning of the subject, you change the meaning of the picture. There's an infinite number of ways a picture can be made of the same subject matter. The subject matter's always going to be exactly the same, but our perception of it, our experience of it...in other words, people have responded to the pictures I make as mystical things, and they somehow carry the illusion further thinking that the place is this mystical, magical place. The desert is also a very barren place, a very lonely place, a very boring, uneventful place. The desert's just out there and has little to do with pictorial expression. Pictorial expression, again, is that notion we have that it's a lie, it's just an illusion of something else.

What words would you use to describe your photographs?

The first word that comes to mind is elegant, probably mystical or metaphysical simply because so many people have brought that up...I can't get that out of my head at this point... formal. I see them as a nice marriage between formal and expressionist properties. I see them both intertwined. That's all.

How much does this mystical interpretation affect your vision, say the original vision you might have had?

I would say it does in the sense that nothing else makes me fight it or question it. It's like any photograph you see--even if you don't like it, you kind of internalize it and either start working against it if that's not what you're intending, or you support it. I think it's a valid response. I wouldn't go that far to be validated at all. I think it's a very interesting response, but it still has very little to do with my intentions.

As our learning is based on certain ever-changing levels of understanding, we are continually re-orienting our knowledge and expanding our capacity for learning. Is there a pattern in your learning process? How often do your perceptions change, and how does this occur?

I read something by John Cage in which he said "bring an idea to closure and then drop it like a pair of dirty socks". It's real important that I don't get pinned into this stylistic thing. As much as possible, whether it's through reading or something else, as my ideas change I try to unlearn. I go through periods, maybe one or two-year projects, where I carry out something till I've really saturated it, and then I'll drop it and try to unlearn it, and I'll do that by doing antithetical activities with the camera...using different kinds of cameras, approaching things from the opposite of my normal stance...for a period of time and then I will find that it generates a whole new set of ideas.

There is an ongoing series of contradictions and confirmations that exist in life which are involved in what we've been talking about. Does it demonstrate the existence of two worlds of reality?

I see it as a little more. I think it parallels the basic growth process. I try to maintain this kind of ongoing process which has to do with changing, and changing is a real important word because it involves undoing this kind of rhythm, momentum that you maintain, and there is a lot of pressure in the photography world from galleries, critics, peers, to maintain a style. Critics can't stand it in particular, peers can't stand it when you start experimenting and try to go off into new things, but to me that's really the only way.

There are strong visual relationships between TELEGRAPH 3 A.M. and the Cactus series, both being nocturnal views of impressive and unique forms, or icons as you call them, that project out of their controlled, ambient environments.

Yes, that's true in formal terms. TELEGRAPH 3 A.M. was an attempt to make a social and political statement, and the desert work is definitely not about that. There is a centrality in all my work. In the portraiture it's all this kind of head-on stuff--the person's right smack in the center again. And I started out working at night with the TELEGRAPH project.

The one thing that seems to be consistent through all my work that I like, and I experimented a lot, is the viewer is allowed to meditate on something that normally we don't stop and stare at, whether it's people or cactus. We just don't look at people or things in the real world that way. The work defies the linear quality of time. In other words, when you walk down the street or in the desert there's always this momentum going on, but a photograph isolates that moment in time.

Some of your first serious attempts in photography had to do with the Berkeley street demonstrations of the 60's. Do you feel that the political and social transformations you might have experienced affected your vision and altered your perceptions?

I was in college in the 60's and was very much involved in political activity. I thought the camera would be an effective tool. When the 60's died down, it became apparent that there's very little anybody could do, at least in that context, to effect political and social change. The whole Berkeley atmosphere turned from political to spiritual. People started getting into vegetarian foods and different religious and philosophical thoughts, which basically became an apolitical sort of movement. My work parallels that really well. You can pound your head against the wall only so long and then you turn to something else, a different kind of meaning. Political activity is impossible. I really feel that you're going to be politically active or you're going to be an artist. The two of them are mutually exclusive.

What were your reasons for excluding any text from your most recent publication A PHOTOGRAPHIC

BOOK?

There are a number of reasons. I was influenced by Robbe-Grillet's concepts in his lecture on "Order and Disorder". What he said essentially is that whenever we're introduced to something new we always find it to be chaotic, without any meaning, off the wall. What is really going on is we feel certain structures to be organic to the world and other structures to be forced and put on the world, when in fact they're all man-made. So I started reassessing traditional structuring of books and realized that there are certain elements to be found in practically all the monographs that are made today. Conventional language has to do with basically commercializing the book in terms of a hype. For instance, most monographs have an introduction by somebody famous, like John Szarkowski, which is supposed to edify the artist, give him a kind of credibility that normally wouldn't be there except for information that the art puts forth. In other words, he is an expert in the field and he is saying that this person is good, this is why (s)he's good, and so on.

If you stop for a second and examine how text is normally used in a book--the title, introduction, jacket, dedication, colophon, titles of pictures, particularly "untitled"--you find that they have virtually nothing to do with the photographs. We witness them over and over--this repetition of convention which at best signifies mindlessness and at worst tastelessness and overtly commercial priorities.

I also found that titles of books are arbitrary. You do a body of work and you have to come up with a title, something to set a context for the imagery, and most of the time they're really irrelevant, inappropriate for the imagery. I also wanted to strip all the decor and design aspects of book production, strip it to the photograph's essentials.

You take Ralph Gibson's books...he's trying to create a semiotic between photography and poetry, because what he does is take photographs that have nothing to do with Deja Vu or Somnambulism, and he links them up to their context by the use of those titles which are actually poetic references as opposed to, for example, Lew Thomas who will do something like structuralism and photography, or Hal Fisher's *Gay Semiotics* which links photography with Science or linguistics. In other words, there's a certain kind of credibility issue going on where photography no longer has its own context to refer to itself. *Photojournalism has always been like that.* Don't misunderstand me. Titles can and have been effective, particularly in Fisher's and Thomas' examples, and even Gibson's case was significant, however, I decided I would use one of my photographs for the title of the book. The photograph on the cover tells you what's inside the book. It's got all sorts of signifiers, cues, stylistic devices, and by looking at the cover you know immediately that this is a book of photographs.

There are differences between a book and a monograph and a catalog, and I want the thing to be a book. Ultimately it's meant to relate from picture to picture without any interference from arbitrary or commercial language. There are words on the spine...it's necessary...it has to be on there. I would like to remove it altogether, but in order to make the thing a book that information had to be there--the price had to be there, the copyright, Library of Congress number, and the publisher.

The photography and language movement to me has been the most important, most exciting work in years. One reason I eliminated words in the book is out of a tremendous respect for the kinds of things people are doing now with language, people like Lew Thomas and Donna Lee Phillips. For me the people who rely strictly on the image, those kind of intuitive responses, the divining rod response, that's not where I'm at at all.

Another important reason for removing the text was with this philosophical notion about absence and presence. By the absence of language there is the presence of that language right there. Let's say you crossed out the word "blue" and wrote over it "red". You can still see the blue under there. It's like latent image--it's still there, it still tinges your concept--"Oh this has been changed from blue to red." So by removing language that we normally expect to see, we still feel that the language is missing. To me that's a really important language problem. I'm not coming from the purist view of "Let the image speak for itself." I think that's been abused, exploited and misdirected. I think visuals, like photographs, are a language unto themselves.

Ezra Pound, and a number of people who are involved with language, feel it doesn't matter how much criticism you read about visual experience --there's only one way to experience it, and that's a first-hand experience of it in visual terms. Language in one sense ultimately can't do anything for that. In another sense it can always set the context from which to read it, so it's a very delicate balance.

Every medium, whether it's painting or music or poetry, has a very specific illusion it creates, something that Suzanne Langer talks about--every medium creates its primary illusion. To me photography creates a primary illusion of fact. When people talk about the mystical properties of the desert photographs, basically they're responding to the illusion of this other world. It would seem if you went to this place you'd see my photographs, but you wouldn't see them--you'd see a bunch of cactus sitting in the sunlight. At night you wouldn't see anything...you'd just see silhouettes. But the photograph has powers based on the kind of authenticity it appears to have. It almost looks like I went there, snapped a picture and caught these kind of things crawling around at night. That was all done by the formal properties of the medium. That's how the formal properties of the medium transform this kind of literal subject matter that's out in the world.

I understand that Walter Benjamin, the Marxist literary critic interested in the social and political meanings of photography, has had an influence on you. In 1936 he said that as "a mass media it can radically alter the function of art" and "photography destroys in art objects unique existence or aura thus hastening art's politicalization." Is it a political question in regard to your attitude about the book, the references you make to differentiating it from a commercial venture, the book being a fine art piece?

One of the things he talks about is this question of the aura of a masterpiece. In the book you lose that pretty quickly. Individual prints were made before I was exposed to Benjamin which is important. And the book does democratize the experience of the thing; they no longer have that kind of individual aura. It reads more in a linear fashion from beginning to end. And what's happened is you're forced to deal with the information more readily than before when you were dealing more with an object.

But does the book now become the object?

Absolutely. But it's a different object than the prints. What Benjamin was getting at was different than what that work is about. He's talking about the way the medium, in a holistic sense, has transformed our cultural barriers, our cultural concepts of what art is supposed to be. Artists, even people who did earthworks and people who were involved with so-called conceptual projects, like Crysto, still use photographs to document those projects. Those photographs become the objects, the final objects that actually become commercialized and sold through galleries. In other words people bought photographs of Crysto's fence. It is now secondary information, the reproductions of the original, that are the real communication, simply by virtue of the numbers it reaches.

I think the photograph has ushered in what I call the post-modernization of art which is what we see right now. The 80's is going to be about people getting away from the formalist, self-reflexive language aspects of art. Now we're heading toward what I call post-modernism which photography does fairly well--describing the iconography of the real world. Meaning is no longer about the medium. It's going to have to change. We're going to have this extended meaning where photographs, paintings, anything about art will have to have this kind of extra information. It can be political, it can be social, it can refer to economics, but it can't be this ivory tower sort of activity where you're working out of formal limits and properties of the medium. That's really a dead end. And that's the modernist ethic. As much as photography attempts to reduce itself to mere formalism, its denotative nature, and the connotative nature of any implicit subject, resists such reductivist attempts.

So now we're talking about going after the very socialistic elements.

Not necessarily just socialist. I don't really go for that word socialist at all. It's going

to be extended back to trying to achieve meaning on a broader scale just outside of the art world. Photographs are so effective in doing that that they haven't been able to be ignored. That's why we're seeing the resurgence of this kind of new topographics in the Atget, Walker Evans tradition, which I think is right now very weak, but I think that's an indication of where we're needing to go...describing the world, the world we all identify with whether we're photographers or not. The manipulation or different processes we saw in the early 70's was like a branch on a tree--the trunk is still going straight up, but that branch can only grow so far and it becomes a stalk.

Can you give us some explanation as to exactly how you make the exposures?

They range from 1/15th of a second to three or four hours.

How about the strobing?

If you position the strobe right behind the camera in the same direction as the camera is pointed, you get this kind of frontal light. It could be single strobe, or it could be multiple. Sometimes I'll strobe up to fifteen and twenty times, sometimes I'll walk back into the environment and strobe specific cactus or an area and make multiple strobes. The is being done while the camera is open.

While the camera's open? To what extent do accidents have bearing on the photographs?

Accidents are real important. A lot of time it's experimentation. Usually it's at times when I would strobe too many times and get too much light for the effect I had perceived before, and then later go on and utilize it again. Toning came out of a whole series of things I did with accidents. After I did TELEGRAPH 3 A.M., I did a whole series which I call "Pink Zen Suite". I took all the negatives that had been over-exposed, or fogged, or stained, and printed those and fogged the material, took frames I had cut in half by accident, printed those up, basically started utilizing the accidents and kind of carried that through with the desert work too.

What actually do you do during the long exposures?

That ranges from going to my van and reading, or just kind of sitting out there and meditating, take a walk. It's real isolated--nobody around for miles and miles.

You do drawings as well. Do these happen during the exposures or after?

Most often they're done the next day. They're visual fieldnotes.

For what purpose?

If you're photographing in an area with 200 Saguaro cactus and you make a number of different photographs, it's very hard to distinguish them verbally. The best way is to do a gestural drawing...this cactus has an arm that bends over to the right. In other words, I just draw roughly the form then make the notation with the date and maybe some feelings I had at the time that corresponded to the experience.

Have you ever had any psychic experiences during your stays in the desert?

Psychic? Yes.

When you're meditating?

No. When I'm making the exposures, I'm just trying to make sure I did the right meter reading.

So they become mystical experiences after they're printed?

Well they're not mystical experiences!

I mean for other people.

These mystical experiences come from the way people learn to read information, pictorial information. Man's initial response to the universe came from the experiences most immediate to him. With cavemen one of the most important events of the day was the sun coming up, which is an arc that may arise from left to right. That gesture, that line then becomes symbolically related to the sun coming up, and it becomes a very positive, affirmative gesture. The gesture going down left to right corresponds to the sun going down and darkness coming on, so that would be a very negative gesture.

We're talking about associations and symbols.

...which come from very primary experience. Over time they've been convoluted and complicated. But essentially there are certain things in my photographs that cue those responses, but they're just pictorial information. I was not having that experience. It's not that kind of thing.

The photographs effectively evoke a mystical, or other-worldly response from viewers. But, of course, it's strictly an illusion, created by the manipulation of the medium. What engages me is the convincing ability of the medium, the authenticity of its illusion. The fact that toned and strobed photographs of the desert at night evoke "mystical" responses is extremely interesting to me. On one level, the most obvious surface level (Barthes would call it "denotation") the photographs are about cactus of the desert. However, what is equally fascinating to me is the hidden level which I would suggest is the psychology of perception, or better yet how we metaphorize everything. It's really funny when you think about it, but we always tend to make metaphors out of relationships between objects in photographs. (This points up problematic carryover #324 from painting; the realist painter chooses every detail to be included, thus, we have intention of information the photographer relinquishes such a thorough control and most information simply falls into place.)

For instance, recently I had dropped acid and spent eight hours floating on a raft in a pool taking pictures of flies (now that's a zen exercise!!). Now I can just see a critic coming along trying to make sense out of this picture of a fly standing by an ashtray with cigarette butts on the edge of the pool. The critic will suggest that the ashtray is a crematorium, relating back to certain ritualistic behavior of ancient Egypt, when flies were endowed with supernatural sexual powers, as suggested by the water of the pool (water, of course, according to Freud, is the symbol of sex) etc., etc., ad nauseum.

The fact of the matter is that I may simply be trying to take a picture of a fly, and the hurry-scurry nature of the camera pointing, the fact that the frame is rectangular and larger than the fly, etc., means that there will be other information contained in the frame as well. In other words, it tells you more about the medium than the fly. I suggest then that it is now time to reassess our criteria for understanding photography's meaning. We must drop the conventions of other mediums and allow photography to suggest its own criteria. However, reducing photographs to formalism would be missing the boat. We can arrive at an understanding of photo meaning by addressing the limitations of the medium, the psychology of perception, the role of art, and particularly photography in culture.

Huxley talks about two kinds of light connected with the mystical experience--the differentiating and the undifferentiating. One is where an object seems to be exuding light and one is where there's light filling up the surrounding space.

Huxley also talks about the history of mystical experience being related to the desert. He says the desert "is closest to God and where devils abound." I experienced that out there, those extremes--from feeling calm, quiet and really at peace, and at other times absolute terror.

Do you see your personal philosophy as Empiricism?

There's part of me that feels very much a Western man, skeptical of the mystical experience. I rationalize a strange experience, "It's a coincidence", and there's another side of me which responds to mysticism. I don't know who said this, but it's a great quote, "If you understand, things are such as they are; if you do not understand, things are such as they are."

I'm trying to ascertain the meaning of appearances because that's what we're dealing with in photographs as opposed to language which is a different kind of information system. A photograph is almost a primary experience. It's closer than words to the real experience.

Another idea is that if you had never seen a photograph in your entire life, and I spent years and years describing a certain photograph to you, the day I brought out that photograph you would not recognize it. That goes along a little bit with Jung's direct experience, and I agree with that part of it.

Would you discuss the importance of re-evaluating one's philosophy.

At this point in my life I'm not able to feel that things have any concrete, innate, intrinsic value that is irrefutable. It's like a photograph--a Dorothea Lange photograph forty years ago triggered some kind of response that today is completely different. There's no intrinsic meaning there. Basically, as I feel that as I work out an idea or an attitude I have at present that in order to catch up with time again I've got to unlearn it, re-evaluate my philosophies and ideas, and they've changed tremendously.

To what degree is romanticism a part of your photographs?

In terms of my work there's romantic energy, but it's tempered just enough by self-reflexive and formal aspects of the medium. I think I'm that way too--I'm very analytical as well as being very romantic.

Do you keep a journal?

I don't know if it's a journal so much as a kind of workbook. I put down anything that's relevant to what I'm doing--mostly drawings and notations about photographs that I'm making or want to make.

What pictures do you have on your walls at home?

I have some of Lew Thomas' work, I have some of my own "Jungle" things, I have a Sam Samore piece, a Myer Hirsch piece, a lot of language pieces. I don't like many of the photographers who deal strictly with pictorial imagery. I don't like very many photographers' work right now.

What in your mind represents a work of art?

A characteristic that a genuine work of art might have is that it stretches my own boundaries. I appreciate Curtis prints, for example, as historical artifacts. They do not stretch me in the slightest.

There's a dialog developing that centers around visual literacy.

Are you talking about literacy that relates to visual arts?

Right. Do you feel a need to sort of fine-tune your visual literacy?

My need at this point is to get real clear on my own philosophy, but I'm just starved for critical literature. What it does is tell me how a photograph gets its meaning and that's really interesting to me, because once I can understand how a photograph obtains meaning, exactly what the elements are that give it meaning, then I can go ahead and utilize that. Most photographers don't even know what information they're putting out there. I think it's real important to take that responsibility.

Let me interview you...what was your response to the Desert photographs when you first saw them four years ago?

Well actually my response now is a result of a chronological development of what I know of you and your past and present work. I made an immediate association between the Desert work and TELEGRAPH 3 A.M. The purely formal considerations are apparent at first. The square format, the strobe at night, the centralizing and the ambient light have become distinctively associated with your work. In these two bodies of work there is an acute relationship between the use of isolated and unique subject matter in complex environments. This stylistic construction is further exemplified in your use of light. The detailed and lucid foreground is juxtaposed against a darker and more obscure background. The attention is directed towards the clear object of the "icon" in its individual environment.

For me, these pictures are symbolic associa-



tions with selection. And these selections begin to challenge one's perceptions within this illusionistic context.

My mind's eye is continually searching the unknown areas in the background. The interplay between the accessible and inaccessible visual information is an ongoing source of stimulation to me.

So now you've seen some cactus photographs over time and now you have the book. So you've seen a fairly comprehensive body of work. When you sat down to look through the book, what were you looking for?

Well it wasn't a question of what I was looking for so much as what I found--an experience different than say viewing individual pictures of the cactus. It became more of an examination of space. When I first saw the work it was four and five cactus pictures at a time; it wasn't a body of work.

Your concept of this book brings up questions about the so-called picture book. It brings in completely new elements in the sense of your trying to institute a completely new idea separate from the pictures themselves in the form of the book. I think it's successful in that sense.

The book is broken up into suites--there's a

ground suite, sky suite, ground/sky, there's rocks, there's palm trees, there's cactus. Is there any sub-body in there that you particularly respond to and if so why?

I think the cactus appeals to me first. But there is that rather acute kind of attraction towards visual elements that repel one's eye, such as the ground pieces. After that initial perusal they become very interesting because they're most difficult in their stark austerity.

That's interesting. I'd say off the top of my head the ground pieces are my favorite.

The ground pieces play with the eye more than anything else, and there are those abstract qualities that one can't explain, that loss of reference.

I think an important aspect of the work which Joan Murray talks about is that expanded period of time. We're so used to dealing with the photograph in terms of the fast shutter and the decisive moment consciousness, now we're all of a sudden dealing with exposures of two, three and four hours, and we're all very curious to see what's there. Even though we know the moon moves across the sky, we're very much mystically attracted to that pattern. I think there's an innate process we can relate to. It's very humanistic, a quality of nature that we can all identify with. It's like the obvious metaphor of life, the equivalent of following the pattern of birth-life-death as the moon travels across the sky.

It's what Jung would call the archetypal response. How do you see this body of work in the realm of contemporary photography?

I think photography is a way of exploring and finding answers. I would say that your work comes closer than most in honing in on something which is about you, about Richard Misrach. A polarity exists in which you're far away but you're close. The lack of information tends to define it all--more information defines it less and it becomes inverted knowledge.

Lately I've been trying to figure out what artists do. I'm starting to believe that there's no correct position--conceptual art, objectless art, the art of the object--all these positions are temporary points in a dialog. In other words, the Pop Art movement is a response to Abstract Expressionism, and Op Art is a response to Pop Art, and all the way down the line. There's no resolution--just a continuous dialog.