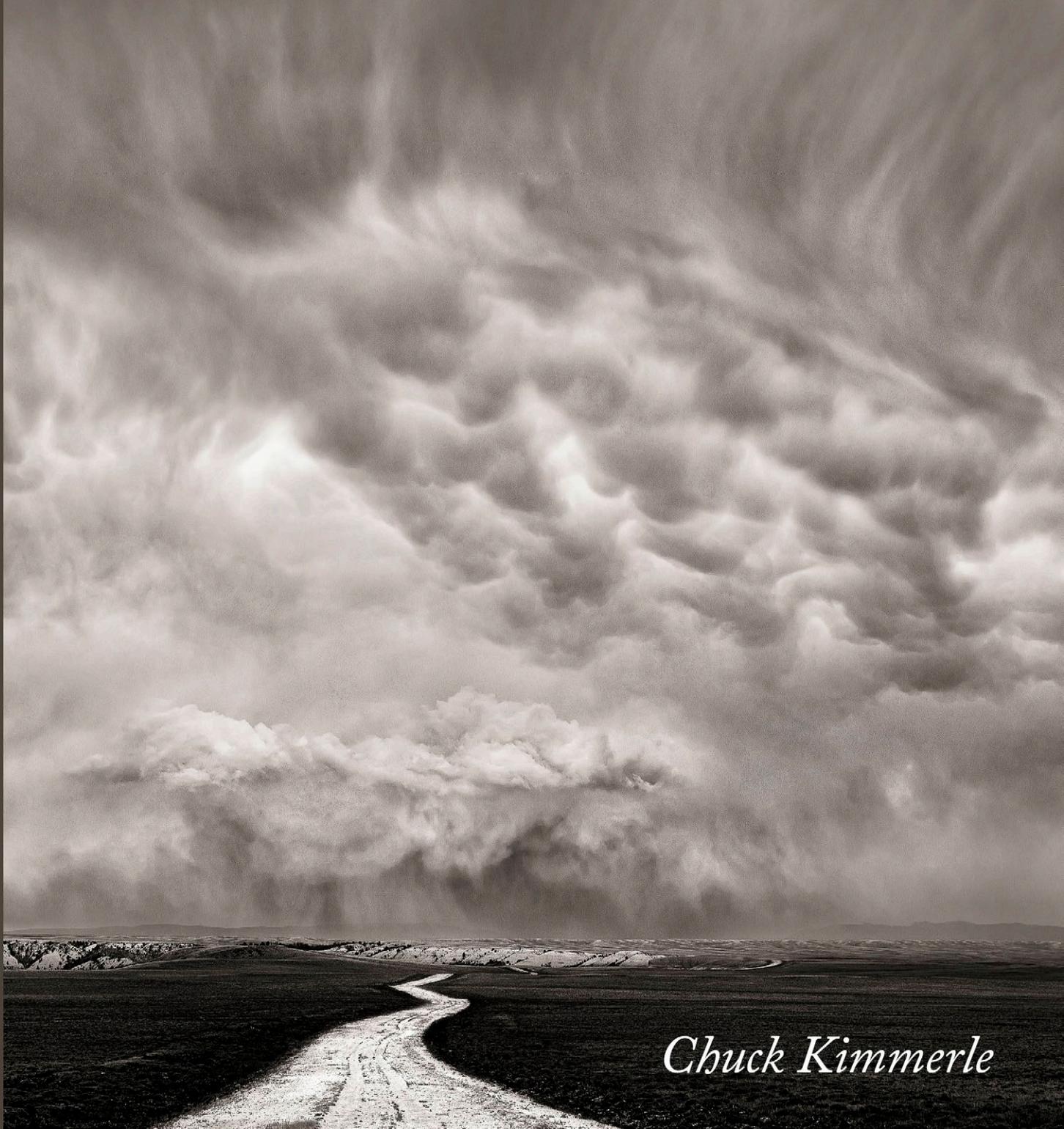


PERIPHERAL VISION

LENSWORK  
MONOGRAPH  
SERIES

10



*Chuck Kimmerle*



PERIPHERAL VISION



CHUCK KIMMERLE



# PERIPHERAL VISION

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# INTRODUCTION



The first time I drove into eastern North Dakota, I was astonished by the immensity of the open land. Other than the occasional row of stalwart trees and hearty shrubs (planted to protect farm houses from the relentless wind and blowing snow) the land is uninterrupted prairie. The joke is that (with a long enough lens) one can photograph *anywhere* from here.

In 1996 I took a self-imposed demotion as a photo editor for a newspaper in Pennsylvania, to that of a small-town photographer at the *Grand Forks Herald* in North Dakota. Prior to that I worked at a newspaper in Minnesota. During those jobs (as a way of keeping photography *fun*) I photographed the landscape as a casual hobbyist. Upon leaving Pennsylvania (where the landscape is anything but flat), I could not see a path forward for my landscape studies. North Dakota was unnervingly flat and, even worse, there was very little public land. For five years I didn't even try to photograph: the landscape was just too alien to me.

Fortunately, providence managed to intervene during a photo assignment: as I was looking at the landscape I experienced what some folks call "a revelation." As I was photographing near the actual geographic center of North America (one of North Dakota's few unique attributes that doesn't include something related to winter weather) I looked *into* rather than *at* the land. For the first time I saw not only possibilities for photographs, but for a *relationship* with the land. It was then that I made my first photographs that conveyed an appreciation for the aesthetics of the prairie landscape.



Ask any photographer to pinpoint the moment when the camera captivated their imagination, and they'll have a story. For me, it was when I was about three years old: while hiding beneath a table at a family picnic I took my first picture with my grandmother's Kodak Brownie. Although I had been warned repeatedly not to

take a picture, and despite my promises to obey, I just couldn't resist that button. It was, I am sure, not my first rebellious act (and it certainly was not my last).

That incident taught me two valuable lessons: The first was that a family picnic would not prevent a public spanking; the second was that a camera was something both fascinating and mysterious. I would love to see what a wide-eyed and innocent version of me found so compelling that I would risk public punishment. But that photo (along with my grandmother's camera and my grandmother) has been lost to us. Bummer on all accounts.



My first post-college job was working as a photojournalist, a career which spanned 15 years with three different newspapers in three different states. All in all, it's been an amazing experience: I covered a Super Bowl, a Stanley Cup, a Major League All-Star baseball game, the kidnapping of young Jacob Wetterling, the 1994 crash of Flight 427 near Pittsburgh, and a Johnny Cash concert at which I could, for the only time in my life, actually *feel* the power and excitement of a crowd.

While I liked working as a newspaper photojournalist, I have to admit that I was never very

good at it. There was no passion in my work; to me it was simply a job that I tried to do well. When I had an opportunity to take on a job as a photographer at a university (with better hours, more pay, and nobody yelling at me) the decision was easy. After sixteen years, it was time for a change.

Throughout my time as a photojournalist, and my subsequent university position, I never felt the need to travel far; I have photographed the landscape near where I live. As a kid I often heard one of my mother's favorite sayings: "Charity begins at home." For me, that also applied to landscape photography. I just wanted to explore and better understand the area where I lived. As a matter of fact, I had never photographed nor even visited the Desert Southwest—a true photographic mecca—until five years ago.

I was perfectly happy making my pretty landscape pictures until the summer of 2006, when I experienced a bout of severe double-vision. After much poking, prodding, and testing, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. It was, as one might imagine, an unpleasant shock. MS is a marvelously insidious and unpredictable disease; at the time, the future looked rather bleak.

A friend pointed me to the work of photographer Steve Szabo. Like me, he was a former

photojournalist and, like me, he had MS. His landscape photographs were powerful in their reticence and quietness. I was inspired by him and his work, and although he died from complications due to MS, he gave me a great deal of hope. His book, *The Eastern Shore*, is one of my most cherished possessions.

After my eyesight returned to normal I applied myself to landscape photography with an enthusiasm that surprised me. It was something I *had* to do. Not only did it serve to distract me from other concerns, but it calmed me. Looking back, I think the act of photography, of exploring and discovering, allowed me to convey certain feelings—fear, uncertainty, hope—that I never would have spoken out loud. It was therapy without the requisite office.



If there is one thing that I've learned about photography over the years it's this: *it's not about the picture*. Rather, it's about the communication—the connection. The photograph is just a conduit through which we are able to have a dialog with the viewer. Surprisingly, I discovered that the subject matter is secondary. That realization helped to reinforce my resolve to spend the bulk of my time and energy photographing where I live. I'm grateful that my eyes are able to see the prairie, and to see its beauty.

I have little doubt that my years as a photojournalist have influenced my fine art work. I want my photographs to tell small stories—thus I am often attracted to scenes that include a juxtaposition of the natural world and that of man. It is at these intersections and areas of interplay where I find a great deal of meaning.

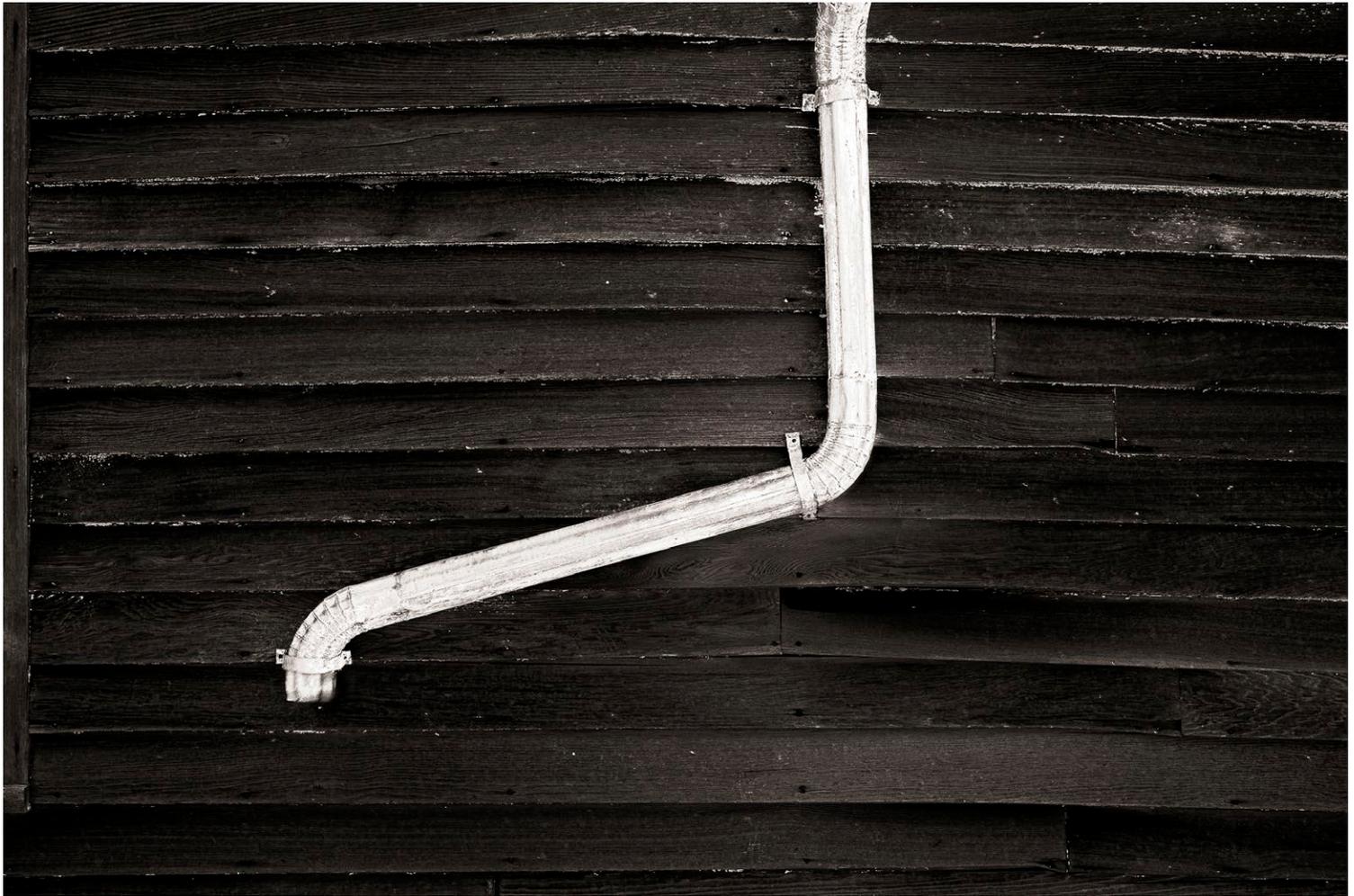
With few exceptions, I now photograph exclusively in black-and-white. At first, this was to differentiate my personal images from work done as a newspaper photographer. As I worked on my own, however, I began to realize that I was much more drawn to the tactile attributes of shape, form, and texture than I was to the purely visual stimulation of color.

My personal work has been described as quiet, serene, and often lonely. I can't argue, nor can I explain. Some of that is due to the austere areas where I often photograph—in the central or northern plains—but much is due, no doubt, to some undiagnosed irregularity within my psyche. No matter. It makes me happy and harms no one.

So there you have it.

Chuck Kimmerle  
Casper, Wyoming  
January 2017



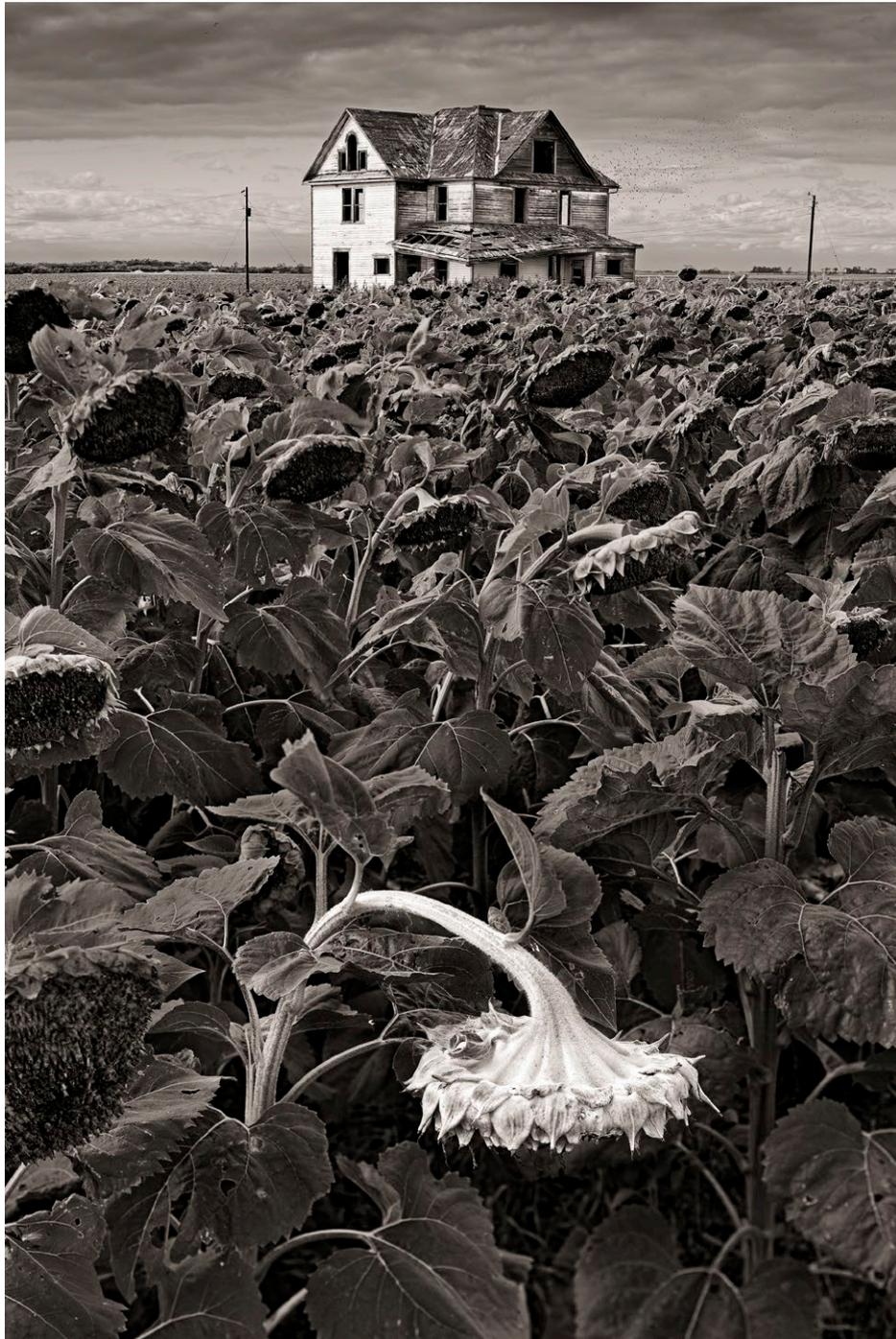




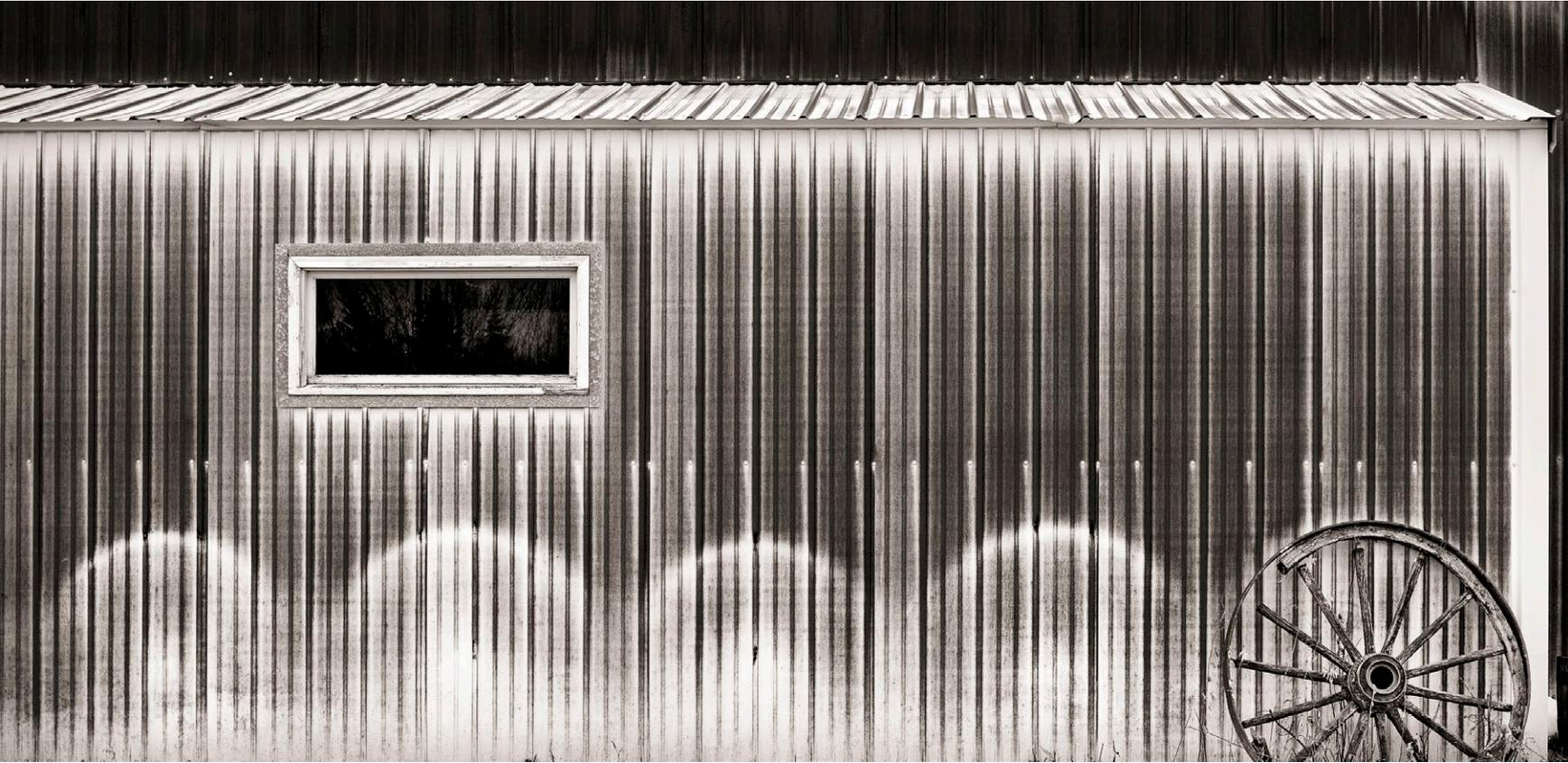




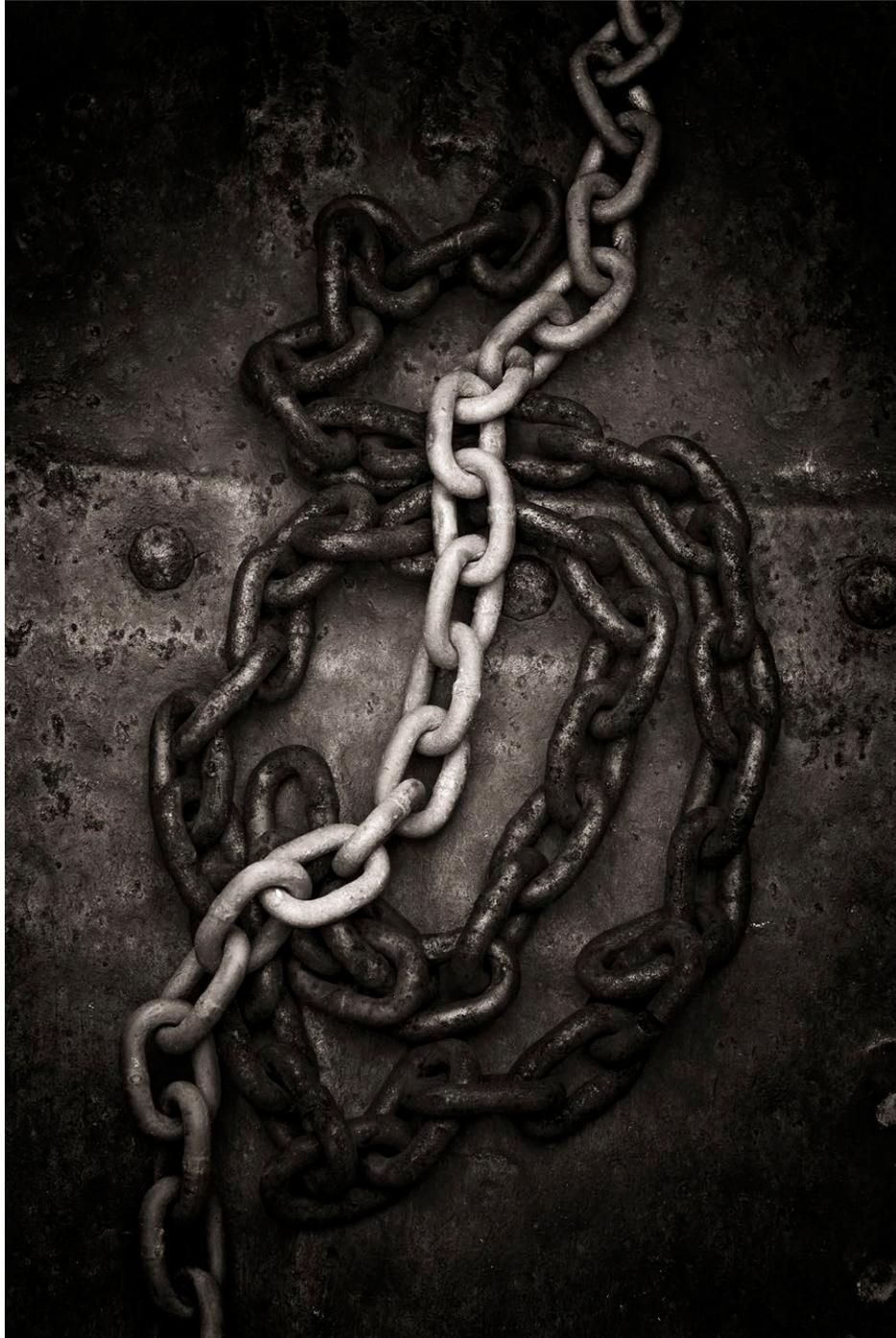






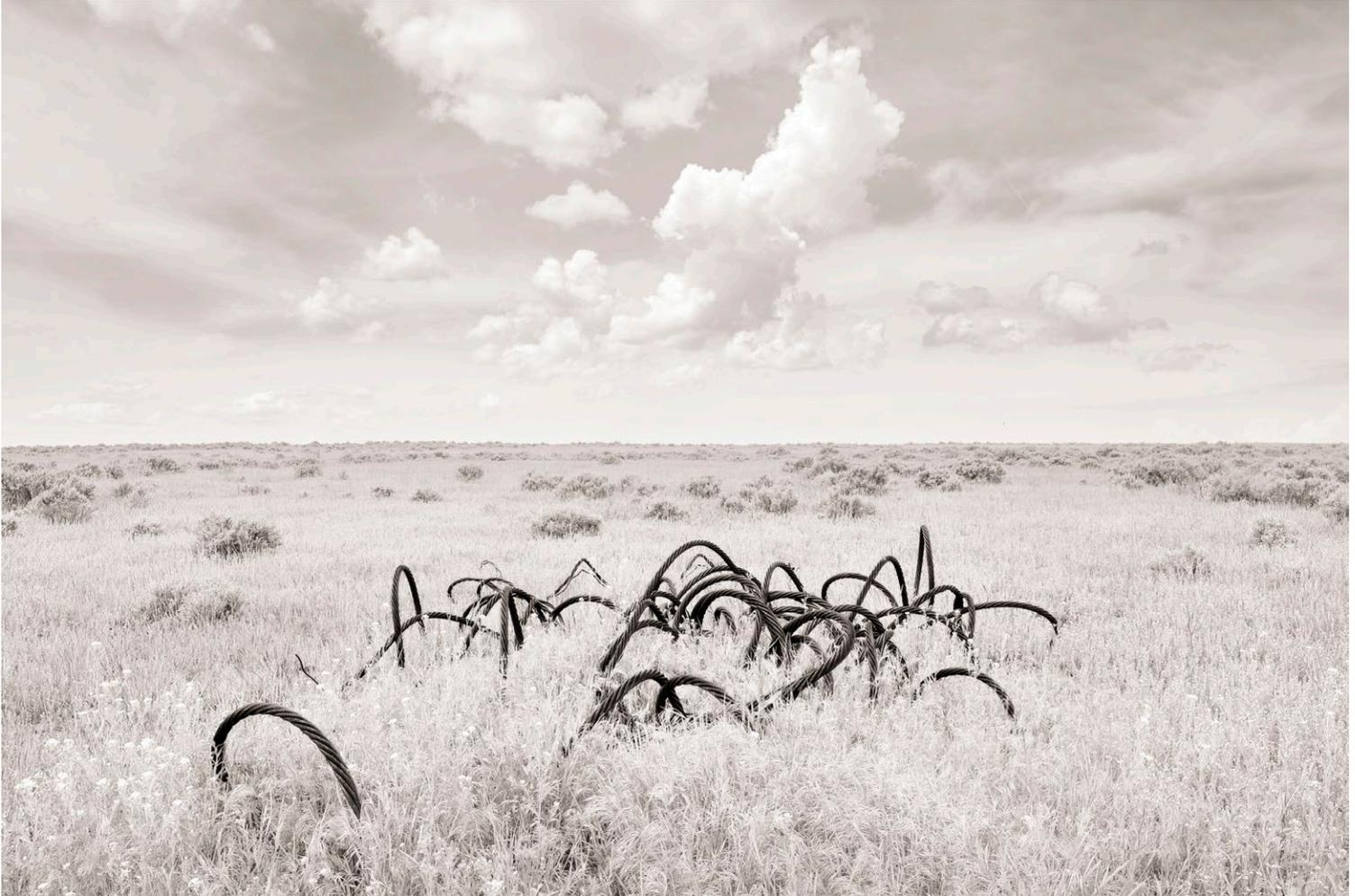


















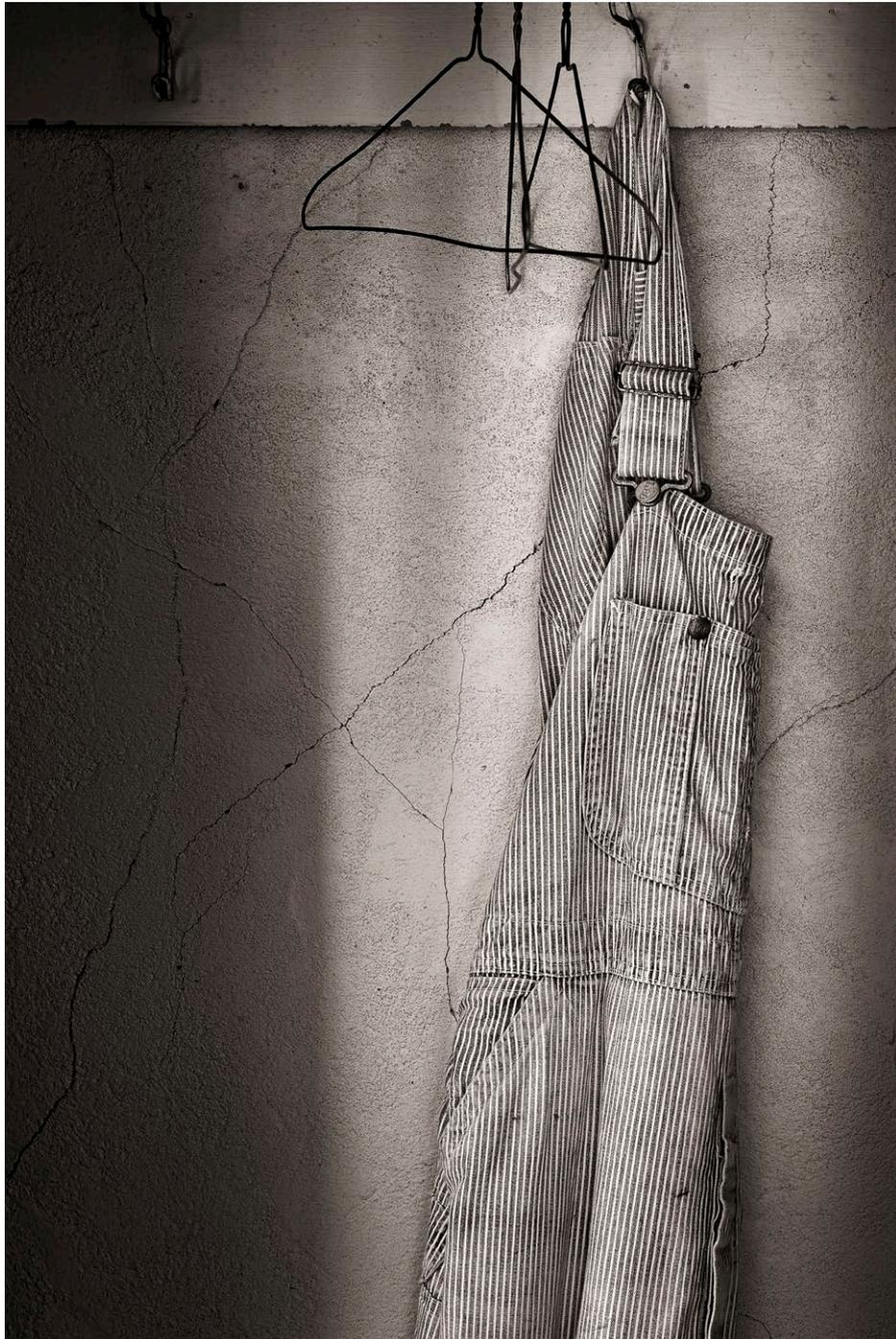
































































































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