

Beauty Will Save the World

Volume V: Thirty Photographs of Giants by the Water's Edge

Stephen S. Ashley

2020



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FRONTISPIECE: *Loading Cranes No. 20, Port of Oakland, 2016*

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Oakland Estuary, 2014

THE late photographer Ruth Bernhard taught her students that they need not retrace the wilderness journeys of Ansel Adams in order to find worthy subjects for photographs. She encouraged them to photograph everyday objects they already knew. They could make great photographs, she counseled, of subjects located within a hundred yards of their dwellings.

The waterfront in which the structures and vessels depicted in this book are located is eight times that distance from my dwelling, but still those objects are familiar to me. I see them almost every day. I have seen the cranes and the ships that frequent the Port of Oakland at all times of day, in all kinds of weather, in every season. At night I hear the cargo containers banging against one another as the giant cranes in the Port load and unload the containers from ships that dock at its wharves. When an earthquake happens nearby, I get a moment's warning: the shock wave rumbles through the containers stacked on the wharves on its way towards my house.

The cranes at the Port of Oakland remind many *Star Wars* movie fans of the AT-AT walkers from *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. (*Star Wars* creator George Lucas denies that the cranes inspired the AT-AT walkers.) To me those cranes look like giant sculptures. In them I see horses and praying mantises. Ruth Bernhard was right: one can find beauty in one's own neighborhood. A photograph of anything beautiful can bring you harmony.

In this image we find two common types of cranes at the Port of Oakland, what I think of as the “horse crane” on the left and the “praying mantis” crane on the right. They are better known as “low profile” and “high profile” cranes respectively. Both types of cranes are well represented at the Port.



Loading Cranes No. 8, 2013



Loading Cranes No. 6, Port of Oakland, 2013



Loading Cranes No. 33, Port of Oakland, 2016



Loading Cranes No. 12, Port of Oakland, 2019



Loading Cranes No. 13, Port of Oakland, 2019



Loading Cranes No. 20, Port of Oakland, 2016

One morning in March I rode the Alameda Ferry to San Francisco so that I could stand on the stern and photograph the first burst of sunlight as the sun rose among the giants.



Loading Cranes No. 25, Port of Oakland, 2016



Loading Cranes No. 21, Port of Oakland, 2016

A good vantage point for viewing the cranes and ships is the northwest shore of the island of Alameda between the Alameda Main Street ferry terminal and the entrance to Alameda Point (the old Naval Air Station Alameda) at Navy Way. An abandoned pier runs along the waterfront, lending an air of urban decay to the industrial efficiency of the Port of Oakland.



Abandoned Pier No. 3, Oakland Estuary, 2015



Abandoned Pier No. 6, Oakland Estuary, 2015

If you have access to a boat, you can navigate beneath a crane where the structure soars overhead.



Loading Cranes No. 16, Port of Oakland, 2016



Loading Cranes No. 17, Port of Oakland, 2016



Loading Cranes No. 19, Port of Oakland, 2016



Loading Crane and Containers No. 1, Port of Oakland, 2016

From a vantage point close to the cranes you can see the complex mechanisms that move containers between the wharves and the ships.



Detail, Loading Cranes, Port of Oakland, 2013



Detail, Loading Cranes No. 1, Port of Oakland, 2016



Detail, Loading Cranes No. 2, Port of Oakland, 2019



Loading Cranes No. 1, Port of Oakland, 2019



Detail, Loading Cranes No. 1, Port of Oakland, 2019



Detail, Loading Cranes No. 3, Port of Oakland, 2019

One wonders how a ship, stacked high with containers, can avoid capsizing in a storm.



Container Ships No. 1, Port of Oakland, 2019



Bridge, Gunvor Maersk, 2016



The Tugboat America, Port of Oakland, 2016

At the end of the island of Alameda, adjacent to the Port of Oakland, is Alameda Point, site of the former Naval Air Station Alameda, which is still home to a fleet of “ready reserve” ships in varying states of repair, awaiting orders from the Maritime Administration or the Military Sealift Command. These ships, too, have their own heavy lift cranes.



Ships' Prows, Alameda Point, 2019



Heavy Lift Cranes No. 1, Alameda Point, 2019



Ready Reserve Ships, Alameda Point, 2013



Ship's Bridge, Alameda Point, 2019

The aircraft carrier *Hornet* served from World War II until the Apollo 11 and 12 missions, when it recovered the astronauts returning from the moon. Decommissioned in 1970, the *Hornet*, its paint slowly peeling, is moored at Alameda Point.



The Hornet, Alameda Point, 2013

At the southeast end of the harbor stand the silos of the aptly named Miller Milling Co.



Miller Milling Co. No. 2, Oakland, 2015

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About This Portfolio

I took the photographs in this portfolio on many occasions between 2013 and 2019 from the island of Alameda (along the Oakland Estuary and in Alameda Point), the Middle Harbor Shoreline Park in Oakland, the San Francisco Bay Ferry, and a friend's boat. I used a Nikon D800E camera, chosen for the high resolution of the sensor. I used 50mm *f*/1.8 and 85mm *f*/1.8 prime lenses and a 50mm *f*/2.8 perspective control tilt-shift lens. I processed the photographs in Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop using the Nik Collection of plugins. I composed the text in this book in Optima using Adobe InDesign.

You can find many of these photographs, along with dozens of photographs of other beautiful places, on the website at nigrumetalbum.com. If you would like to track my photographic activities, you may follow me on Twitter (twitter.com/sashleyphotos). You can reach me by email at stephen.ashley@strattonpress.com.

This portfolio and many other photographs are available for purchase on the website nigrumetalbum.com and on Etsy at nigrumetalbum.etsy.com. Printed versions of this book and of my other photography books are available at www.blurb.com/user/sashley; pdf versions are available for free at nigrumetalbum.com/books.

About the Photographer

When I was a teenager, my parents rented a house with a bomb shelter in the basement. I discovered that when I turned off the lights, the bomb shelter was perfectly black, and I realized that it would make an ideal darkroom. I assembled one, using a Kodak slide projector as an enlarger. The light from the projector burned so brightly that it solarized the enlarging paper. Thus began my photographic avocation.

During my career I engaged in many occupations—fire fighter, typesetter, lawyer, writer, publisher, law professor, software developer, flight instructor—but all the while I honed my photographic skills. After a serious illness forced me to give up my law-related work, my retirement gave me the opportunity to devote my time to expanding my portfolio and to sharing my photographs with a wider audience.

I had no formal education in photography but learned from many teachers. My uncle, Roy Stratton, freely shared with me his deep knowledge of photography. In the 1970s and 1980s the University of California Extension programs at Berkeley and Santa Cruz offered a wide selection of short courses on various aspects of photography, and I enrolled in several. These courses let me meet and learn from Stuart Scofield, Mark Citret, and others. I also had the good fortune to attend a Friends of Photography program, where I met Ruth Bernhard, Morley Baer, John Sexton, Marilyn Bridges, and William Christenberry. More recently, in 2014, 2015, and 2016, I traveled to Moab, Utah, to attend the Moab Photography Symposium, where I had an opportunity to photograph with Judith Zimmerman, Colleen Miniuk-Sperry, Bruce Hucko, and Guy Tal. In 2019 I attended the Sedona Photography Symposium, where I had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of Cole Thompson.

Southeast of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge lie the Port of Oakland and Alameda Point, the former a major container ship facility and the latter the home of the decommissioned Naval Air Station Alameda. The Port of Oakland is noisy with the loading and unloading of container ships from around the world; Alameda Point is a ghost town inhabited by a fleet of old Navy transports waiting year after year for a recall to duty that never comes. The cranes and ships that inhabit the Port of Oakland and Alameda Point look like giant creatures that stalk the waterfront.

