

JEFF

## JACOBSON

**M**elting Point, Jeff Jacobson's portfolio and book (published by Nazraeli, 2006), is a collection of haunted images that perfectly captures the exhausted, paranoid zeitgeist of its historical moment—post-9/11, pre-Obama, mid-way through



George W. Bush's second term. It is a visual journey that took years to complete, and one that could only have been realized through retrospection. The photographs in aggregate form less of a concrete narrative than a psychographic, impressionistic sequence, less literal than intuitive.

The spirits running through this work take several forms. Shadows and silhouettes are frequent visitors; their two-dimensionality reiterates photography's spatial compression, and they remind us that what we see in images can never be more than a partial truth. Reflections, blurs, and various optical effects create ghosts, irrational areas within the frame that suggest the instability and, perhaps, unreliability of the visual evidence around us. An image like *Anchorage, Alaska, 1994* pulls all these phenomena together in a phantasmic delirium of near-legibility. Jacobson's work insists upon an inseparable union between color and content, even color as content. An ostensibly quiet image like *Winter Haven, Florida, 2002* pushes us into some uncanny territory—as audience members in the tiered bench seats, what exactly are we witnessing? Without resorting to post-exposure sleight-of-hand (the book contains a disclaimer to this effect), Jacobson's magical realism depicts worlds somewhere between surreal Gabriel Garcia Marquez and apocalyptic William Gibson.

Jacobson began his working life as a lawyer, but very early on he connected with the spirit of humanistic documentary photography. He was employed by the American Civil Liberties Union in Atlanta in the early 1970s when, in need of a hobby, he bought himself a camera. Eventually he became more interested in the photographs he was making, in places like rural jails, than in the legal briefs and cases that crossed his desk. He met and worked with many East Coast photographers, including Charles Harbutt, Sylvia Plachy, Ethan Hoffman, Abigail Heyman; the extended labor leading to the delivery of Jacobson's son Henry is depicted in famed photographer Eugene Richards' book, *50 Hours* [Many Voices Press, 1983]. With Harbutt, Hoffman, Heyman, and others, Jacobson was a principal member of the

New York-based photographers' collective Archive Pictures during the mid-1980s; many of them had been part of Magnum Photos and spun off to form their own agency (which is no longer operating).

He has used color film for his work since 1976 (the images in *Melting Point* were all made on 35mm Kodachrome), and his unorthodox use of strobe lighting brought a distinctive style to his earlier work—the ghosts, blurs, and surprising brightness of the electronic flash lent his reportage a uniquely subjective quality. As he wrote in a statement in his first book [*My Fellow Americans...*, University of New Mexico Press in association with Picture Project, Inc., 1991]: "Combined with a long shutter speed, the strobe allowed me to glimpse not only the moment the subject was illuminated by the flash, but also the moments immediately before and after. This technique created a sense of time moving within a single frame. It also gave the photographs a three-dimensional look by making the foreground jump away from the background. For a while this technique alone fascinated me, but I soon learned that the technique is only useful to the extent that the picture beneath it has meaning." Except for the earliest images, the work in *Melting Point* was not made with the strobe technique.

His work from the 1980s had a sarcastic, sardonic bite to it, and Jacobson often focused on the ego-gratifying behavior that Americans indulged in during that excessive era. The work in the *Melting Point* portfolio, however, issues from a more introspective artist. Mortality and loss began to inflect Jacobson's world and thus his work. As his photographs became more personal they lost some of their frenetic, jagged quality; disorientation and displacement have replaced the electricity that characterized Jacobson's earlier images. These works must be absorbed and felt to be fully known; captions convey little of their meaning.

Spirits populate Jacobson's photographs; the viewer is left to decide whether they are benign or otherwise. But the accuracy of their collective reporting, issuing from an era of cynicism, doubt, and frailty, comes clearer every year.

—George Slade

#### ■ PRINT AND BOOK INFORMATION

Epson archival pigment ink prints. The scans and large prints are all done by Mac Holbert at Nash Editions in Los Angeles. Copies of *Melting Point* are available directly from the photographer, from photo-eye books ([www.photoeye.com](http://www.photoeye.com)), or from Nazraeli Press ([www.nazraeli.com](http://www.nazraeli.com)).

#### ■ CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact Jeff Jacobson at [JJJPix@aol.com](mailto:JJJPix@aol.com) for further information about print availability, sizes and prices.



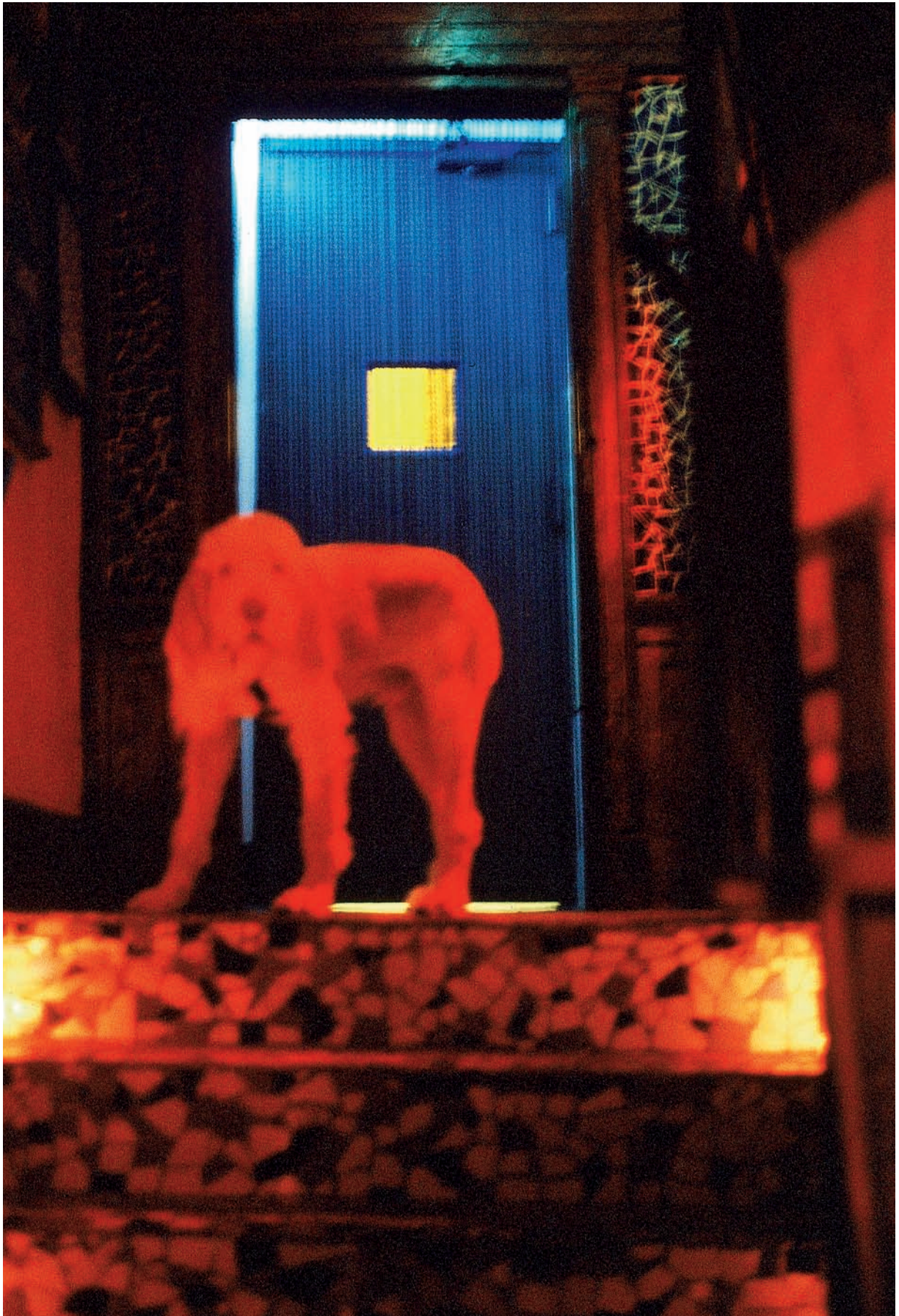
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA—1994



PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA—2003



SHANGHAI, CHINA—2002



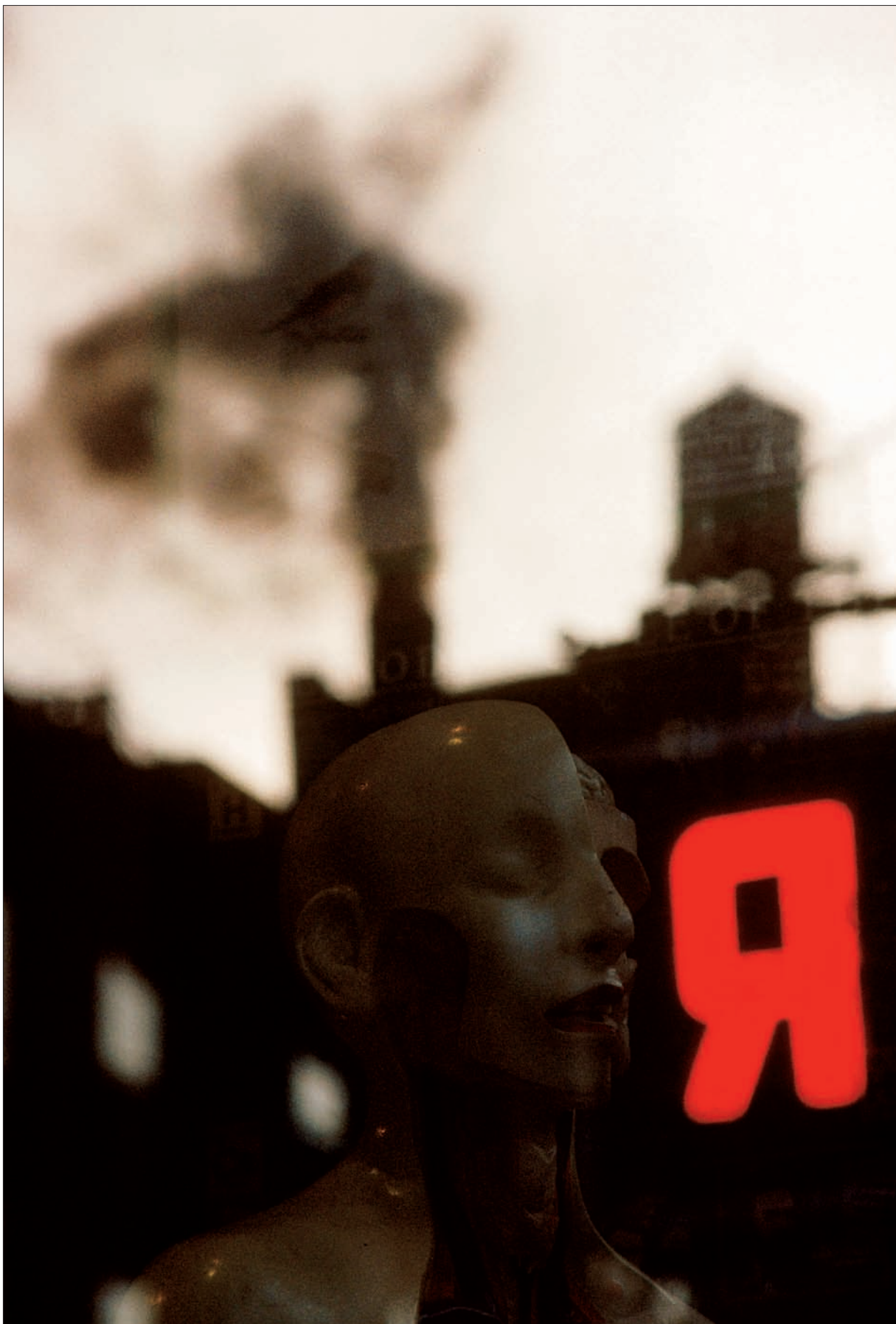
NEW YORK, NEW YORK—2003



NEW YORK, NEW YORK—1994



LAS VEGAS, NEVADA—1997



NEW YORK, NEW YORK—1995



HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA—1993



JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY—2001

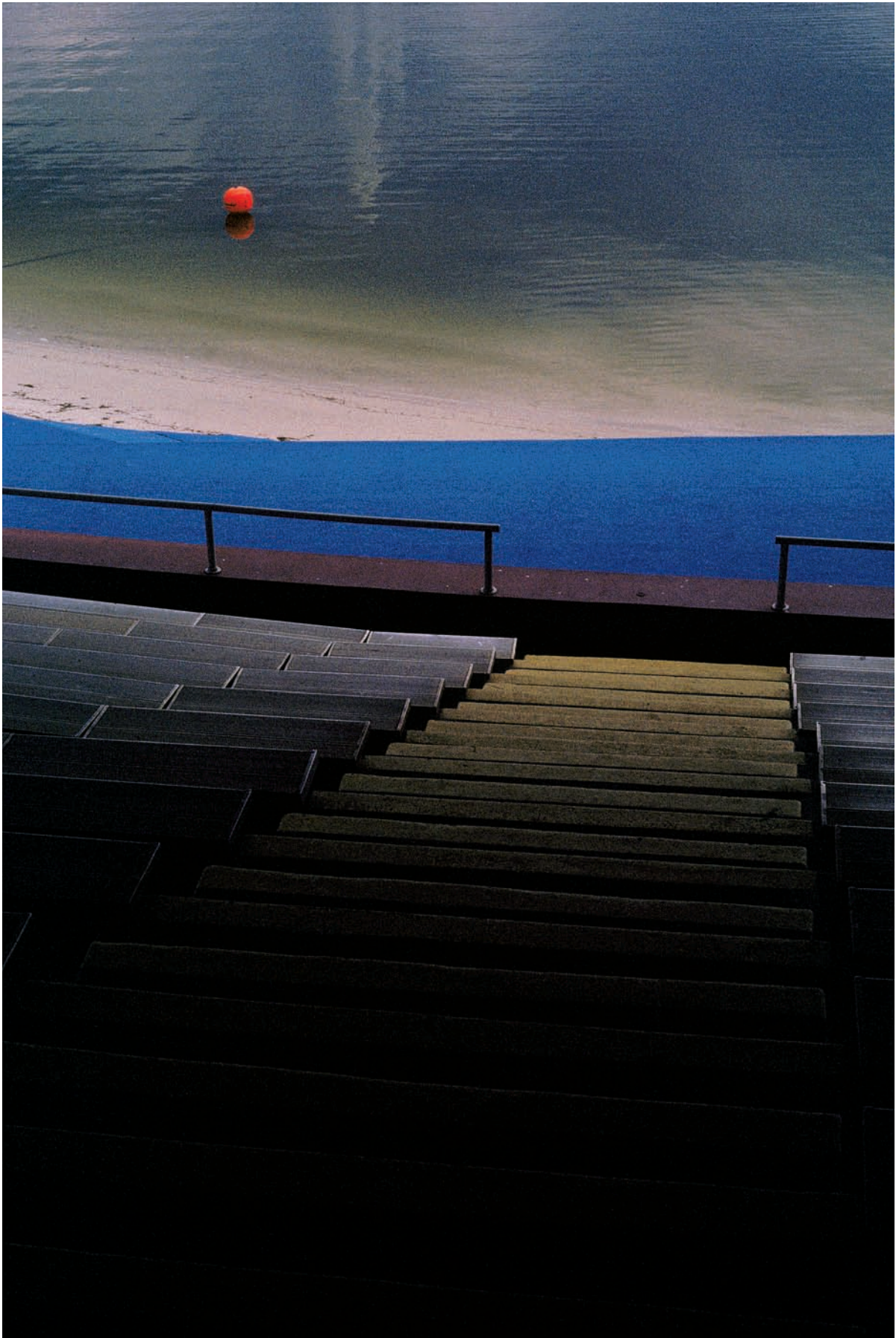




EAGLE BUTTE, SOUTH DAKOTA—2003



DES MOINES, IOWA—2002



WINTER HAVEN, FLORIDA—2002