

KOKORO



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KOKORO

Wandering Through a Photographic Life

*An Image Journal
with Commentary, Meditation, Philosophy,
and Unanswered Questions*

Brooks Jensen

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Perhaps Lafcadio Hearn will not protest too much if I paraphrase (almost word for word) from *Kokoro*, his 1895 book of Japanese life. He explains this important Japanese term far better than I ever could:



“The entries comprising this volume treat of the inner rather than the outer life, — for which reason they have been grouped under the title *Kokoro* (heart). Written with the above character, this word signifies also *mind*, in the emotional sense; *spirit*; *courage*; *resolve*; *sentiment*; *affection*; and *inner meaning*, — just as we say in English, ‘the heart of things.’”

Well, the end of the first year —
66 installments of *Kokoro* later,
and it still feels like home.

A few reflections on the year, if I may.

As an artist/photographer, I've always felt that I produce work to share, to connect with others, to send my work out into the world. Yes, I value the artistic *process* for what it gives to me, but I value my artistic *product* for how it connects me to others. *Kokoro* has allowed me to do this like no other in my 45 years in photography. Home, indeed. Which means, of course, that I'm looking ahead already to the second year of *Kokoro*. I hope you are, too.

During my seminars, I persistently suggested to all the attendees that there is enough in our archives to keep ourselves busy for the rest of our lives producing finished work. I encourage them to mine deeply to see what they might find there just waiting for them. I think *Kokoro* this year has confirmed my theory.

And one other point that I've made elsewhere but is worth repeating. As artists, we simply cannot judge how others will view our work. *Kokoro* has made that point in bold type. With 66 entries this year, each and every one of them has generated an email "This is my favorite!" at one point or another. Curiously though, someone's favorite is someone else's *least* favorite. Beauty and the eye of the beholder, and all that. It's all so interesting, but I hope you don't mind if I just keep producing as the muse guides me.

On a personal note, I must admit that I am glad to see 2015 fade into history. During the first half of this year, my wife (Maureen) did battle with ovarian cancer and won. We (and I use that term on purpose) made it through surgery, chemo, and recovery. Goodbye 2015 and don't let the door hit your bum on the way out. Come to think of it, let it hit your bum. Hard. And good riddance.

And welcome 2016 — with the promise of another year of family and friends, life and art — and *Kokoro*. Thanks to all of you for wandering through my photographic life with me.



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GRANITE HOME



Brooks Jensen

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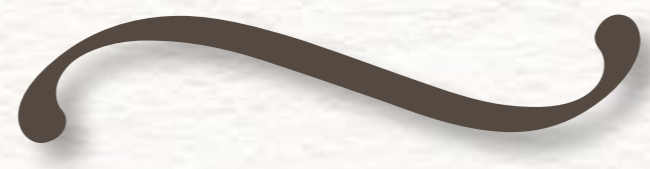








SEPARATE WAYS



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We visited them and stayed the weekend in their lovely desert home. They seemed like a happy couple — pleasant, hospitable. Little did we know the turmoil underneath that would end a few weeks later with them going their separate ways. Looking back, it may have been obvious, even inevitable. How else can I explain the photographs I made in their home?



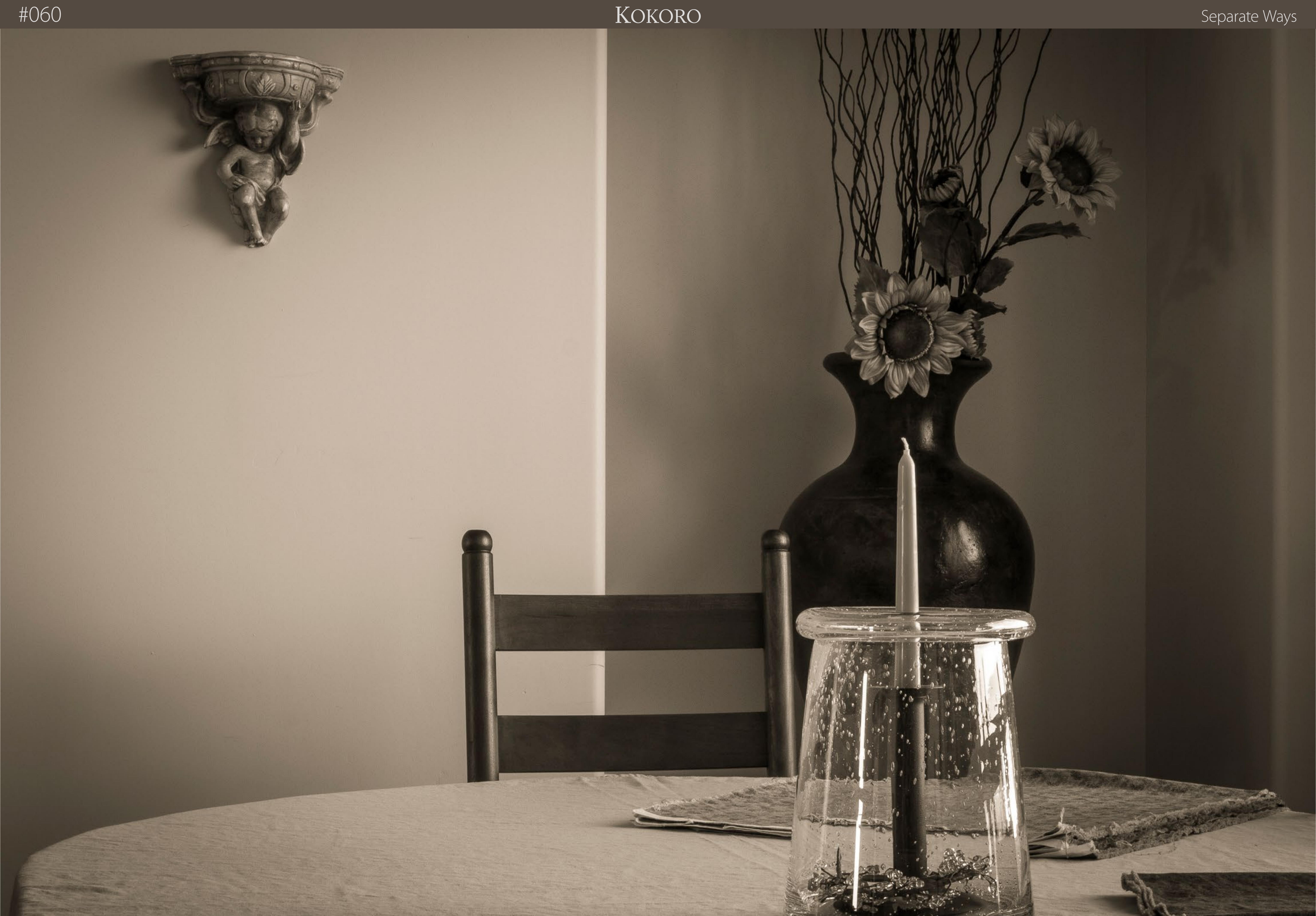




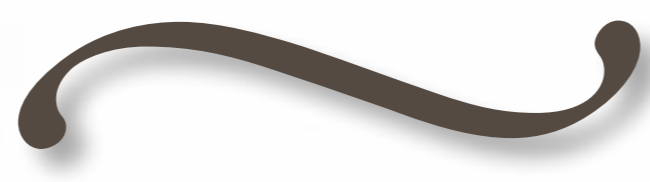








LONGQUAN SWORDS



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What do I know about swords?

To me, a sword was usually a short stick I picked up somewhere on my way to becoming a pirate or a musketeer as I walked to my friend's house before school. No Hattori Hanzō blades of steel for me — just a stick and a make believe bad guy to vanquish in my imagination.

But, swords — actual weapons — are real things, made by real people, crafted from real materials. I know that now, too, from first-hand experience when I had an opportunity to photograph one of the famed Longquan sword makers in Lishui, China.



I wish I could tell you that they were making swords of legendary fame. I don't know, and I suspect there was an element of the tourist trade involved in their production. Be that as it may, I can assure you they cut with ease — a testament I can verify by how easily one cut my finger before I realized just how sharp it really was. In a different part of the compound however, a different sword — perhaps destined for some imaginative boy — would not have damaged a marshmallow. Stacks and stacks of swords, each stack for a different purpose and with a different design, were distributed in the dozen or so buildings that surrounded the central compound.





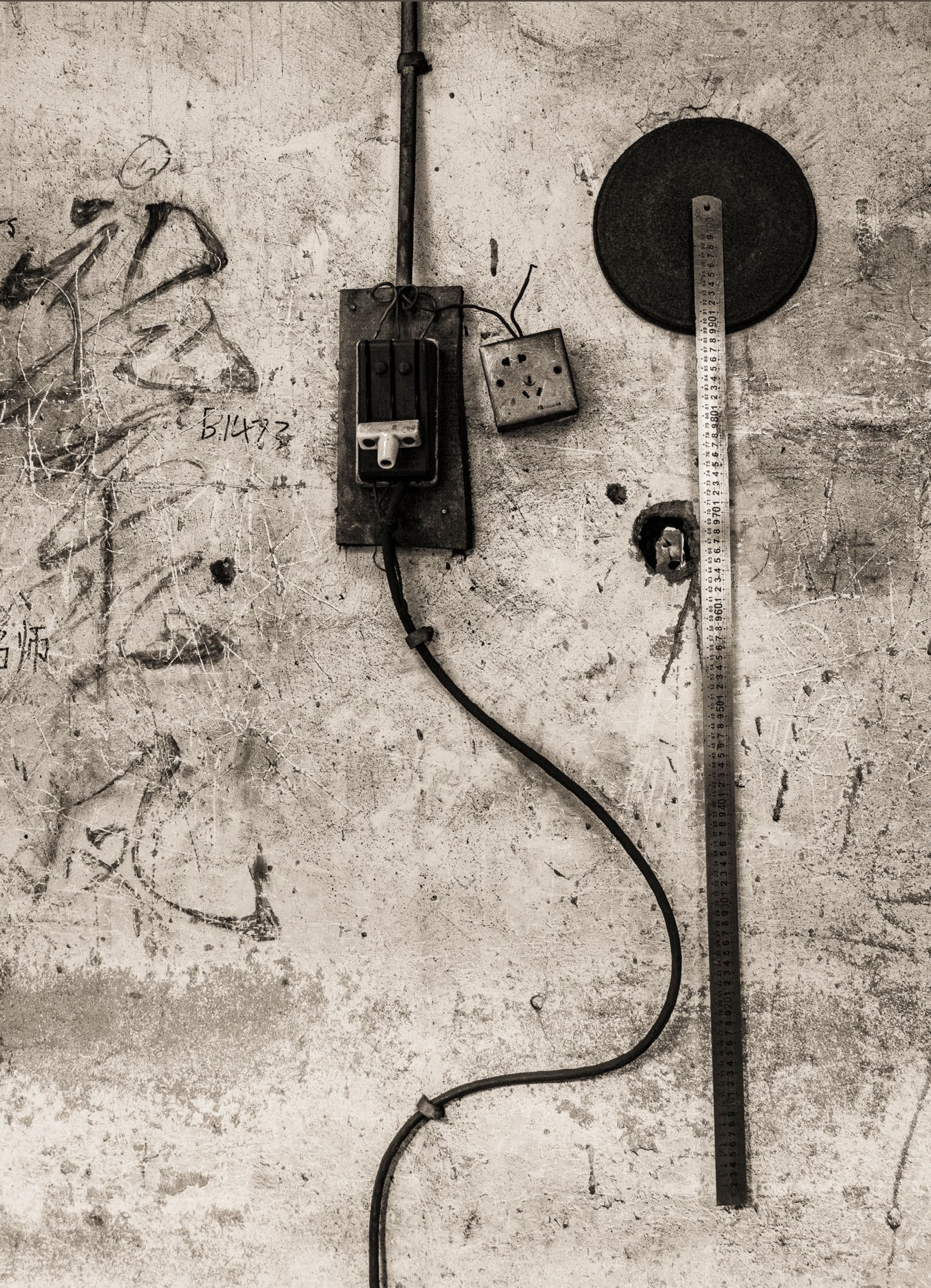
As much as the swords were fascinating, the shops and the craftsmen were moreso. By the wear on the walls, the depth of dusty metal filings on the floors, the deft skill with which each step in the process was executed by the various workers, the polished and refined details of production — by all of these the shapeless bars of steel transformed into the exquisite beauty of a finished blade. In my naiveté, I knew little of what I was watching and photographing, but even amidst my unanswered questions, I could recognize the skill of countless hours making these Longquan prizes.



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名師



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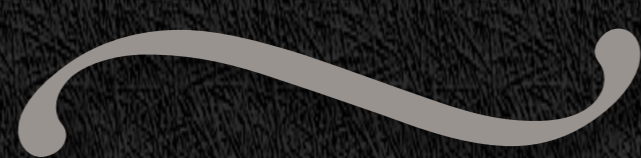
永原





SHOJI

In Praise of Shadows



J. Brooks Jensen

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WATERPOCKET FOLD



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Waterpocket Fold, Capitol Reef, Utah.

Wow.

Massive rock, literally folded over time into smooth, uplifted domes and steep rock face walls. White, a tinge of yellow/orange and occasionally pink. Dotted with scrub and the stubborn will to live. Warmed by the desert sun.

We humans may think we are all-important, but such arrogance melts in the presence of rocks like these. We are reduced to, "Wow."





















LET IT SNOW



I'm in a holiday spirit.

Turn on the carols and
warm up the chocolate, shall we?

*Oh, the weather outside is frightful
But the fire is so delightful
And since we've no place to go
Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!*

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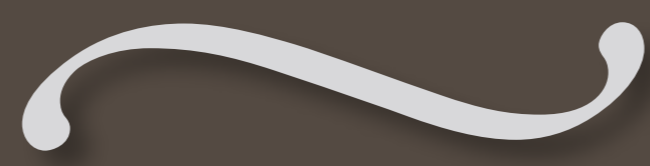








BEAUTY IN DETAIL



Brooks Jensen

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The stately Hastings Building in Port Townsend, Washington lies in wait. Construction was completed in 1890 and for decades it was the crown jewel of the Olympic Peninsula. Mostly abandoned and empty for the last 75 years, its glory may not be entirely in its past. Efforts to rejuvenate it are ongoing.



In the meantime, a glimpse of its former beauty can still be seen in its details. Such craftsmanship! Such attention to the smallest embellishment! Architecturally, the building is a marvel — but in its details lies the story of the craftsmen whose hands made and positioned each decoration in place 125 years ago. They are gone, but their presence is still with us in every hinge, in every carving, in every sheen in the exquisite polished redwood, in every place where beauty augments function. We are reminded that function *without* beauty is an opportunity lost.





























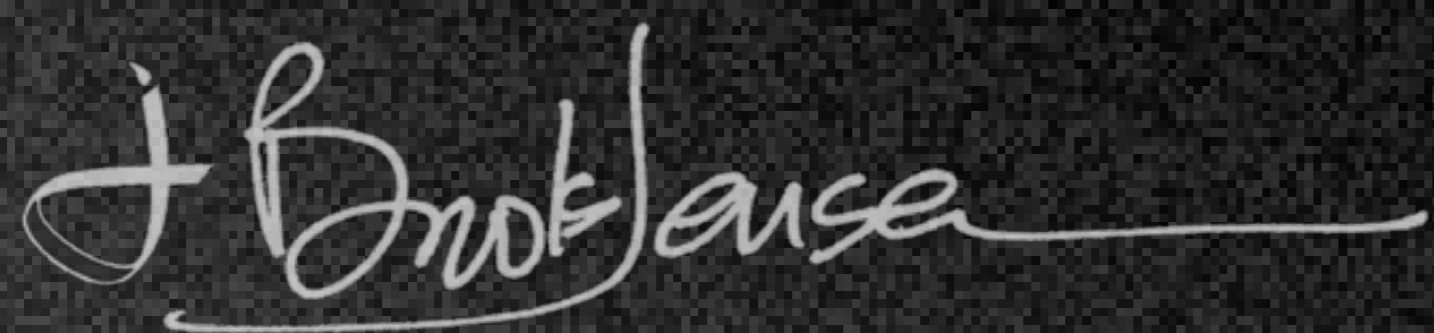




You can learn more this historic structure at [www.hastingsestate.com/hastingsestate.com/Hastings Building.html](http://www.hastingsestate.com/hastingsestate.com/Hastings_Building.html)

I thank the Hastings family for their gracious permission allowing me to photograph the interior during three days in August 2007, of which these images are a small subset.

FACE TO FACE ACROSS TIME

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink, reading "Brooks Jensen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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They are just stone statues...



...until you look directly into their eyes.

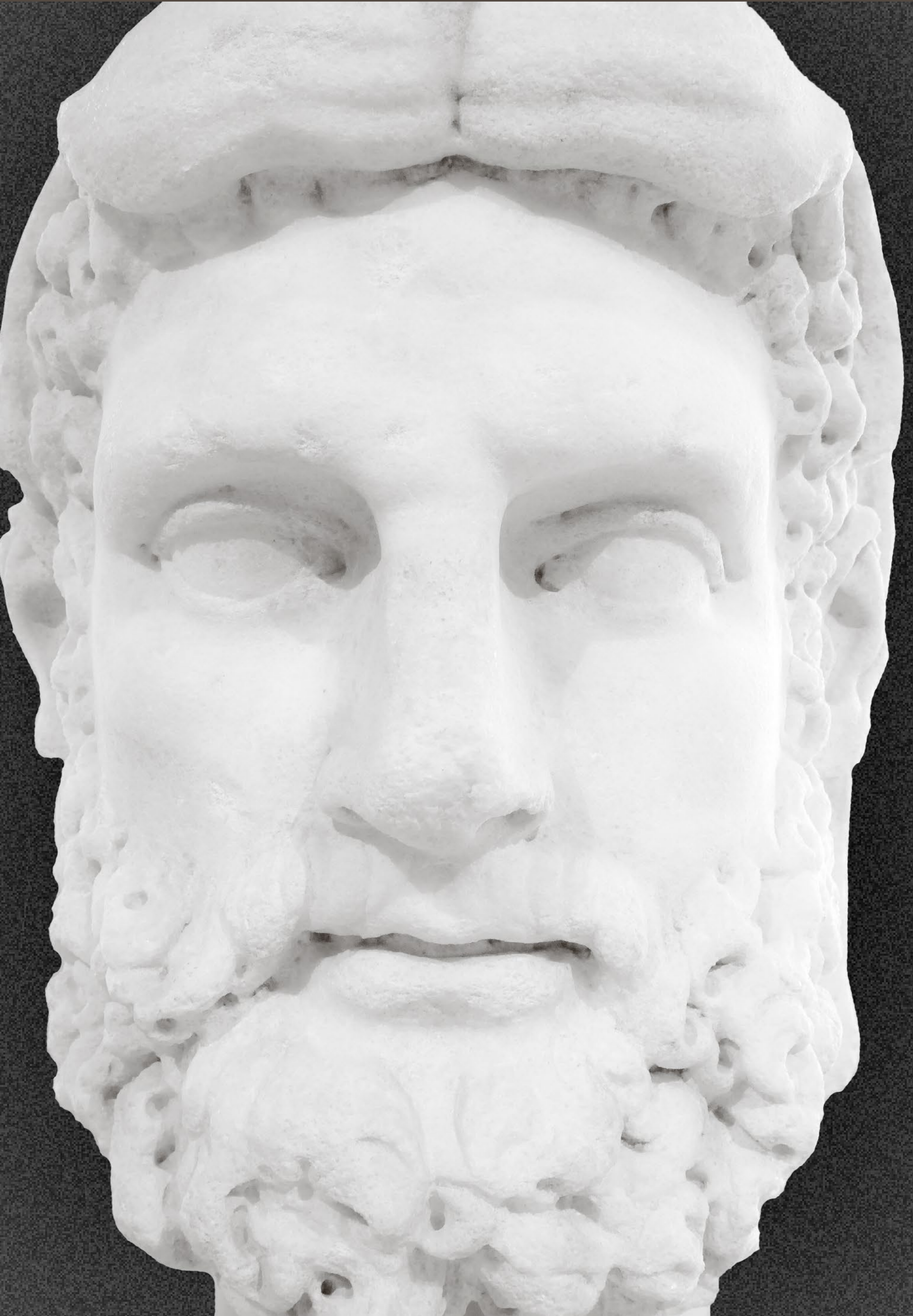














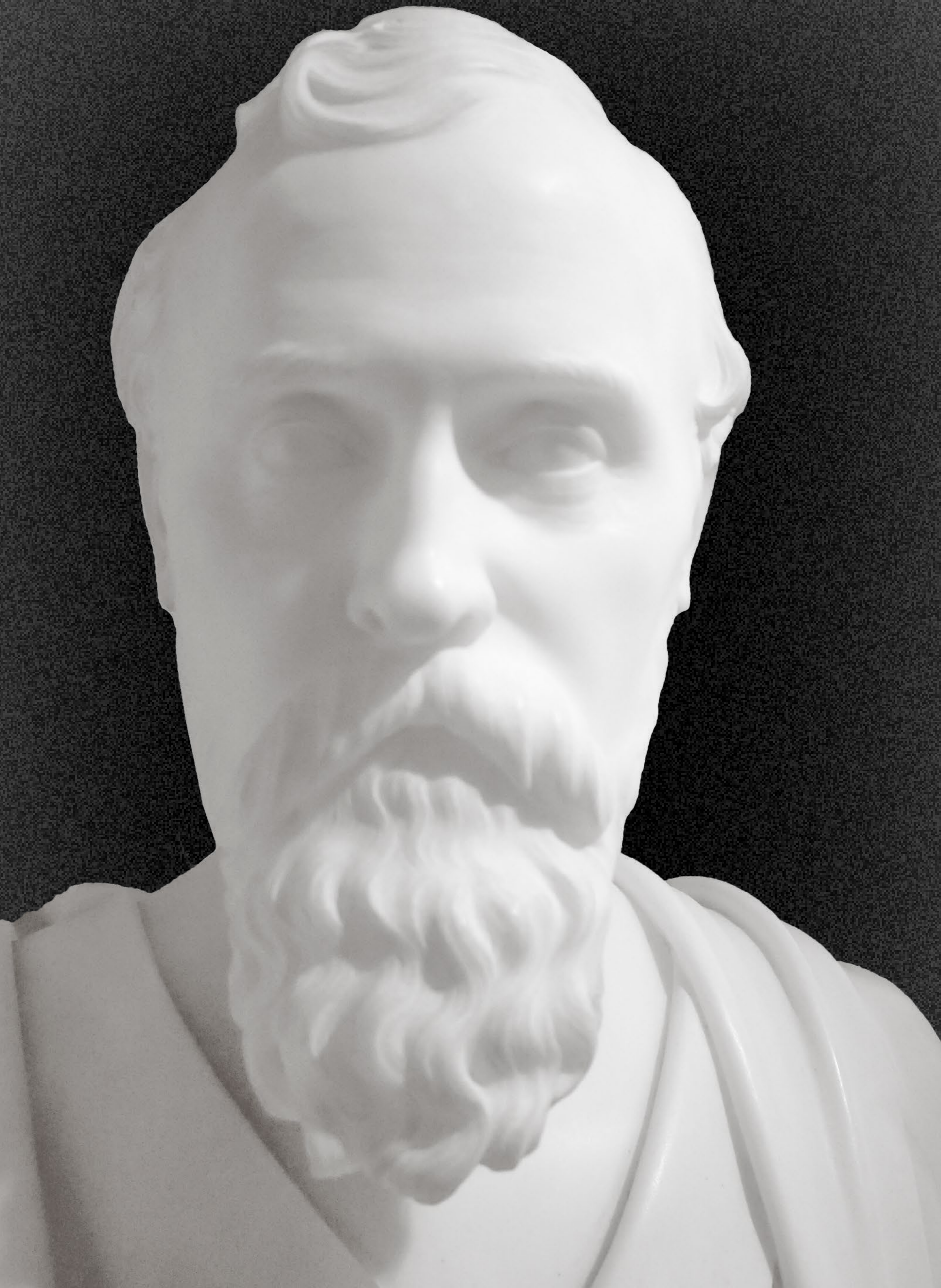




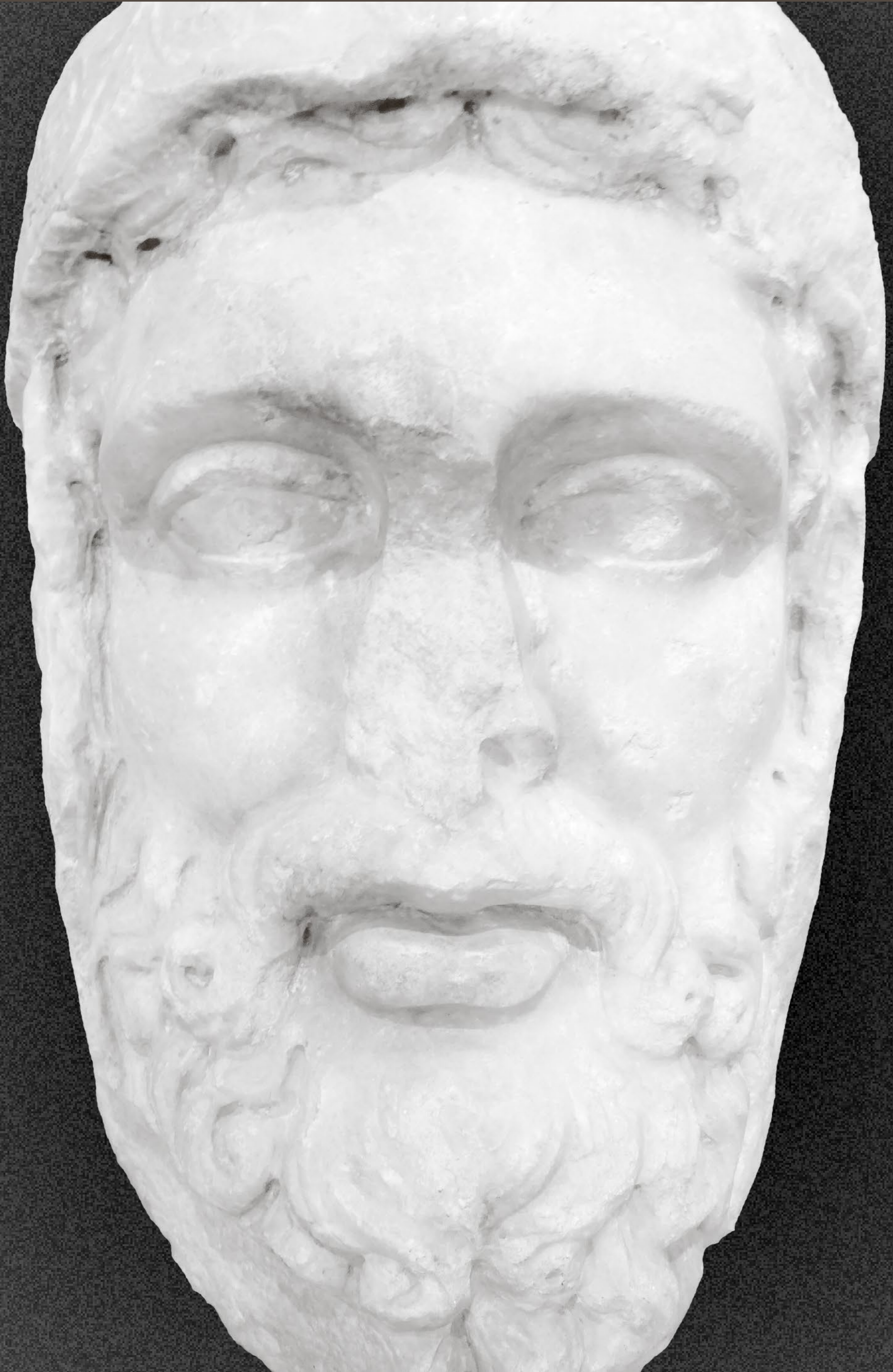










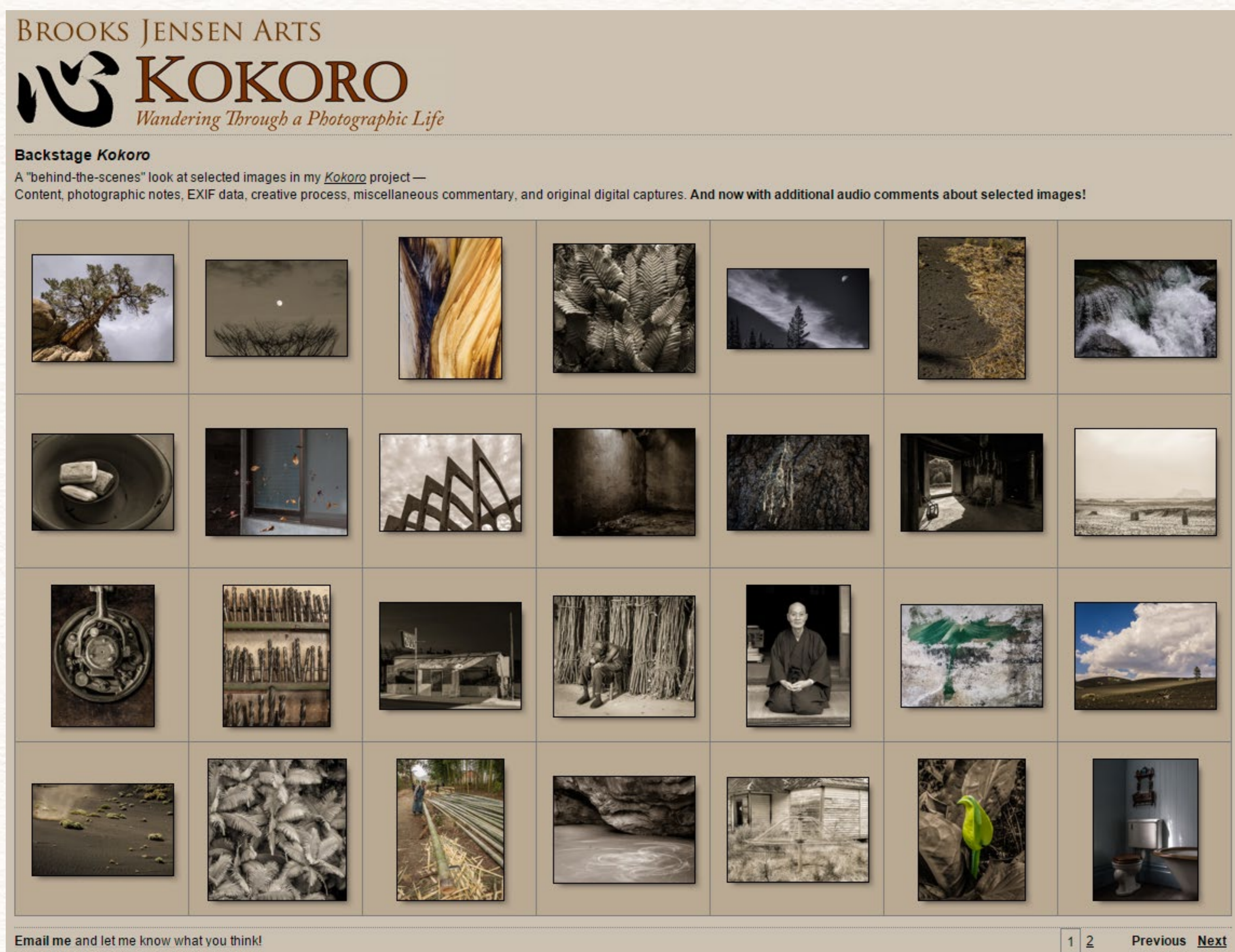




You might also like...

BACKSTAGE *KOKORO*

A “behind-the-scenes” look at selected images in *Kokoro*



This [stand-alone web presentation](#) offers comments about the creative and technical process for one image per topic in *Kokoro*.

- Text and audio comments about content, and the making of the image
- Photographic notes
- Creative process comments
- Includes EXIF data for each image
- Original digital captures (downsized for the web) to illustrate the “before” and “after” of post-processing



Brooks Jensen is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist's books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 73 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly world-wide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 900+ podcasts are available at [LensWork Online](#), the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with *LensWork Extended* — a PDF based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of seven best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); and *Looking at Images* (2014); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next book will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)*. A free monthly compilation of of this image journal, [Kokoro](#), is available for download.

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