

## Thomas Joshua Cooper

In these works Thomas Joshua Cooper focused his attention on the sea, investigating its persistent beauty by creating moody black-and-white images of the waves, whirlpools, rocks, and breakers of various oceans around the world.

Using a 1898 field camera and cumbersome tripod, Cooper traveled extensively along the rugged coastlines of Canada, Wales, the US, and Scotland in order to capture these images. He often visited places repeatedly, sometimes waiting for hours and days at a time for weather conditions to be just right. "It is often in such places that I wait, in order to make my work. I wait to catch up with the silence. I use the silence to gaze into. Gazing is my primary activity."

Cooper's sea does not look infinite in the conventional way, as the horizon is usually kept out of the frame. The images are at once abstract and concrete: waves break against the rocks, but their sense of scale is uncertain. The photographs are generally somber, unified by the dim illumination of evening, early morning, or moonlight. The lighting results in prints with lush, velvety shadows and highlights, which, within their narrow range of tonal contrasts, achieve clear resolution. Cooper's lengthy and specific titles belie the Minimalism of the images: they generally include the geographic location and sometimes note the type of observation (for example "An Indication," or "A Premonitional Work"), the year the image was taken and printed, and various historical and temporal signifiers.



Newfoundland

Some of the images on view here are from Cooper's *Work from the New Found Land* series, made in 1998-99 at the most northeastern part of the North American continent, Newfoundland. Following the coast of Newfoundland for 3,000 miles, Cooper made many photographs in places charged with history. For example, one photograph was made at the site of Lief Ericson's first camp in the New World. The photographs in this series were all taken on or around the Vernal (Spring) Equinox, the day when the sun is directly over the celestial equator, usually occurring on or around March 21. "Equinox" translates as "equal night," when night and day are the same length, each lasting exactly twelve hours.

Cooper is renowned for his superb craftsmanship and admiration for the properties of the photographic medium. He enhances the intense atmosphere of his silver gelatin prints by printing them in large scale and toning them with selenium and gold chloride. His concentrated attention to technical details results in exquisite resolution and rich tonality. "To find beauty is my job," he has said.<sup>2</sup>

Born in San Francisco in 1946, Cooper is a member of the Cherokee Nation on his father's side. He holds a BA in philosophy and literature from Humboldt State University, and an MA in art with distinction in photography from the University of New Mexico. Cooper has resided in Scotland for the past nineteen years, where he is currently professor of photography at the Glasgow School of Art. His work has been widely exhibited throughout the world and is in the collections of major museums. He will be the subject of a solo exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2002.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Joshua Cooper, from Dreaming the Gokstadt: Northern Lands and Islands, Graeme Murray, Edinburgh, (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Peter C. Bunnell, from Thomas Joshua Cooper: A Simples Contagen Das Ondas (Simply Counting Waves), (Lisbon, 1995).