

SEAWATER

Photography by Ray Collins

Exhibition reflection essays by

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and

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Irene Carlson Gallery of Photography
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Gallery reception with refreshments
5:30 – 6:30 p.m. Thursday, November 12

Ray Collins describes his work for the exhibition Seawater ...

My first ever memories are of the ocean. I can still feel my little fingers digging into the shoulders of my mother as we swam under the waves. Although ever changing, the Sea has been the one constant in my life.

It has taught me humility, respect and courage, lessons that have carried over to who I am as an artist and more importantly, who I am as a human being.

Being colorblind, my emphasis is light, tones, textures and composition – saturation and scope of the color gamut will always be secondary to what I see. Growing up it was hard not fitting in during class and seeing what everyone else saw, but now I've come to treat this as a gift rather than a curse.

In this series I aim to document the Sea as if it were a living and breathing thing. To show ephemeral liquid sculptures as solid masses, mountainous even. Nature imitating nature. I want you to feel as though you were swimming next to me, seeing these waves crash, hearing and feeling the rumble of an angry and beautiful ocean.

The Ocean is all I have ever known...

-Ray Collins
November, 2015

About Ray Collins...

My introduction to photography came in 2007 when a knee injury I sustained at work in an underground coalmine forced me to reevaluate my passion. At the time it was the worst thing ever, but to use a way overdone cliché it was truly “a blessing in disguise.” During the rehabilitation process I was unable to walk or drive for about six months, which gave me ample time to read and re read the camera manual – learning about the relationship between shutter speed, aperture and ISO and how to interpret and manipulate available light sources.

As my condition improved the surgeon recommended I start swimming again. Having always been a keen surfer this was truly music to my ears. I bought an underwater housing and ‘practiced’ ‘rehabilitating’ my knee! A lot of my friends are great surfers so naturally they were easy to document, and I enjoyed learning different lens focal lengths in different conditions. I gave myself a goal of getting a shot published within 12 months. Within a month I had my first photo in print and within two months had my first international magazine cover. It was a lot of luck obviously, and coupled with the steep, quick curve on learning with digital I found it addictive.

As time went on I was sent on assignments from various magazines to document surfers in some beautiful and remote locations in the world. There was always this quiet voice compelling me to shoot the unsorted wave though. The purity, the strength and the beauty of nature meant more to me than a companies advertising space on a surfers board and clothes.

Waves were timeless. They needn’t any explanation. There are no trends. A good photo will be the same today as it will be in 20 years from now. I had truly found my connection, my reason for doing what I do.

Since focusing (excuse the pun) on just seascapes the demand for my work has grown exponentially. Somehow I was this coalminer with a camera and I’m answering calls from National Geographic, Apple, United Airlines, Nikon and RedBull to name a few... I’ve been lucky enough to win awards and grants from organizations such as The Smithsonian, California Academy Of Sciences and been named Sport Photographer of the Year for *Capture Professional Photography Magazine*, won the Surf Photo Of The Year award twice and a whole lot of other accolades that I really don’t want to bore you with.

I’m not sure where to from here as it has been an organic process so far, all I know is that I am really passionate about what I do and just being able to wake up each morning with the ocean on my door step and the sun rising over the sea is more of an award than any material thing I have accomplished.

Thanks for taking the time to view my work. I hope your visit stirs emotion.

-Ray Collins
November, 2015

On Seawater
By Sean Bernard

This is how water used to be.

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I was nineteen the first time I walked upon the Hoover Dam. We had been driving seven hours, and it was twilight when we parked and stepped out of the car, stretching out our aches. We stood atop the dam and it felt like the world had fallen away beneath our feet: we stared down its southern end, at the distant diminishing trickle of the Colorado River. Wind gathered along canyons we could not see, wind that rushed up the dam's wide span, that buffeted our faces and watered our eyes. We felt vertiginous, peering down and down into all that nothing; we felt breathless, giddy, aflight. It was tremendous, we all agreed. Like nothing we'd experienced before.

Then we went to the other side.

Hoover Dam's darker northern rim was a different place. It did not dizzy. It did not giddy. It was a place of dread. Of water. Miles of water, days and weeks and months of water fallen melted condensed evaporated and fallen again, all gathered and formed into a singular mass rising nearly to the dam's top, nearly covering four concrete intake towers of enormous proportion, like machines put in place by some industrial future race. It was vast and silent and whole, a block cut from a vast quarry of unlimited resource. We could not fathom how deep it went. How much lay there before us. We stood on the brink of a massive force that considered us, if at all, with distant contempt.

My friend spoke for us all. He said,
Look at all that water. All that power. Doesn't it scare you?

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That was nearly twenty years ago. That was how water used to be.

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The images in this exhibition, Ray Collins's *Seawater*, are not of the trickling and sparse waters we now know. They are older and stranger. They are epochal.

This is water-as-power. Water-as-the-clenched-fist. The hewn stone. The draped crystal cut in shards that will – certainly – cut back. It is water as an awful dream, a David Lynchian water. Mythical titanic hands reside behind these images, forces far greater than us, hidden in deep depths that we cannot comprehend, rearing back.

Once there was beauty to be found in dread. Mr. Collins has found it again.

On Seawater
By Pablo Weaver

Although it may not be apparent by the pop-cultural representations of surfers and surf bums, surfers are truly masters of physics and the physical sciences. We spend countless hours studying the applied properties of fluid dynamics and wave mechanics. We are given real time feedback on our learning through emotional bliss, or dangerous, sometimes life threatening negative reinforcement. We are obsessed with the concepts of geomorphology, studying the features of the coastline, both above and below the surface, to better understand their effects on incoming swells. We are equally obsessed with meteorology and the progression of low-pressure systems in far off reaches of the oceans, and we fanatically follow the way the moon's gravitational pull warps the planet's oceans on its daily rotation around the Earth. Through our studies and experiences, we develop a keen sense for the underlying mechanics of waves. At our local spot, we know how to time the act of paddling out with the least amount of energy expenditure, often, as our goal seems to be, without getting our hair wet. We know where to sit to catch the best waves, using tactile and visual cues both in the water, as well as on the shoreline. As swells approach in the distance, we make split second mental calculations of the shape, speed, and trajectory of the wave, and whether it will bring a profound feeling of joy and "stoke," or one of instant pain and regret.

Once you catch a wave, you become an unwitting practitioner of Zen meditation. You are singularly focused on the sensations and experiences around you, and you connect to nature in a way that is hard to replicate on dry land. You feel the exhilaration of the natural power of the wave beneath you, the coolness of the wind on your wet skin, and the warmth of the sun's rays. You learn not to fight against the movements of the ocean, but to go with the flow, fine tuning your position to achieve your desired outcome. As I grow older and more cognizant of the complexities of the human condition, I have developed a deep appreciation for the power of ocean waves, both to thrill, as well as to heal and maintain balance. As any surfer will tell you, all the baggage and stress of daily life gets washed away when you enter the water. The giddiness that I feel at the end of a wave, and its compounding effects at the end of a surf session, is enough to sustain me through the deepest of challenges.

As someone blessed to have spent my youth as a surf bum in Hawaii, I am moved to many different emotions by the photography of Ray Collins. The photos capture the essence of the power, complexity, and energy of the surf. As I look at photos such as "Blue Curve" and "Oil," I am intrigued by the immense power of the ocean. I also find myself studying the shape of the projecting lip and wondering about the underlying reef that created it. As the base of the wave catches on the ocean floor, the top continues forward in its initial trajectory, either crumbling downwards, or if conditions are right, pitching out into a "tube" or "barrel." To create a pitch of the magnitude seen in "Blue Curve", which is very different from the "mooshy" white water we are accustomed to in most California beaches, there must have been a rapid depth change, most likely at the interface of deep water and a shallow coral reef. In waves like "Glow" and "Holocene," you can see and almost feel the added effects of strong offshore breezes propping up the projecting lip. In others, such as "Flair," "Silver Fan," and "Wobble," you can see the effects of wave interference, both positive and negative, as well as bending energy, as the sea floor shapes the waves above.

Perhaps most fascinating for me, is that photos of waves, in both their capturing and viewing, seem to evoke the same sort of emotional spectrum as the act of surfing itself. By capturing these unique moments of time and space, Ray Collins has frozen the essence of the situation, revealing the deep and complex sentiments of the sea. When the obligations of adulthood make finding the time to surf more challenging, it is gratifying to reflect on images that produce that same complex range of emotions, from exhilaration, to contemplation, and most importantly of peace and connection with the natural world.



Crystal



Oil



Rock



Green Claw



Blue Hook



Flair



Wobble



Blue Curve



Glow



Snow Mountain



Sea Monster



Silver Fan



Triangle



The Claw



Womp



Holocene