



Daniel N. Johnson

- PERIODIC BOOK -

ISSUE THREE

**POTENTIAL INGREDIENTS OF PROCESS:**

SENSORY DEPRIVATION  
CREATIVE RESTRAINT  
PURPOSEFUL LIMITATIONS  
FOLLOWING WHIMS  
GOING NEW PLACES  
TAKING PURPOSEFUL DETOURS  
MEDIA FASTING  
BEING HUNGRY  
TRYING NEW FOOD  
DRAWING  
USING YOUR NON-DOMINANT HAND  
CREATE SPACE/TIME TO GET WEIRD & MESSY

**INITIAL CONSTRAINTS FOR CREATING ISSUE THREE**

SOLITUDE  
PROXIMITY TO NATURE  
NO INTERNET, NO PHONE  
SIMPLE FOOD  
4 DAYS OF SILENCE  
~~4 HOURS OF BLINDNESS~~  
3 DAYS OF CREATION  
LIMITED MUSIC SELECTION  
ONE HIKE OR RUN PER DAY  
30 MINUTES OF MEDITATION AM + PM  
WRITE 30 MINUTES EVERY AM



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To create Issue Three I wanted a cabin in the woods with no internet access & no phone to work alone and uninterrupted for three days. I felt the need for a container - a defined space and time to focus and get weird without the pull of social interactions, an email that might hijack my day with a pressing obligation or the general vortex of diversion that is the internet. I'm learning I have to get ruthless with my distractions.

After months of searching I finally found the location and there I stumbled on a book entitled *Unspoken: The Path to Creativity* It inspired me to attach a day of silence prior to starting work - one day to rest and listen, then three to create. But I'm already alone so why not do all four days in silence?

I believe it was Hemingway who said (and since I don't have internet I can't confirm at the moment) that writing was like a faucet upstairs. Talking is a hydrant in the yard. You have to turn off the latter if you want to do any of the former.\*

Thus in addition to defining time and space to create I've often felt that part of my process as an artist was to find ways to embrace discomfort and experiment with deprivation as a means of challenging my perceptions, both of the world around me and that of myself.

John Dewey wrote in *Art as Experience* that "since the artist cares in a peculiar way for the phase of experience in which union is achieved, he does not shun moments of resistance & tension. He rather cultivates them, not for their own sake but because of their potentialities."

Thus I experiment with deprivation. To embrace tension and subsequently, the potentialities therein. Could not speaking for a couple of days enable me create better, to listen to my heart and instincts more clearly without external noise? To open the *faucet upstairs*?

\*actually it was Robert Frost but I'll stick with my original paraphrase.



I've experimented with periods of silence twice prior in my life (intentionally anyway.) The first was a nine day Vipassana meditation course in 2012, the second, a 36 hour period in the redwoods last year. The first was intense and challenging, the second, clarifying. Both were deeply rewarding.

As an additional element of constraint for this process I decided to do a period of blindness as well. This I've also experimented with once before (intentionally anyway, a burned cornea as a teenager notwithstanding.) In 2012 I spent six hours blindfolded in Paris as both empathetic challenge and visceral research for a short film I was working on. The experiment ended at the Louvre where I proceeded to spend the next few hours barely even looking at art, being instead captivated and even brought to tears by shadows and reflections throughout the building (along with the occasional Rembrandt.)

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I originally intended the blindness experiment for Issue Three to last 4 hours begin on my first day of silence at 7:11pm. In the end, however, it dured 13 hours, 31 minutes, ending the following morning at 8:42 am. Seven hours were spent sleeping. The remaining six and a half were a mixture of lighthearted exploration of the senses- moments of play occcasionaly punctuated by boredom with a couple instances of panicked lostness and/or with claustrophobic agony to round out the experience.

The first portion of the evening was spent outside on the deck and garden focusing on my remaining available senses to experience the elements around me; tasting tree bark, caressing plants, listening to how sound reflects off of windows or house siding. I made a simple dinner of salad and embraced the slow methodical process of making and consuming food. The solitude was intensified and I realized how often my loneliness has been staved off by the glow of the computer screen. But also a reminder to embrace the gifts that discomfort provides as an opportunity to perceive myself and the world around me differently.

In addition to a further gratitude for the gift of sight and the desire to never take it for granted, this experience reinforced a bit of what I'd encountered in Paris years prior - a profoundly visceral reminder of the recognition that all of our senses are giving us information at all moments - smells, sounds, the feeling of the air around us, that we tend to instead rely *blindly* solely on our sight for input. For example, if you're walking down the left side of a city street, you can hear your footsteps bouncing off the brick wall to your left, and you hear the traffic to your right. When you walk past an alleyway not only does the sound immediately change but so does your feeling of the air opening up beside you as well. You can smell a garbage dumpster long before you'd otherwise see it.

Our senses are continually collecting information and our brain actually needs to limit this input otherwise we would go crazy from information overload. This function is called the reticular activating system and it enables us to ignore much of what is happening around us. It's what makes it possible for you to have a conversation in a crowded restaurant or even focus on reading these words and ignore the multitude of sensations that would otherwise steal your attention away.

In *Doors of Perception* Aldous Huxley argued that this function (which he perjoratively labeled "the reducing valve") was "to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by the mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge (we take in.)" He believed that the function of the brain (in combination with the sense organs) was mainly eliminative and not productive.

I, however, wanted to see if limiting certain senses could be additive, rather than simply being reductive. To not only heighten that of my remaining senses, but also that of non-physical sensory inputs as well - whims or intuition, which I am coming to trust more and more as part of the creative process.

Thus I'm trying to explore what sensory deprivation can do for paying attention to the other oft-ignored senses. Our sense of sight often strongarms the other senses in terms of how we rely upon it. As a visual person, I am often quite guilty of this.

Thus I experiment with deprivation.

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Don't ever try blindness and silence at the same time. It sucks. Especially when as part of your process you decide to go out exploring the plants along the road at 11pm and then a dog accosts you and his owner asks if you're ok as you lift the blindfold. He thinks you're on drugs, surely, because it's been 24 hours since you last spoke a word and you're without contacts or glasses, it's been 3 hours since you last saw light and your pupils are fully dilated to the far reaches of your cornea. And ironically you're now blinded by the flashlight. Your blindness experiment now briefly paused, you next break your silence to awkwardly reply that you're ok and just going for a walk but surely he thinks you're a homeless vagabond wandering his neighborhood. You navigate yourself as quickly as possible back to the house, but you're not sure exactly where it is now, finally you find it, stumble through the gate, can't find the front door, then finally you do and you're a tense mess, you decide to take a shower (still blind because you're committed) but you're convinced the guy called the cops on you because why is there someone with an unkept beard, long hair and who is obviously high coming in and out of a completely darkened house? Then you

meditate for an hour, the most stressful time sitting with your brain you've ever had and your mind is playing tricks on you and you feel claustrophobic and all you want to do is rip the damn blindfold off and shout at the top of your lungs "I'M ALIVE!!"

Which you finally do the following morning. Well, no you don't because you still have three more days of silence left to go. But you do remove the blindfold and get to work.

Welcome to Issue Three.

# Irreducible Stages of Desire

LOS ANGELES / MAY 2015







*For what is longing  
without absence?*

*What is hunger in the  
presence of a feast?*

*Desire*  
*Expectation*  
*Absence*  
*Longing*  
*Restraint*  
*Release*









*Desire*  
*Expectation*  
*Absence*  
*Longing*  
*Restraint*  
*Release*









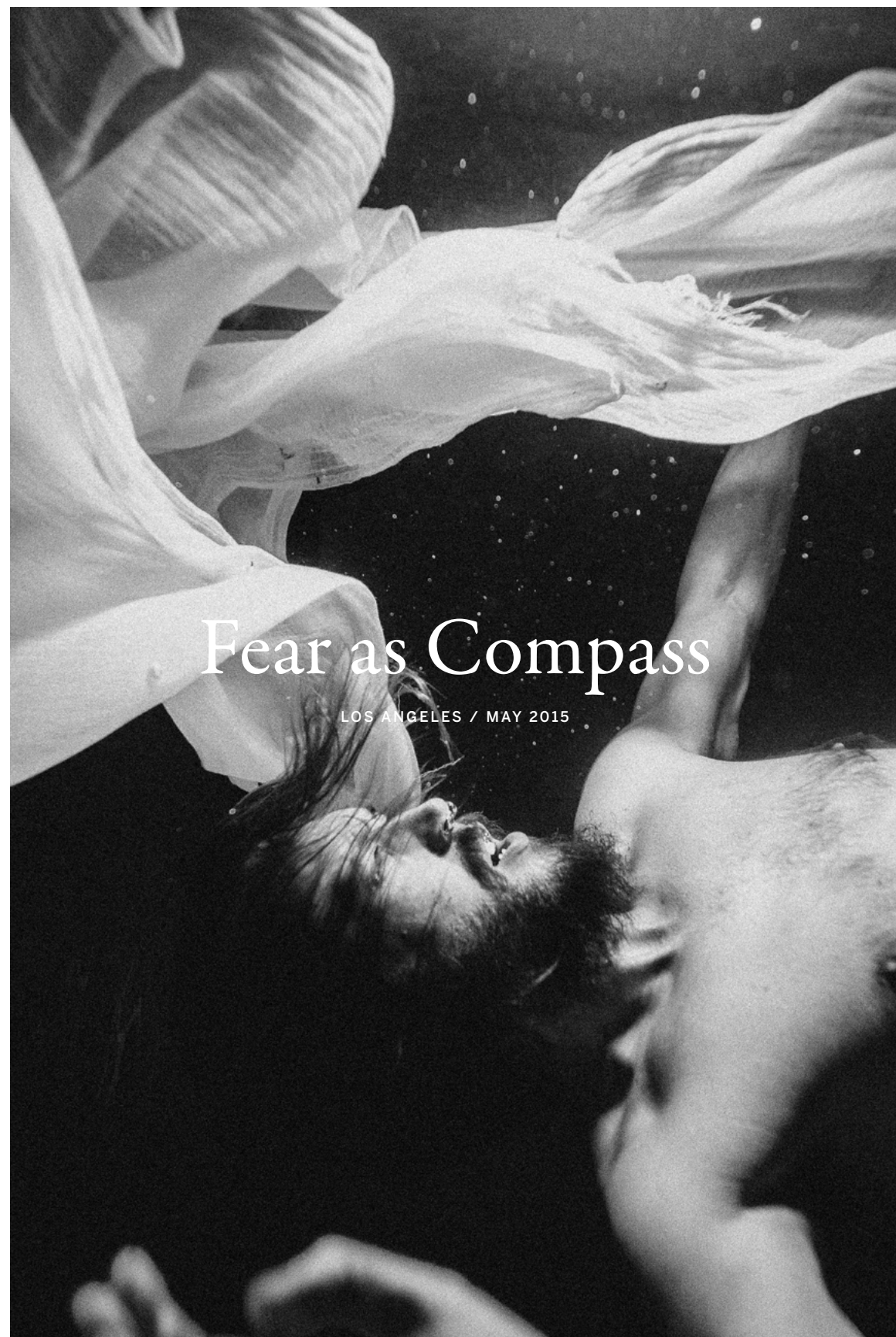


*Desire*  
*Absence*  
*Longing*  
*Restraint*  
*Acceptance*  
*Release*









# Fear as Compass

LOS ANGELES / MAY 2015

I am scared before every single shoot. Afraid of failure, or creating shitty images, of not honestly capturing my subject or the idea, afraid of having bad ideas, afraid of having no ideas at all even. But more and more I'm learning: Doing is the only way to confront fear. No amount of mental gymnastics can substitute for simple action.

Action is the only antidote I know of to confront fear of inadequacy. Afraid you're not creative enough? Do. Afraid you're not talented enough. Do.

Thus fear has been my compass lately. A barometer indicating importance in my life.

I'm learning that if I'm afraid or intimidated by something it's a sign that something is out of my comfort zone and I should pay attention to it. And if I should pay attention to it it's probably important. And if it's important, it's probably connected to my heart somehow and more than likely I should do it.

What if art is a vehicle through which the artist struggles with his/her weaknesses? Or at least a mechanism to get over discomfort by pushing yourself towards your larger significant potential?

Via action I'm learning that each action is preparation for the next. The pathway to build more strength, legs and core build the strength for the next hill, the next mountain. Each shoot is not an end in itself, it is a preparation for the next act of creation, the next challenge even. There is a Haitian proverb which says, "Beyond the mountains, more mountains."

Today prepares me for tomorrow which prepares me for the following day, which prepares me for the following...

I'm still scared before every shoot. Sometimes I let that fear prevent me from creating. Thankfully sometimes I don't allow it to.



I embrace awareness of that and always  
seek to give. And to learn. I collaborate  
with other artists I respect, admire, and  
am inspired by. ~~My~~ I interact very  
regularly with influential, inspiring people,  
but I maintain the beautiful connections I  
have with people in my life thus far. I am  
at home in world cities, with beautiful  
relationships as well as the forgotten ones,  
simple, wild even. I embrace risk, ~~that~~  
lean into my fears, and listen to my heart.  
I create something every single day. And  
every single day I come out a little more,  
add a little more to the piece of work that  
that is my life as an artist. I make  
beauty and beauty based on what I love

I AM an artist. I work in multiple  
mediums. Sometimes I am commissioned to  
do work. Sometimes I pursue my own  
whims, fascinations & curiosities and produce  
bold, illuminating and hopefully inspiring work  
based on that as I invite others to wonder  
with me. Right now I am pursuing a season  
of photography, setting aside the comfortable  
shows of graphic & motion design. To float  
towards new horizons, new islands, up to now  
unexplored by my self. I am a traveler, whether  
on foreign shores or the well-trodden home,  
because the open eyes and conscious presence open  
up to magic. I invite other artists to  
collaborate with me. I seek them out. I  
surround myself with art, music & inspiration.  
I am at home in the world and I am at home in the world.





# Sophia

*Los Angeles. November 2014*





If strength and vulnerability are two otherwise seemingly disparate qualities Sophia embodies both both with inspired grace.

Our conversations often revolve around the uncertainties of the artistic process. How the pathway to our happiness and fulfillment (especially as artists) often leads through mounds of discomfort and fear.



















*“Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what’s next or how. The moment you know how you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong but we take leap after leap in the dark.”*

AGNES DE MILLE





# Some People I Know

NOV 2014 - JUNE 2015

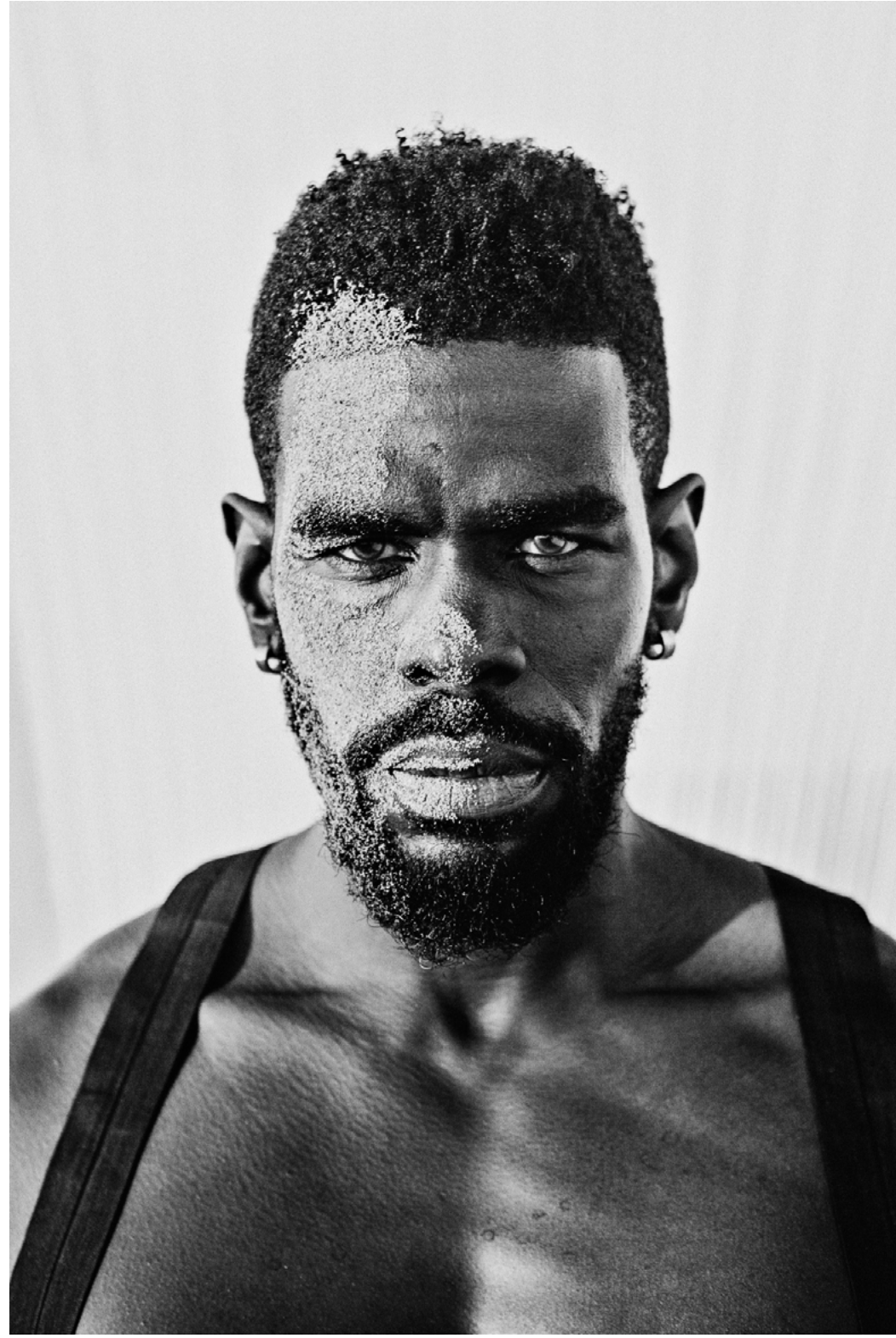
*Adam. Malibu. 2015*







*Mustafa. Los Angeles. 2014*



*Mustafa. Los Angeles. 2014*



*Leslie. Yucca Valley. 2014*



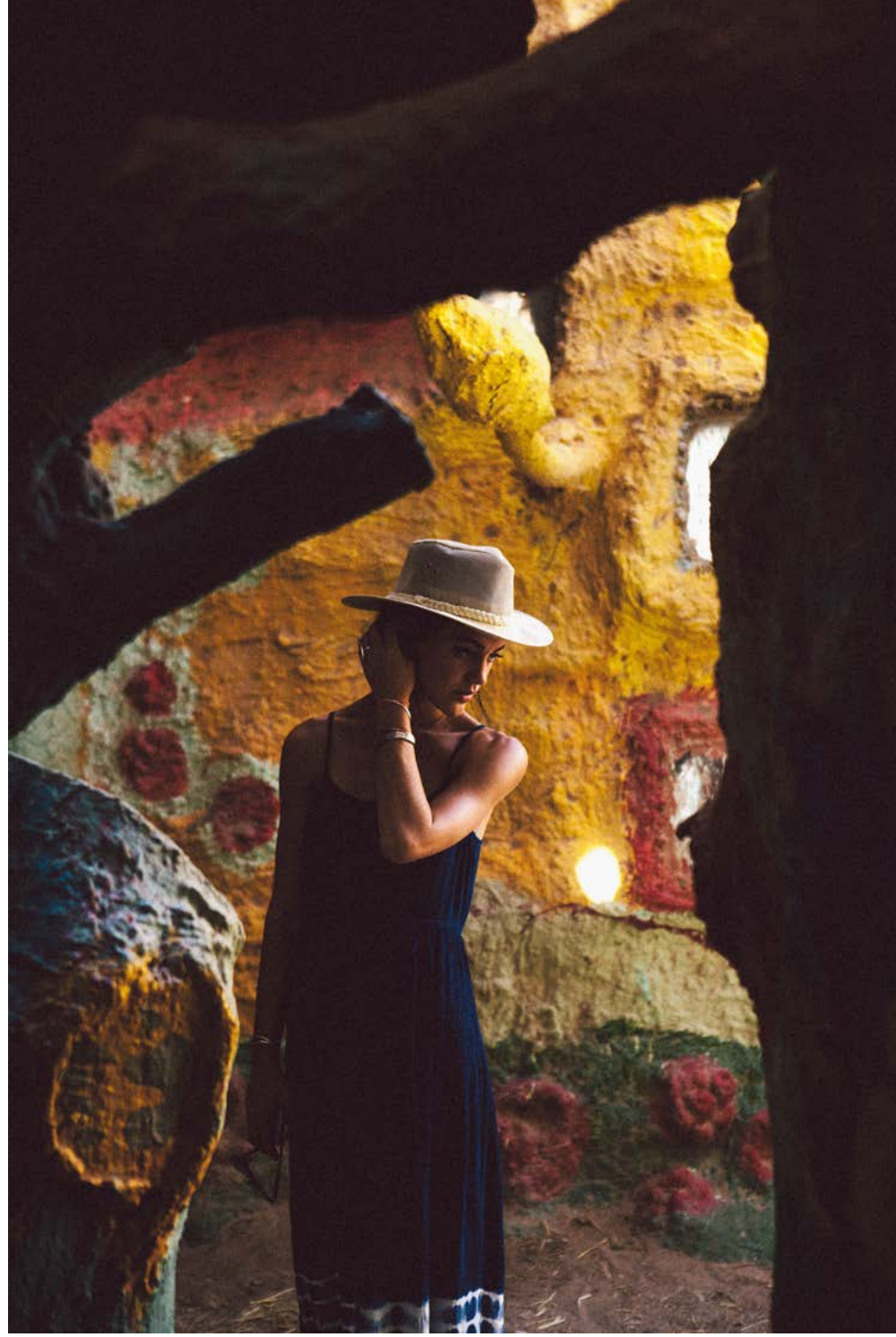
*Leslie. Yucca Valley. 2014*







*Lane. San Francisco. 2014*



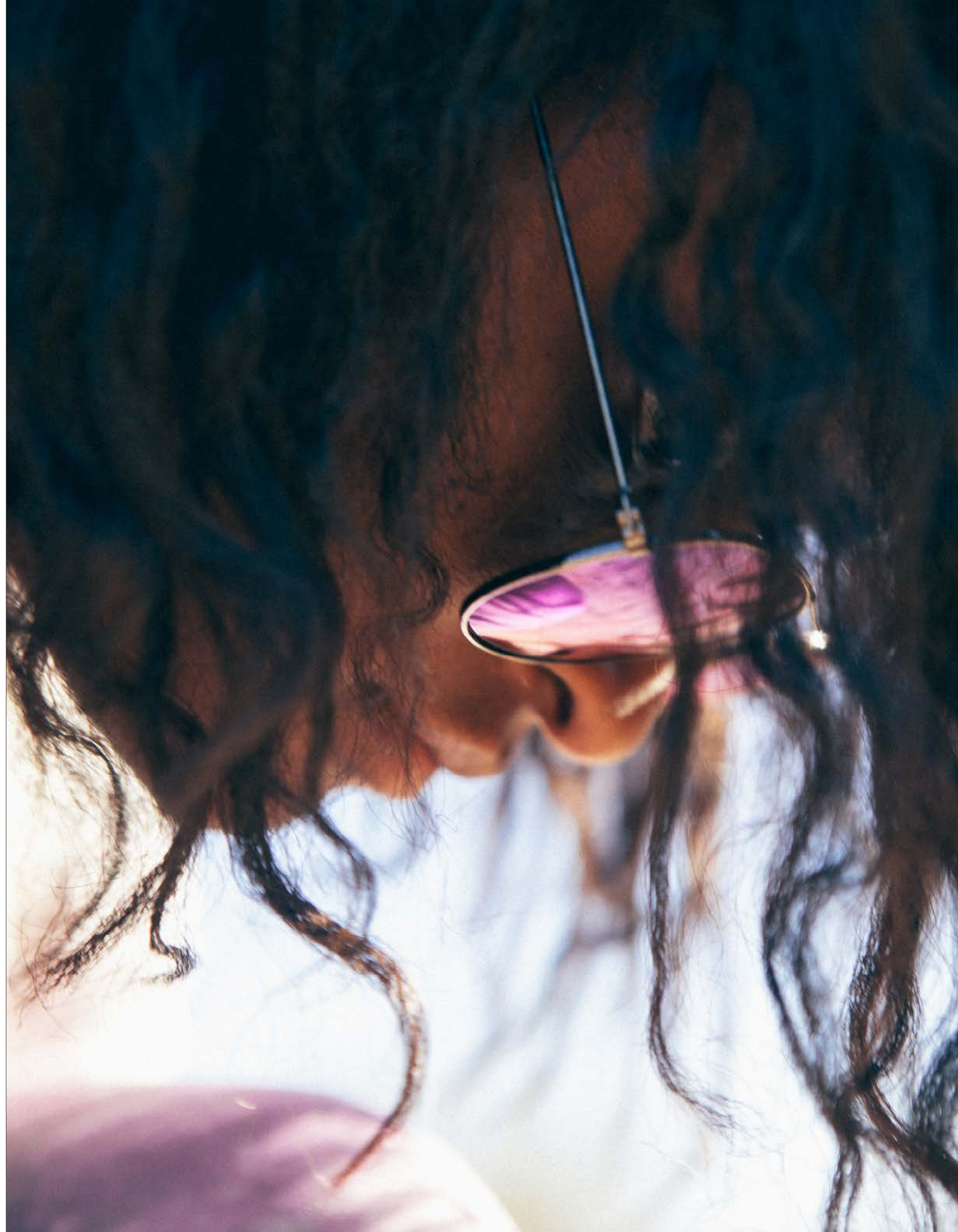
*Crystal. Slab City. 2015*



*Zabar. Los Angeles. 2015*



*Nia. Mojave Desert. 2015*





# Fear & Longing in Los Angeles

CIRCA 2015







*Silverlake* / MAY 2015



*Melrose* / APRIL 2015

















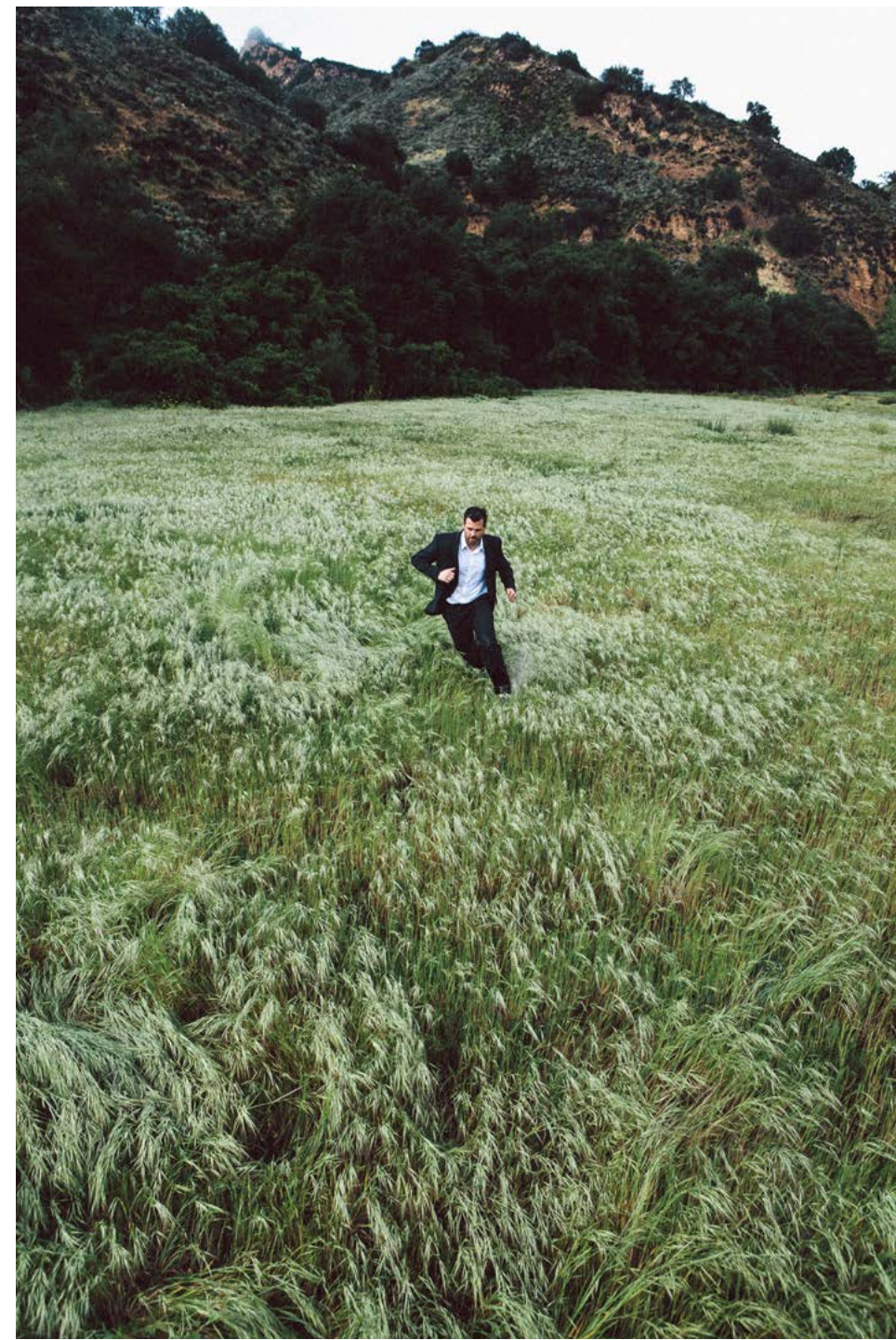












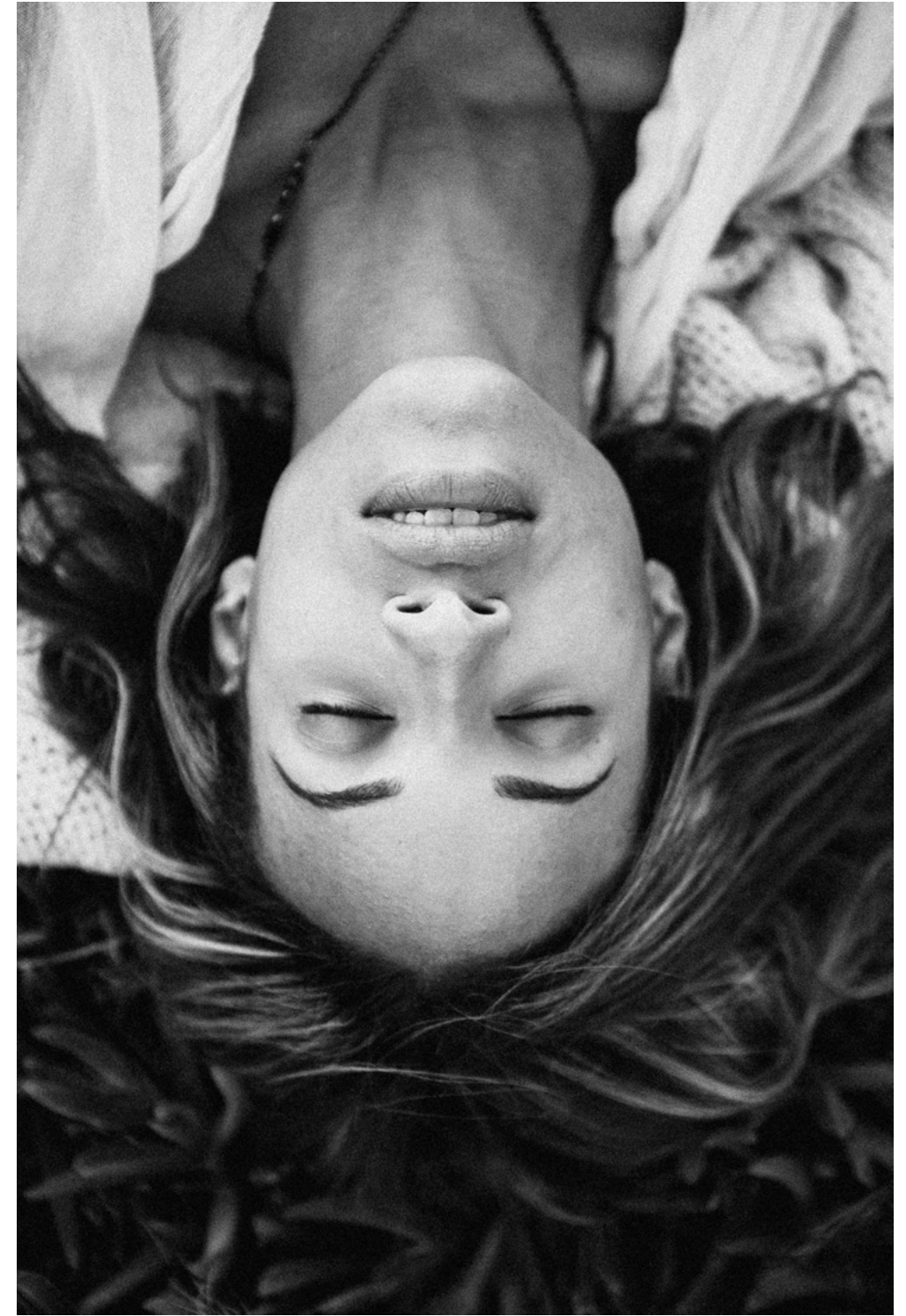


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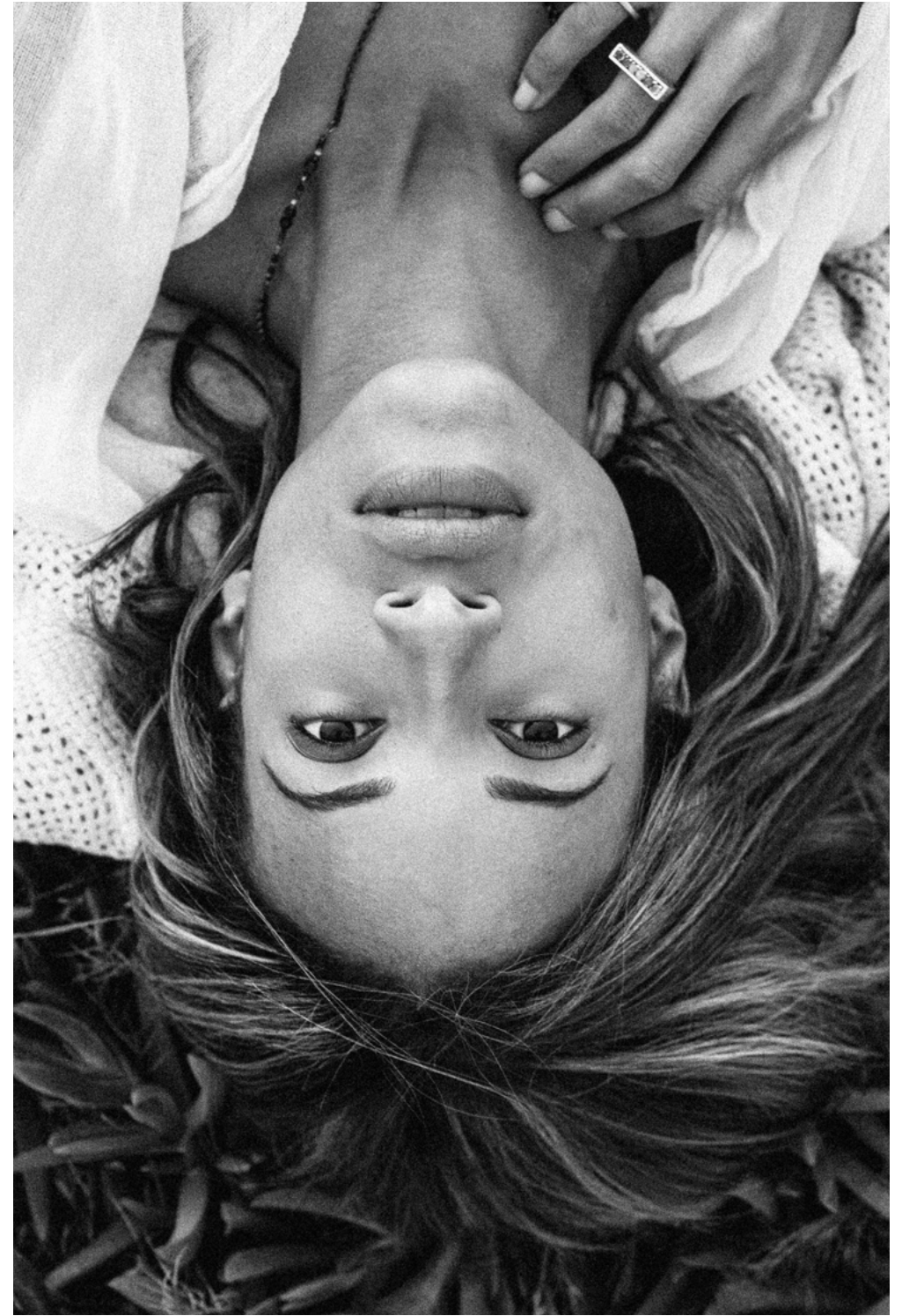
*Los Angeles. February 2015*













# Monuments

*Joshua Tree, April 2015*













## *Epilogue /*

I didn't finish this issue in three days like I'd hoped. In fact, it took nearly five months to complete. I'd originally hoped to descend from my silent creative retreat like Moses descending the mountain, having communicated with the gods and now bearing the tablets of my profound revelations. The blindness and silence were clarifying but it was the focused space and time sans distractions that were of most value. Regardless sensory deprivation is an element I will continue to experiment with.

Someone once told me that being an artist means walking blindly through a dark room smacking your shins on the furniture. Based on my recent experience it appears that sometimes that's a metaphor and sometimes that's the real thing.

Play with the gifts that discomfort provides - it enables you to see yourself and the world differently.

I went to the woods.

I found a container.

I went to be with myself

with my art. With my heart

I blanked myself for 13 hours 31 min

I didn't say a word for 4 1/2 days.

I colored. I played. I listened

I wrote.

I read.

I was with myself.

And my heart.

I left the loneliness.

I felt the longing.

For what? For love?



I want to be with myself  
with my art. With my heart  
I skinned myself for 13 hours 31 min  
I didn't say a word for 4 1/2 days  
I acted. I played. I listened  
I wrote.  
I read.  
I was with myself.  
And my heart.

I sent the old writing  
My sketches exploring what my  
life might look like.

As an artist  
As someone following that inner path  
I wrote.

I wrote words  
and I wrote nonsense

~~scribbles~~

I played. And I worked.

I laughed. And I cried.

A shipping away.

No more underwater.

Had it become a catch?

A cliché?

A ———.

It was gone.

Months later maybe I would discover  
the reason.

To focus on issues that are  
more pressing, more necessary  
than ~~it was~~ <sup>it was</sup> ~~shipping away~~ <sup>shipping away</sup>

And if there are

NO SUCH THING  
AS ACCIDENTS

And if

EVERY OPPORTUNITY  
HAS A  
WINDOW

Then what the fuck is the appeal  
of it?

That is enough as I am?

To see.

To give

To learn

To serve

To give myself

To give my art

To be

A channel.

A vessel.

Yes, here I am

To follow that path

To follow that path

The road less traveled

My heart took that road  
years ago.

All I have to do is catch  
up to it.





To show that path  
The road less traveled  
My heart took that road  
years ago.  
All I have to do is walk  
up to the

*Trust the process.  
The road.  
Circuitous as it might be  
With its potential dead end(s)  
Or entrances*

*Flow is  
Achieved by being.  
And by going.*





The End.



# Current Inspirations

Recent quotes:

*“Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what’s next or how. The moment you know how you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong but we take leap after leap in the dark.”*

AGNES DE MILLE

*“Art is action.”*

MARK ROTHKO

*“If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.”*

WILLIAM BLAKE

*“The chief peculiarity of this feeling is that the receiver of a true artistic expression is so united to the artist that he feels as if the work were his own and not someone else’s - as if what it expressed were just what he had long been wishing to express. A real work of art destroys, in the consciousness of the receiver, the separation between himself and the artist - not that alone, but also between himself and all whose minds receive this work of art. In this freeing of our personality from its separation and isolation, in this uniting of it with others, lies the chief characteristic and the great attractive force of art.”*

LEO TOLSTOY

Recent reads:

[Meditations](#)

Marcus Aurelius

[The Artist’s Reality](#)

Mark Rothko

[Doors of Perception](#)

Aldous Huxley

[Unspoken: Path to Creativity](#)

Jessica Kung Dreyfus &  
Stephane Dreyfus

Recent listens:

[Spaces](#)

Nils Frahm

[Prelude](#)

Deodato

[AMOK](#)

Atoms for Peace

[What’s Goin On?](#)

Marvin Gaye



# Thank you.

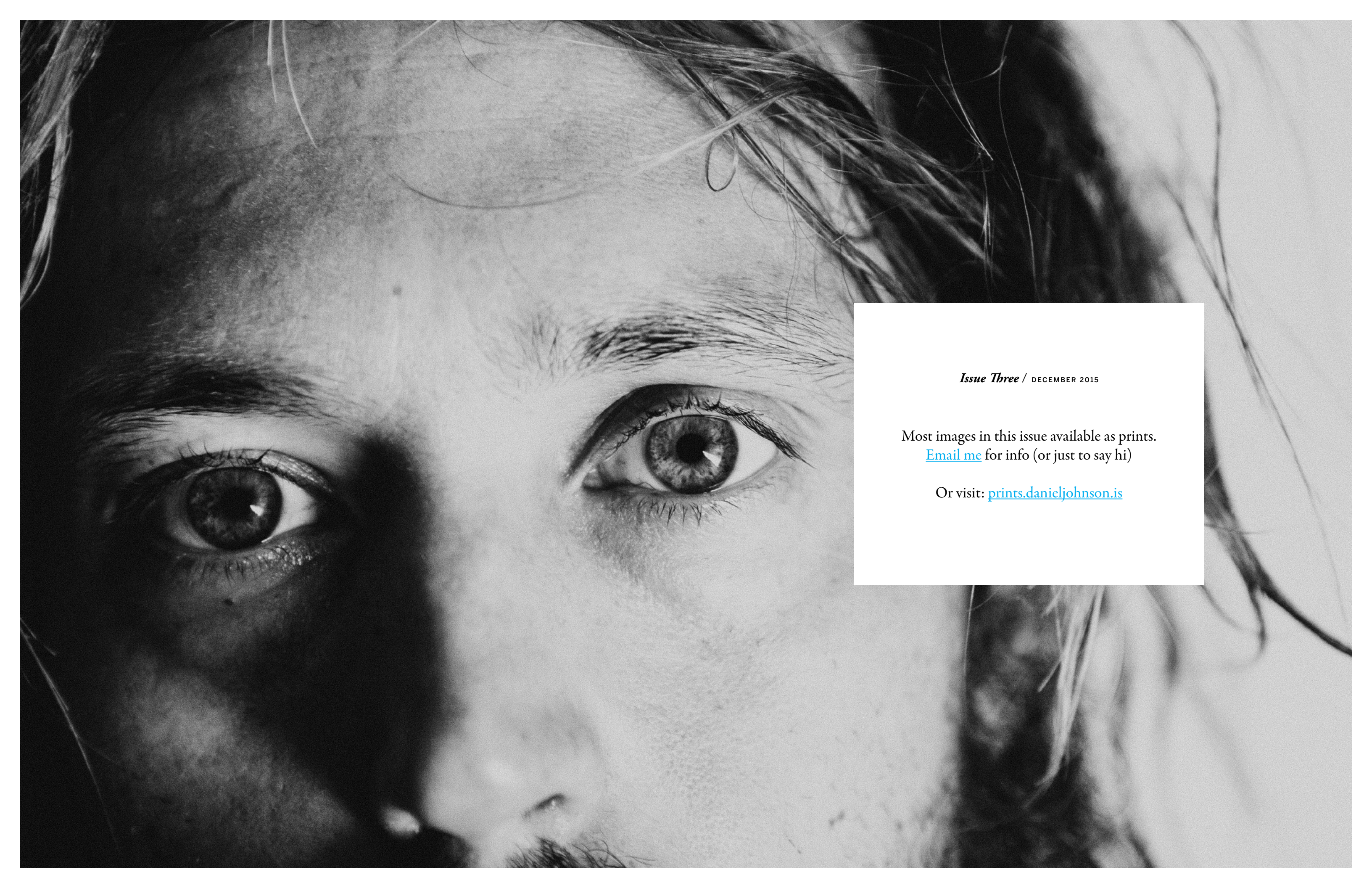
Adam Schmalholz  
Amelia Harris  
Bobby Bailey  
Caitlin Cimino  
Carson Linforth Bowley  
Justin Bauer  
Lane Wood  
Lauren Davis  
Leslie Espinosa  
Neil Bardon  
Nia Batts  
Maricarmen Sierra  
Mustafa Shakir  
Sophia Bush  
Tawney Bevacqua

*Grateful for the  
friends who follow  
that path, the road  
less traveled*

*Knowing their  
hearts forged that  
trail long ago. And  
all they have to do is  
catch up to it.*







*Issue Three* / DECEMBER 2015

Most images in this issue available as prints.  
[Email me](#) for info (or just to say hi)

Or visit: [prints.danieljohnson.is](http://prints.danieljohnson.is)