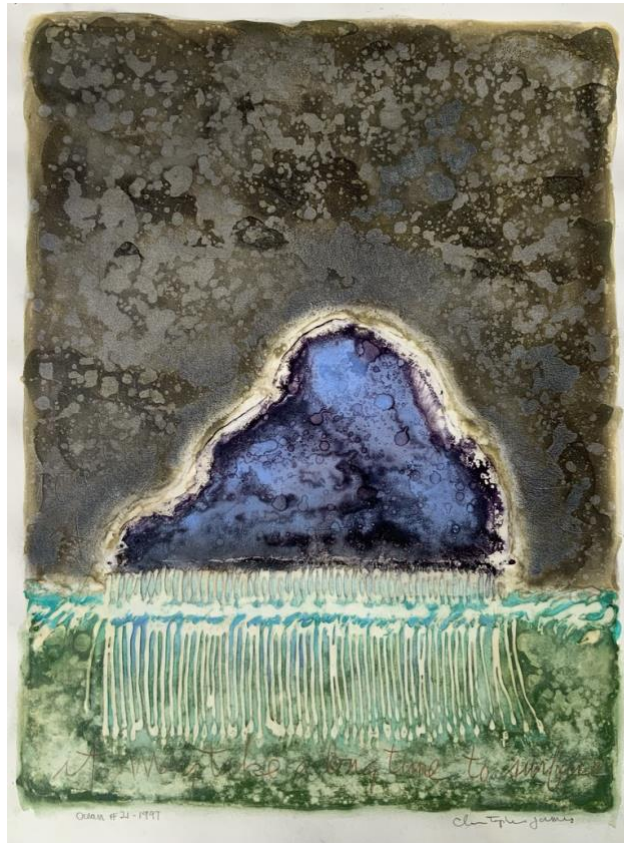


Two Moments In My Life

© Christopher James



Late in one's life you are afforded the luxury of hindsight where moments become crystallized and you can see how their insignificance became significant.

In 1971 I was in graduate school at RISD and had an advisory critique with my hero, the legendary Robert Frank. He didn't like my work even a little, which was very experimental at the time, not subject based and nothing at all like his own. Mr. Frank was pretty crusty about all of it and I made a decision that day to complete my master's without using a camera... and from that moment on, to make all of my images using modified chemistry with a brush, like it was paint, and sunlight instead of a darkroom—no camera or film. That petulant moment pushed me into researching antiquated photographic practices and processes, got me through graduate school, resulted in my first magazine published portfolio, and my first gallery representation with Carl Siembab in Boston and Lee Witkin in New York. It led me to a life, 75 years long as of this writing, Chair and Director positions at Harvard, The Art Institute of Boston, Lesley University and three books on alternative photographic processes and integrated media. I took a thoroughly devastating critique with my hero and turned it into my life's direction. The second moment occurred, ironically, without a camera... but has become the best photograph I never made.

Over half of my artist-life has been as a painter so there are a number of paintings that I have painted in my head and that have served to reinforce my love of that studio practice. Several of them became reality and are on my web site. As for photographs, my love of that art form became insoluble with every picture seen and made. Of my own work, i still love the Dying Man in India because of everything that is not in that image. I realize that sounds backwards but it is an image that requires context and my story of how it was made. The context is critical. Perhaps my image of the Gellért Baths in Budapest will always be one that I will give as a gift to people who I care for.

My favorite image is one i didn't make with a camera. My wife, Rebecca, and I were on a scuba diving trip, and as we had done in the past, took the Zodiac through the cut to the tiny island of Bimini, for fresh, every Thursday, ceviche at dirt floored Panty Bar... and a beer at the Compleat Angler bar where Hemingway's penciled drafts lay under glass table tops in the dark interior room ... it burned to the ground in 2006. After a Red Stripe, we took a walk to a small beach near the cut in the harbor. Rebecca was standing on the edge of the surf line... wearing a white free-flowing cotton shirt and a black wrap around her waist that was in a harmonious line with the horizon. A lamp-black sky, from a storm on the way in from the ocean, and her white blouse, filled in the image from the horizon up. That perfect Caribbean blue, when shallow water is above white sand in tropical waters, was still and lit by the sun at our back, her black wrap completing the split of the image from the horizon to the sand she stood upon. It was the most beautiful light i had ever seen and i asked my memory to take a picture — the best image i never made.