SÁNDOR **POLGÁRI**

BETWEEN SHADOW AND LIGHT



WHERE THE EYE PAUSED

BETWEEN
SHADOW AND **LIGHT**

WHERE THE EYE PAUSED

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FOREWORD



In many people's lives there is a moment whose importance becomes clear only after it has passed. The eye would move on, yet something holds it back: a strip of light, a contour, a face in which the silence feels familiar. This is how images begin. Not from grand, ceremonial events, not from carefully composed scenes, but from a sudden pause. From an inner gesture that says: look more closely.

Although today I think of myself as a painter, and painting has become the deepest layer of my life, for a long time photography was the language through which I first came to understand the world. The camera taught me how to pay attention, how to interpret, how to strip away the superfluous and keep only what is true.

Painting later grew out of this way of seeing, yet photography never disappeared from my life. It waited quietly. Perhaps that is why I felt I owed this book to myself. It was time to sum up the period from which all my later creative gestures were born.

Black-and-white vision has always taught me the same lesson: that the world is built from subtle gradations, ordered between light and darkness. That behind every form there is a story, behind every detail a rhythm. And that light never exists on its own—it can only be understood when we see its place within shadow.

The photographs in this book were taken between 2008 and 2012. But at the time I was not only taking photographs—I was learning to see. Learning to understand the corners of a city, the misty mornings along a shoreline, the fractured layers of light in Transylvania, a face that said more than words ever could. Photography, for me, was not documentation. It was a search for the answer to a simple but essential question: what does it mean, for me, to see the world truthfully?

When I returned to these images years later, one thing became immediately clear: I did not want to rank the "best" ones. I did not select them through a technical lens, nor according to photographic conventions. The aim was for this book to become an imprint of a formative period—of the places I walked through, the roads where I stopped, the lights I first truly understood. Images that do not merely appear, but look back.

The cities where I lived—the streets of my hometown, the rhythm of Debrecen—the rural air, the foreign light of distant places, and the deep timelessness of Transylvania all shaped me in different ways. Every landscape revealed a different face, depending on how I looked at it. Yet there is something shared among the images: they do not record geography, but the point where my gaze came to rest. The moment when the world suddenly became personal.

Perhaps this is the essence of the book. It does not tell a story; it records pauses. Moments in which outside and inside meet. Landscape and human presence. Light and shadow. And perhaps time itself.

As you turn the pages, think of it as a journey—not one that moves between locations, but one that slowly, quietly turns inward. Toward the place where every image is truly born: the world behind the gaze.



1.

THE MEMORY OF PLACE

In a person's life there are spaces that do not remain outside, but within.

Places that matter not because they are exceptional, but because they are where a way of seeing was formed—where the first essential impressions were made. The rhythm of streets and early experiences almost merge into one's gaze, shaping how one looks at the world and how one understands it.

These places are not merely backdrops to life, but points of orientation on an inner map—points one always finds one's way back to through remembered light, atmosphere, and mood.

This section is not about the geography of a country, but about how spatial experience becomes perception, then memory, and finally a way of seeing. Cities and landscapes appear here not as external realities, but as those first subtle stirrings that determined the nature of my image-making gaze.

Each image is a backward glance at where I began, and at how I was shaped by places I could not yet truly value at the time. The memory of place is therefore not nostalgia, but a foundational experience: the quiet ground from which everything emerged.

1.

HAJDÚBÖSZÖRMÉNY
WHERE I FIRST LEARNED TO PAY ATTENTION

There are places that do not recede into the past, but remain with us—as inner landscapes, held in a perpetual present. For me, Hajdúböszörmény is not merely my hometown, but a state of beginning from which every later movement, every direction of the gaze, took shape. As a child, this was where I learned to recognize light in the dust of the streets, in the slow rhythm of changing seasons, in the long silences of the afternoons. The city did not teach me; it was simply present—and within that presence something began to form that I would later call a way of seeing.

The photographs made here do not function as a city album. They do not show what this place was like, but how I saw the world at the time: the resonance of open spaces, slow movements, the gentle repetition of everyday life. The understanding that the fundamental rhythm of life is often held by the simplest, most ordinary places. For me, Hajdúböszörmény is the space of beginnings—and the image of every beginning remains with us for a lifetime.



I. THE MEMORY OF PLACE | 1. HAJDÚBÖSZÖRMÉNY **WHERE I FIRST LEARNED TO PAY ATTENTION**




















BARKI—TURI









2.

DEBRECEN

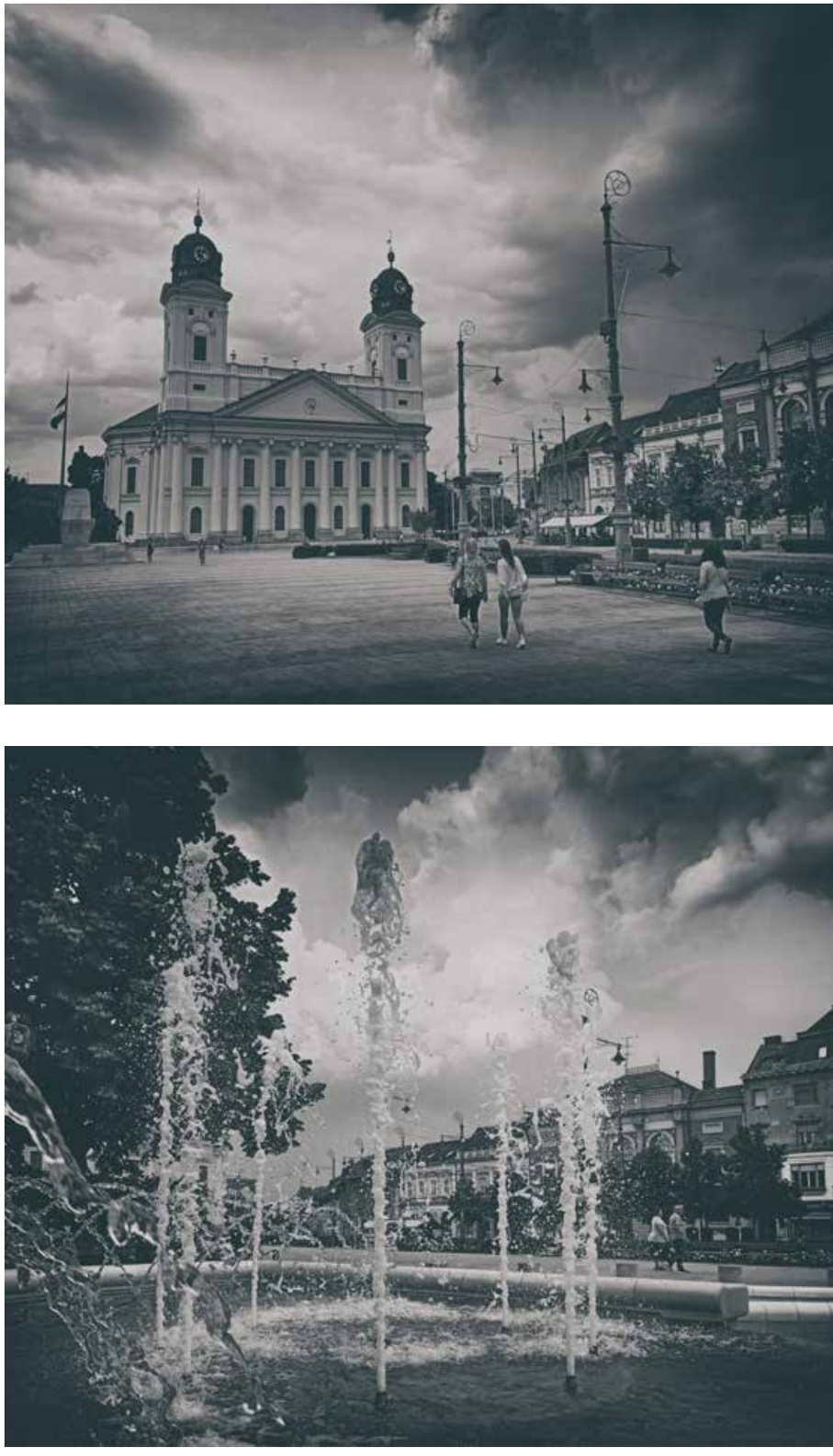
WHERE I LEARNED TO SEE OVER TIME

Debrecen belonged to a different phase. A city where I did not merely live, but came of age. It was here that I learned how a place does more than provide a backdrop—it shapes a person through its rhythm, its density, the way light reflects off the facades of buildings, or the way, while walking the length of a long street, one suddenly encounters oneself. Debrecen was not quiet, yet it carried a constant, deep pulse to which one inevitably adjusts.

The images preserve this state of transition. The search for who I was within a larger space. In the city, shadow can sometimes reveal who we are just as clearly as light. The years in Debrecen were, for me, an in-between time: no longer the safety of childhood, but not yet the final place I could have called home. A period in which answers mattered less than the question itself—the question of where I was looking. These photographs are imprints of that search for direction.















I. THE MEMORY OF PLACE | 2. DEBRECEN **WHERE I LEARNED TO SEE OVER TIME**














RÁCZ ANTÓNIA
1930-1932






Belváros
Piac utca
25
17



















I. THE MEMORY OF PLACE | 2. DEBRECEN **WHERE I LEARNED TO SEE OVER TIME**















3.

PLACES OF HOME
WHERE SILENCE SPOKE TO ME

Home ground often becomes important not because it is exceptional, but because it is familiar. Spaces one does not consciously keep account of, yet to which the mind continually returns. A road along the edge of a field, touched by the light of dusk; a riverbank whose quiet suddenly slows time. These places are not sights to be seen, but rather quiet presences—ones to which we grow, almost imperceptibly.

When I made these photographs, I was not seeking grand moments. I simply allowed closeness to reveal itself. For closeness is not a matter of distance, but of what we allow to enter us. These images are about understanding that domestic spaces are not meant to be looked at, but felt—to rediscover within them something of a rhythm we once knew.





























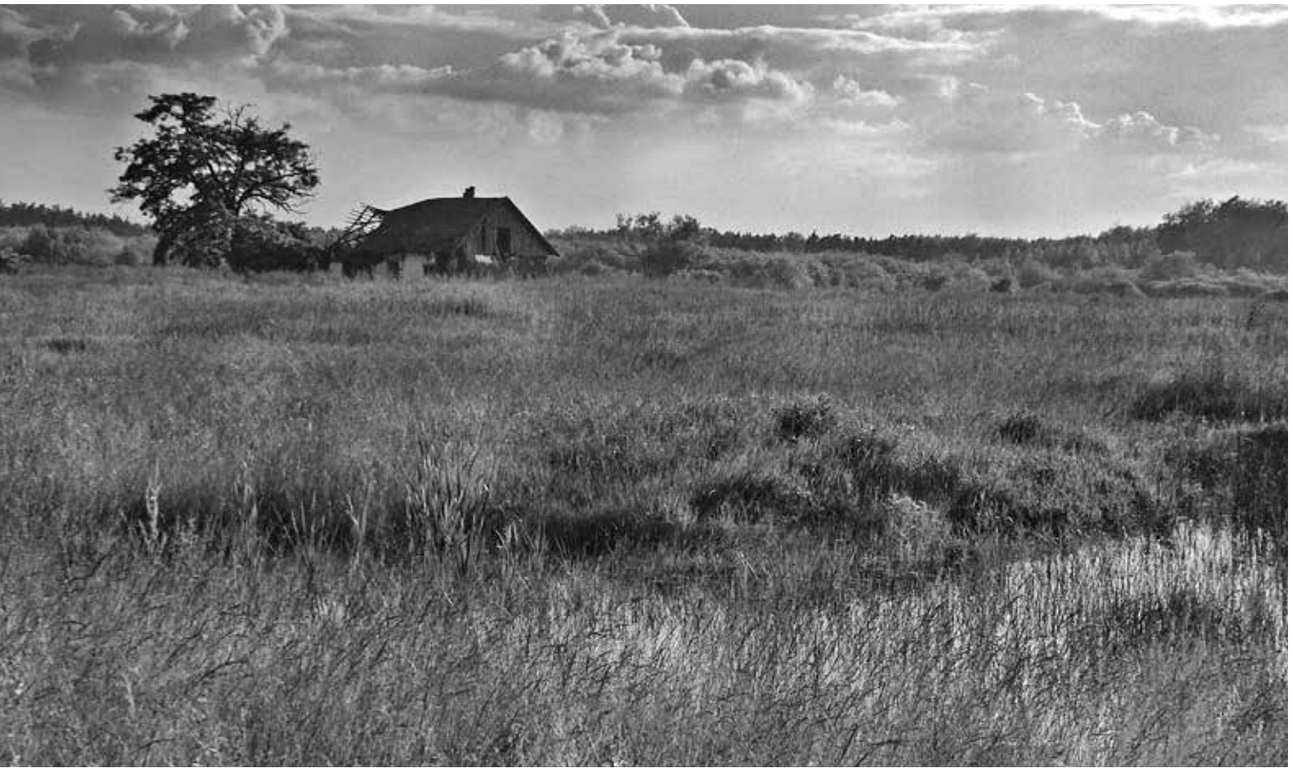


























I. THE MEMORY OF PLACE | 3. PLACES OF HOME **WHERE SILENCE SPOKE TO ME**





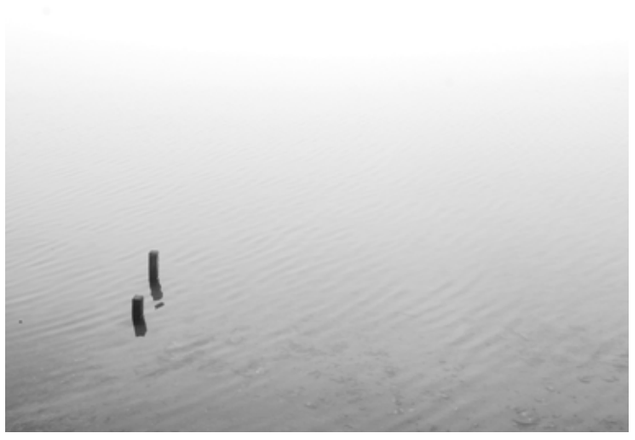


















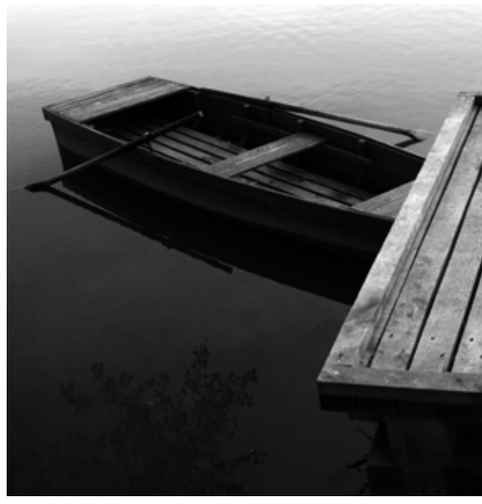




I. THE MEMORY OF PLACE | 3. PLACES OF HOME **WHERE SILENCE SPOKE TO ME**







I. THE MEMORY OF PLACE | 3. PLACES OF HOME **WHERE SILENCE SPOKE TO ME**





I. THE MEMORY OF PLACE | 3. PLACES OF HOME **WHERE SILENCE SPOKE TO ME**































II.

ON THE ROAD

Setting out does not always change us,
but it always sets something in motion.

When one steps beyond the familiar, the world begins to speak in a different tempo.

Light feels more foreign, shadow deeper; spaces open more slowly or close more quickly. The road is not only about the distance between places, but about a peculiar state in which attention sharpens, thoughts become clearer, and the world somehow seems lighter.

In this section, the images do not present landscapes, but the transitional inner state in which movement itself becomes a form of home. The calm of the lake, the unfamiliar light of foreign places, the timeless rhythm of Transylvania all reflect the same experience: the moment when one has already left something behind, but has not yet arrived elsewhere.

Over the course of a long journey, something within us gradually clears—and in the process we come to understand that distance sometimes brings us closer to ourselves. The road thus becomes not a destination, but a mood: an expanded attentiveness in which the face of the world and the direction of the gaze align.

4.

LAKE BALATON
WHERE I SAW MYSELF REFLECTED IN THE WATER

Lake Balaton, for me, is not a memory of holidays, but of transition: the moment when one steps out of the familiar, yet has not arrived elsewhere. This place has always brought with it a kind of inner clearing. The lake as symbol—the surface at once calm and charged with tension, as if every inner change were to appear first upon the water. The quiet of the shore, the horizon dissolving into nothingness, the slow mornings opened spaces in which thoughts decelerated, and light itself seemed to grow more patient.

These images do not depict Lake Balaton as a place, but the state one enters there. The slowing down. The attention. That strange, transitional feeling of no longer being where one came from, yet not fully knowing where one is headed.

Balaton has always held such moments in my life. It has been a space of pause, of renewal, of inner reordering—and perhaps that is why it occupies such an essential place in this book.










GENERALI



















II. ON THE ROAD | 4. LAKE BALATON **WHERE I SAW MYSELF REFLECTED IN THE WATER**

















II. ON THE ROAD | 4. LAKE BALATON **WHERE I SAW MYSELF REFLECTED IN THE WATER**









5.

ABROAD

WHERE NEW LIGHTS WERE LIT WITHIN ME

When I travelled in other countries, I always felt that light itself has a kind of “voice”—and that this voice is different everywhere. As if it were more foreign, arriving from farther away, yet still touching something within me. In unfamiliar places, one also sees oneself more sharply. Familiar reflexes dissolve, and suddenly everything acquires a slightly altered meaning: an alleyway, a mountain ridge, a shadow caught in a window.

The images made here carry this sense of foreignness and familiarity at once. They do not seek to show worlds, but rather the inner state in which one steps out of one’s own story in order to inhabit something else for a moment. At a distance, we sometimes see more clearly what has become habitual at home. These photographs are quiet recognitions of travel as a state of being.
































































HOTEL
SPAGNA
★ ★ ★
HOTEL
MARINA



6.

TRANSYLVANIA
WHERE TIME BREATHED MORE SLOWLY

Transylvania lives by a different rhythm. Here, light and darkness do not alternate; they build upon one another in layers. Among the mountains, I never felt far away—rather, as if I had entered a timeless closeness. As though the landscape were not merely the setting of the story, but the story itself. A place where even silence has a sound, and it speaks more deeply.

These photographs attempt to touch this layered diversity. The slow movement, the weight of nature, and that particular light which feels both ancient and fresh at once. For me, Transylvania is not simply a place, but a mirror: it showed me what it means not to hurry, and to allow oneself to adjust to the rhythm of a place. These images are memories of that slowed pace.

























II. ON THE ROAD | 6. TRANSYLVANIA **WHERE TIME BREATHED MORE SLOWLY**





















II. ON THE ROAD | 6. TRANSYLVANIA **WHERE TIME BREATHED MORE SLOWLY**













II. ON THE ROAD | 6. TRANSYLVANIA **WHERE TIME BREATHED MORE SLOWLY**








Bergenbier































III.

DETAILS

The truths of the world are often not found in vast spaces, but hidden within the smallest details.

When the gaze turns toward something, the structure of reality reveals itself: lines, fractures, repeating patterns, small silences that, layered upon one another, tell stories that reach far beyond themselves. Details are not the scenery of life, but independent worlds in which light and shadow arrange themselves according to their own laws.

This chapter gives space to the recognition that seeing is not only horizontal, but vertical as well: capable of moving beneath the surface, and capable of pausing where the eye usually slips past.

These images reveal how much is contained in what we first perceive as insignificant. The world of close-ups slows thought and teaches us that silence is also structure, form is also history, and even the smallest detail is capable of carrying wholeness. From this vantage point, every crack, every texture, every rhythm becomes a kind of imprint of how the world works—and how our attention works.

7.

NATURAL
WHERE SILENCE CONDENSED INTO FORM

When we lean closer to something, the world changes. Structures reveal themselves, details begin to tell their own stories. The veins of a leaf, a crack in a wall, the dissolving line of a shadow—phenomena we often overlook in everyday life, even though they carry the most delicate traces of existence.

These images speak of silence as structure. Of how the smallest details of the world sometimes reveal more than grand, spectacular spaces ever could. In the Natural series, reality is not a backdrop but an inner movement: as the camera draws nearer, each detail becomes personal. Form here is not scenery, but message. It whispers that sometimes the greatest stories are hidden in the smallest places.

















III. DETAILS | 7. NATURAL **WHERE SILENCE CONDENSED INTO FORM**



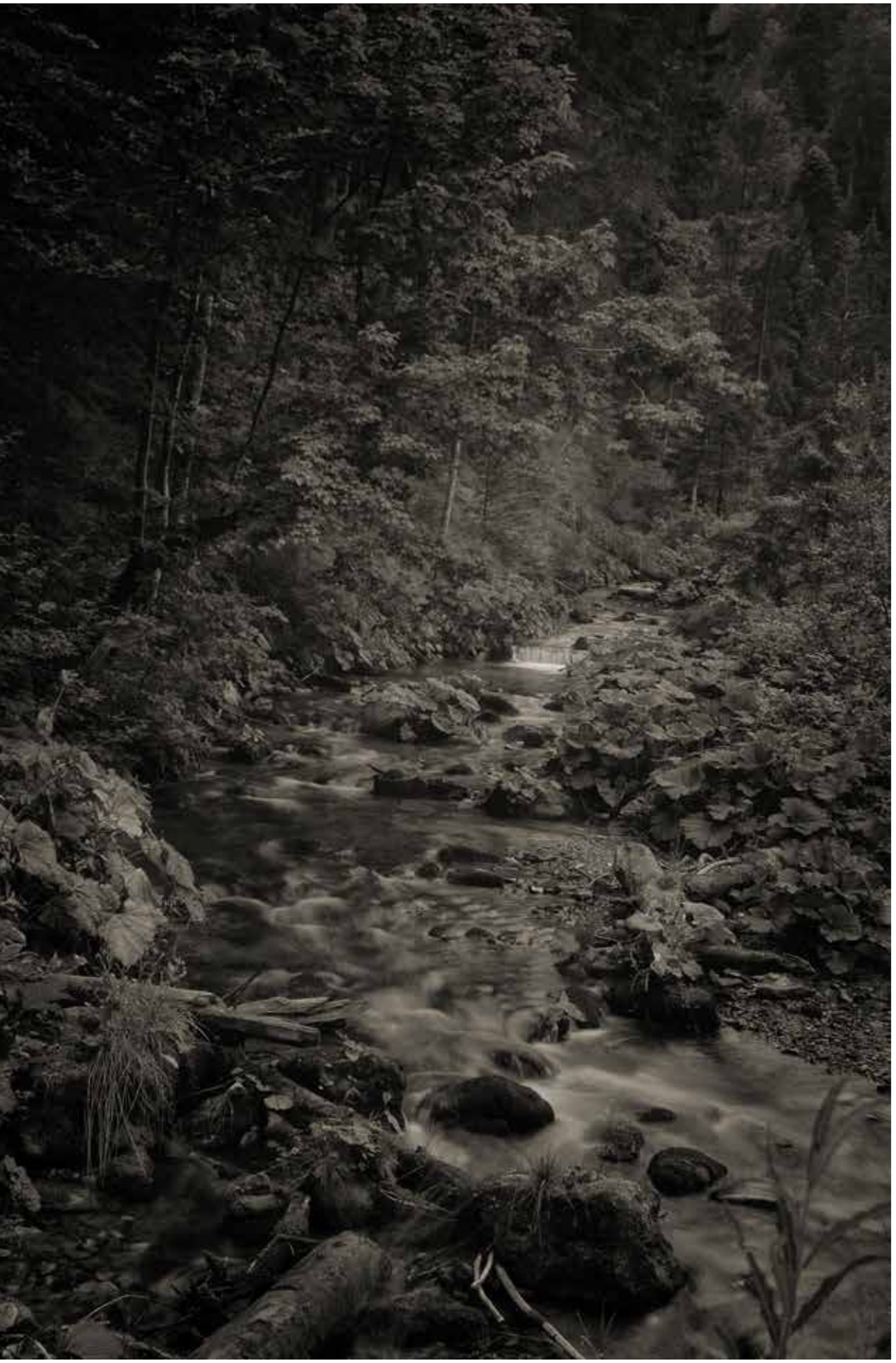








































8.

CLOSER

WHERE THE DETAIL TRANSCENDED ITSELF

There is a point at which distance ceases to be meaningful. When the viewer no longer observes from the outside, but enters the image. No longer seeking form, naming, or interpretation—only presence. At that moment, the detail is no longer a cut-out fragment of reality, but a world in its own right.

In these images, moving closer is not a technical gesture but a decision. A recognition that the gaze does not always seek the whole. Sometimes it is precisely displacement, uncertainty, or becoming lost in detail that leads us to what truly matters. A surface, a fracture, a boundary drawn by light—all signal the same thing: attention has come to rest here.

Closer is not a collection of details, but the imprint of a state. The moment when the world no longer appears as distance, but as connection. And within this attention, even the smallest form becomes complete in itself.

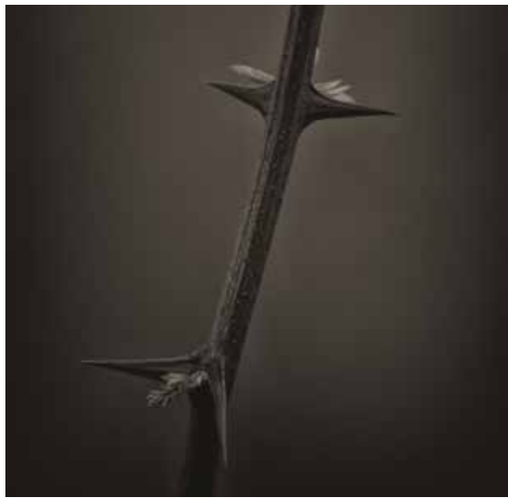






































































IV.

PRESENCE

Sustained attention always
leads back to the human being.

Spaces, journeys, and details all prepare the moment when the world no longer unfolds outside of us, but becomes intelligible through a different quality of presence.

The face is not a subject, but a point of encounter: this is where everything I have learned about light, silence, and attention comes into focus. In a portrait, the face is no longer a sculptural form, but an inner landscape, where every detail carries meaning.

In these images, there are no longer vast spaces or distances. They remain close. They do not explain, interpret, or tell a story. They simply are present—just as one can be present within another person's attention.

Here, attention does not direct but connects. And within this connection, attention no longer rushes; it settles and deepens. This section is not about portraiture, but about the moment when seeing and human presence converge.

9.

ENCOUNTER
WHERE LIGHT FOUND ITS HOME

In these images, the human figure is not elevated above the space, but exists as a natural part of it. The environment does not function as a backdrop; it breathes together with the subject—so everything speaks of presence. As if what we see does not arrive from the outside, but becomes visible from within.

These photographs do not tell stories; they record encounters. A quiet agreement between a person and the world, in which neither dominates the other. Full-bodied presences, subtle gestures, moments of stillness—how a person becomes part of their own space. Here, portraiture is not a likeness, but a state: a moment in which light and human presence attune to one another.

In this chapter, attention no longer seeks points of reference. We do not analyze or interpret what we see—we simply remain present within it. Here, light does not shape but receives; and through this, human presence becomes a quiet yet defining point within the book.

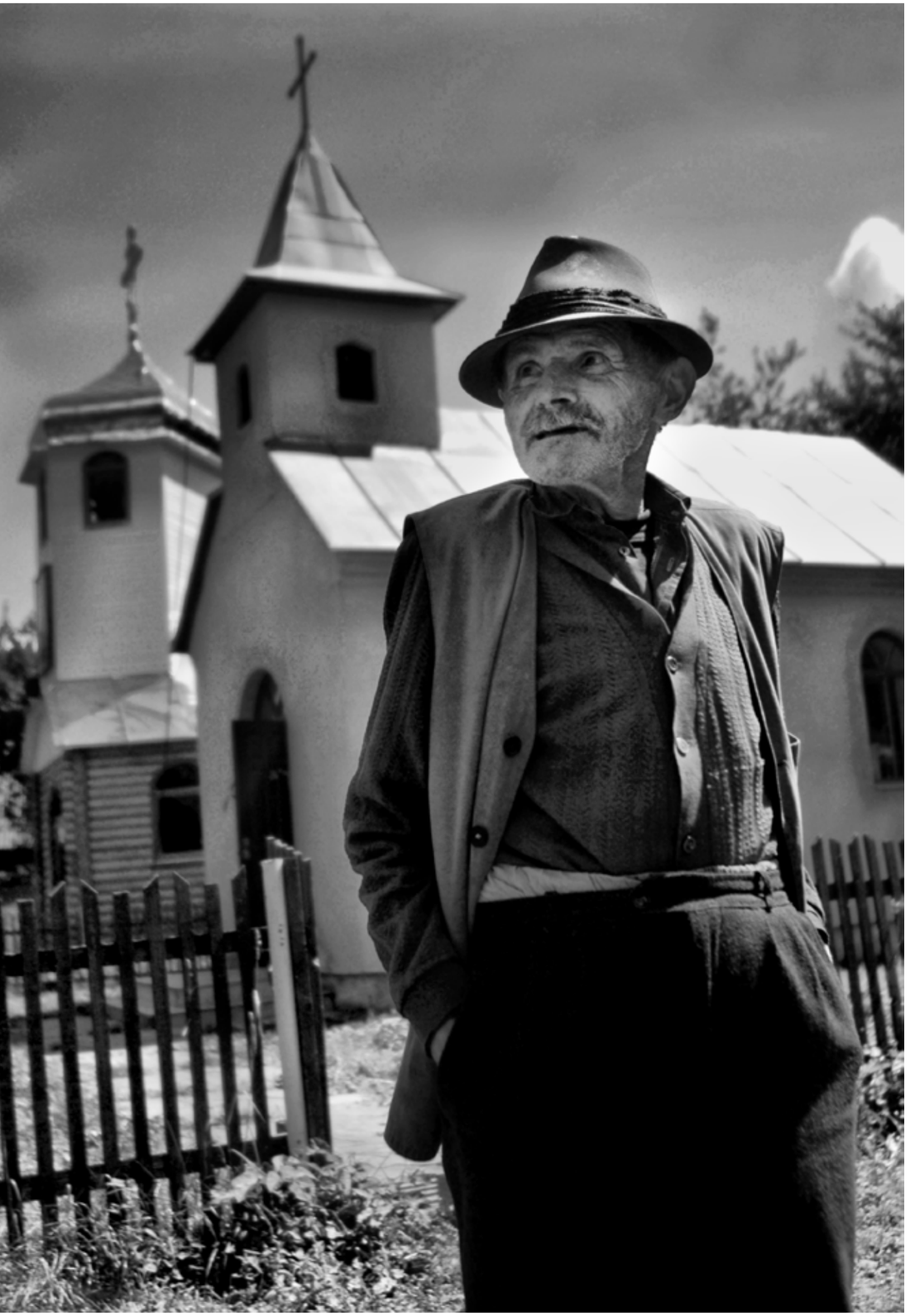


IV. PRESENCE | 9. ENCOUNTER **WHERE LIGHT FOUND ITS HOME**

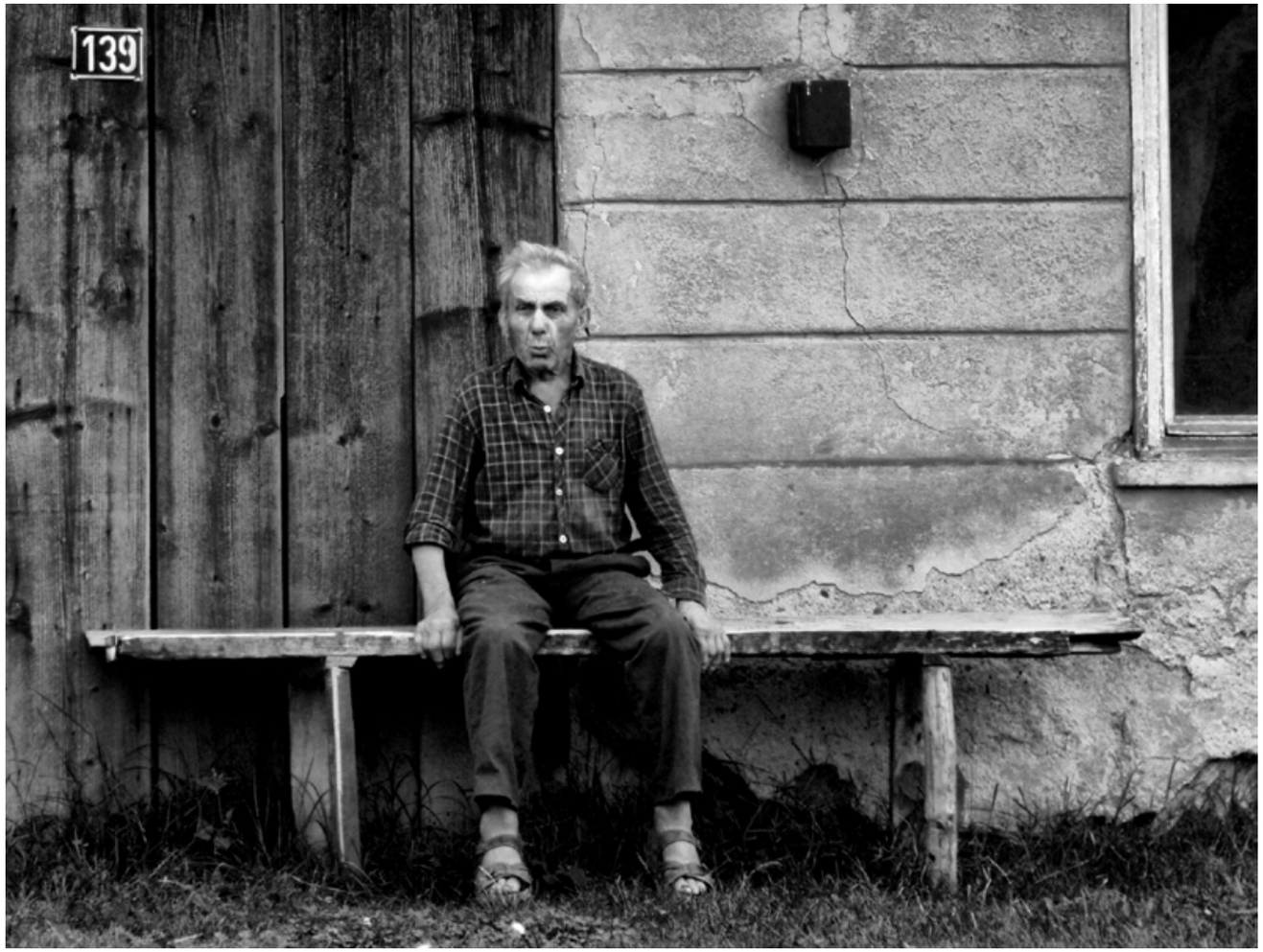








IV. PRESENCE | 9. ENCOUNTER **WHERE LIGHT FOUND ITS HOME**





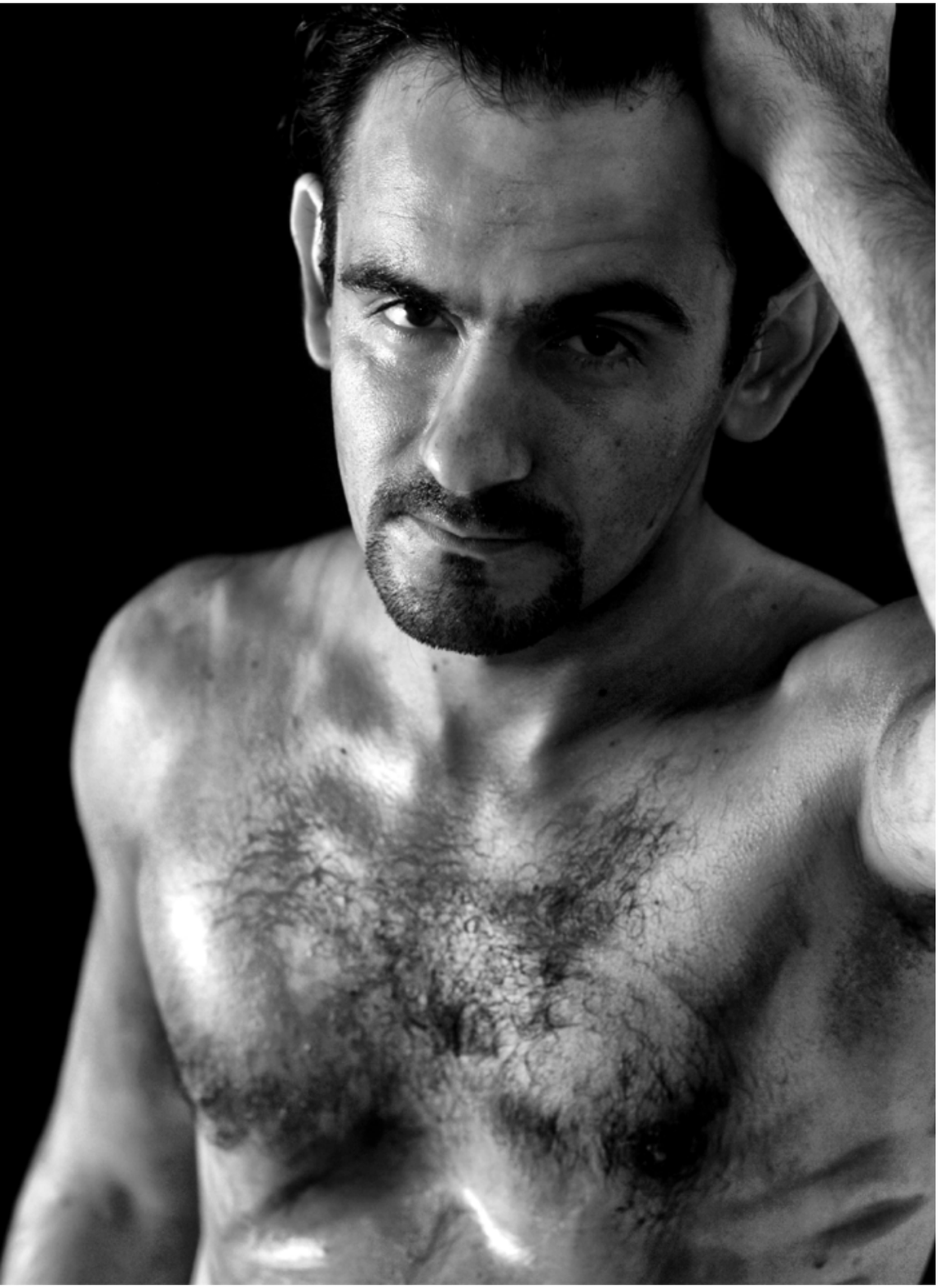








IV. PRESENCE | 9. ENCOUNTER **WHERE LIGHT FOUND ITS HOME**





10.

GAZE
WHERE LIGHT BECOMES ORIGIN

It is on the face that light becomes truly articulate—it reveals every subtle vibration. Within a gaze reside all unspoken stories, every withheld gesture, the imprint of each inner transformation. In these images, we do not see characters, but presences: states in which the human face no longer carries a role, but existence itself.

Here, the eye does not look—it looks back. The light that appears in the eyes is not mere reflection, but an inner source: a sign that life is not only visible, but present. These images are quiet dialogues about attention; about how another person's gaze can become both mirror and gateway at once.

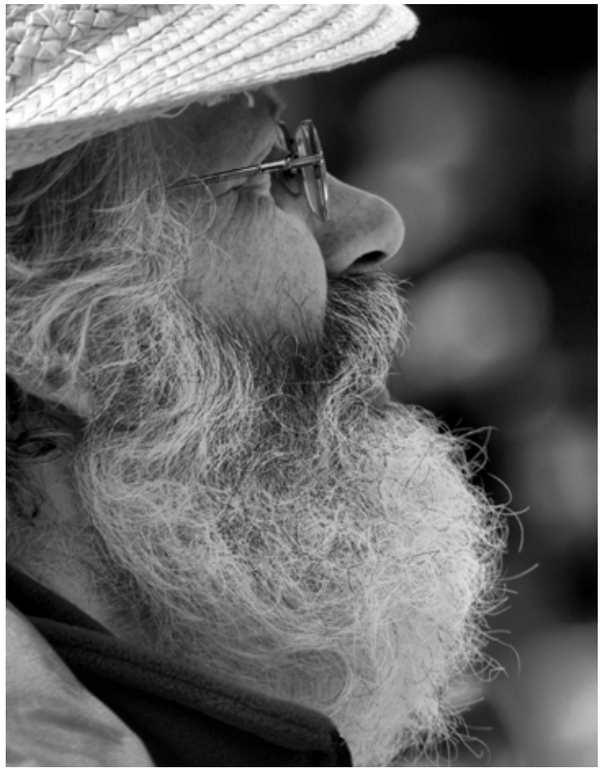
Light here does not shape, but reveals; shadow does not conceal, but deepens. In this closeness, the world no longer unfolds outside, but at the very place where seeing is born. The point of view becomes both endpoint and origin: where the journey closes—and where everything begins again.





IV. PRESENCE | 10. GAZE **WHERE LIGHT BECOMES ORIGIN**



















IV. PRESENCE | 10. GAZE **WHERE LIGHT BECOMES ORIGIN**











AFTERWORD

Just as an image does not end where the frame closes, this book does not end here, on its final page. The experience continues to live on in the viewer, in the reader. The pauses from which these images were born continue to exist—within me, and now perhaps within you as well. The lights have not passed; they have transformed into memory, into experience. Into traces that are not loud, yet enduring.

This book is the imprint of a period in time. Its importance lies not in being finished, but in having been lived. In the attention it required, the uncertainty, the searching, and the moments of recognition. There were places where one had to stop, and moments when the world condensed into a single image. Today I know that these pauses shaped not only my way of seeing, but also how I relate to time, to space, and to people.

I am grateful for the paths that led me here. For the cities, the landscapes, the faces, the lights and shadows that taught me to slow down. I am grateful for having had the time to pay attention, and the courage not to move on when something called for staying.

These images are not complete, not final—but they are true to the moment in which they came into being. And perhaps that is precisely why they have remained.

There is, however, another layer—one that is not about the images themselves, but about the silence in between. About the time when I had already set the camera down, yet the sight would not release me. When a moment did not want to become an image, and yet still left its mark. These invisible pauses are just as much a part of this book as those that ultimately took form as photographs.

Thank you for giving your time to travel this path with me. For not rushing past the photographs, and for making space for what does not seek immediate answers. If, among these pages, there was even a single moment that stopped you, that looked back at you, then the book has achieved what it was created for—the encounter.

Now I let this material go. Not because it has ended, but because it has found its place. The light moves on, the gaze begins to wander again, toward new images. But what once stopped us stays with us. Quietly. Exactly where every landscape truly begins.

SÁNDOR **POLGÁRI**

BETWEEN **SHADOW** AND **LIGHT**

WHERE THE EYE PAUSED

This book does not tell stories.
It shows moments when the world does not lead forward, but looks back. When the light does not illuminate, but finds presence. When the gaze does not search, but arrives.

The volume features a selection of photographs by Sándor Polgári, taken between 2008 and 2012. These are images from a period when photography was not about documentation, but a practice of attention: cities, landscapes, faces, and silences trace the inner path that unfolds between shadow and light.

This album does not offer answers. It makes space for what only becomes visible when we allow it time.