

Richard Murai

Signs of life: worlds apart

This ongoing project has so far spanned a decade; these images represent a small selection from the body of work documenting world sacred sites. The images reflect an ongoing voyage of discovery and creative exploration. Richard has carefully examined the evidence of intense spiritual devotion. The unique architectural environments he photographs point to a long history of devotion to spirits and prophets that represent God on earth. The different cultures he mixes with, and photographs, are an affirmation of the continuation of present day worship and prayers that invisibly bind humankind. Richard has found that through his picture making it has added immeasurably to his understanding of the world. The series of images from diverse areas of India, Cambodia, Tibet and China provide a strong visual link that demonstrates the thread that connects us all. His insight and acquired knowledge reaffirms his belief in the oneness of the human spirit.

Richard grew up as an Asian/American in the San Francisco bay area during the sixties anti-war years. He feels this provided him with a rich political and cultural base for photographic exploration. From those youthful experiences he has developed a lifelong fascination with religious architecture and revered sites that serve as a centre for cultures for their pilgrimage, prayer and devotion. The devotees that he photographs understand the importance of their sacred sites and are almost physically embodied and integrated within the spaces. Ongoing global unrest has caused extreme uncertainty, political dissension and social turmoil creating individual stress and emotional breakdown. We continue to confront a perplexing, irrational and extremely precarious world situation. Reluctance to accept diverse cultural/political/religious influences both here and abroad adds to the apprehension, cynicism and

confusion. Becoming sensitive to unfamiliar cultures can quell much of this anxiety and may encourage tolerance and compassion. By sensitively recording the spiritual side of humanity, it allows Richard to personally explore the cultural and religious diversity, and thereby sharing these experiences with the world.

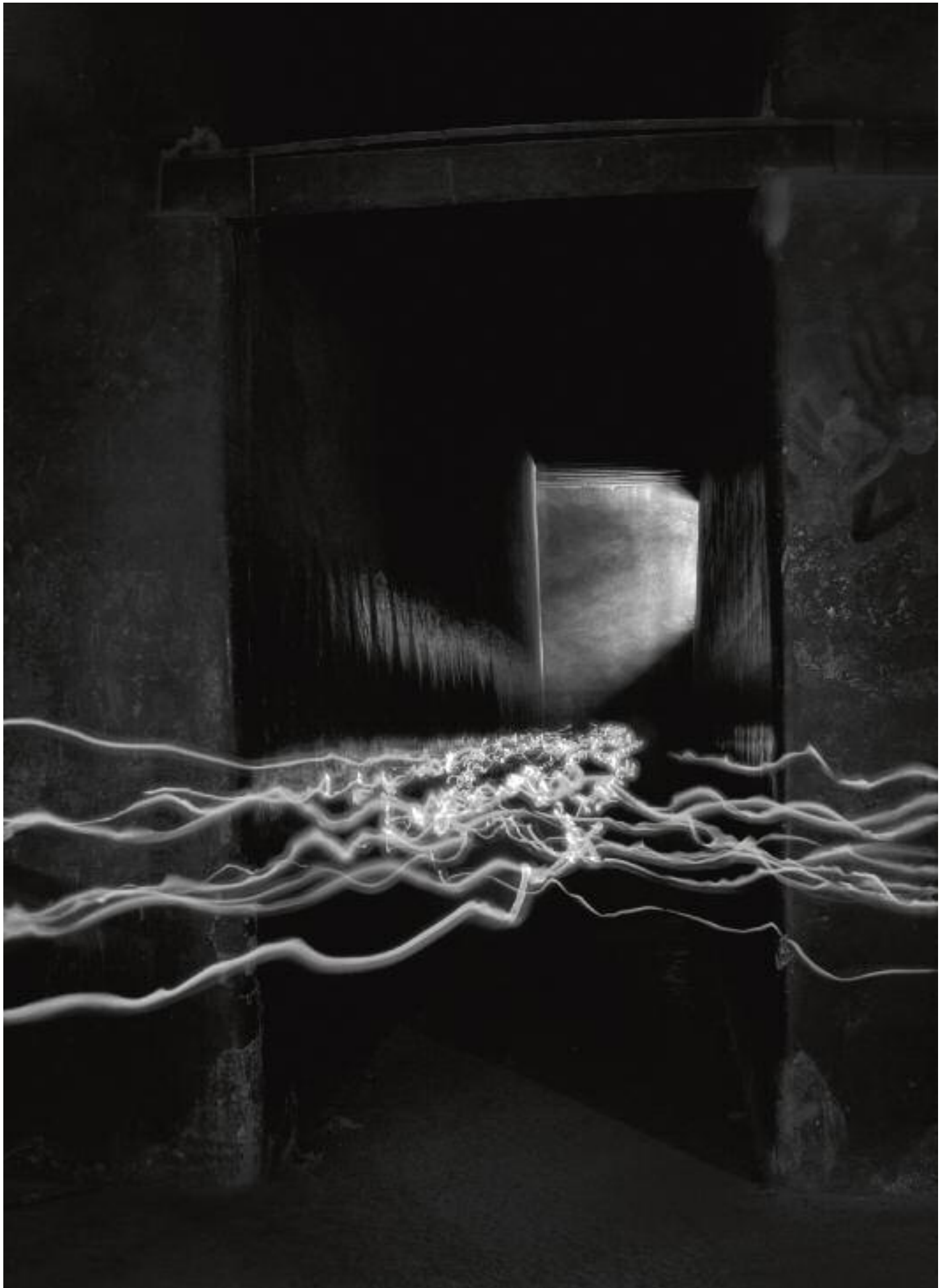
His travels have taken him to India, Asia, Russia, Western Europe, the Middle East and Peru. One of the many highlights was the sacred complex of Angkor Wat in Cambodia. The visually and historically rich ruins of the sprawling Angkor complex are truly one of the foremost architectural wonders of the world. Angkor Wat, "Great City" in the Khmer language, is undoubtedly the most impressive and identifiable monument that, over time, has become the namesake for the entire area. But this most visited site is only a small part of a more elaborate and far reaching network of temples, roads and waterways. The current boundaries of the complex cover over 75 square miles, comprise 135 temples and its architectural evolution spans over five centuries. New ruins are still being unearthed today. Its fascination lies not only as a spectacular archaeological site, but also, first and foremost, it serves as a vital and revered spiritual centre. Its immense and serene grandeur belies centuries of conquest and upheaval and the appalling brutality and unbelievable carnage of the recent past. The images have a sense of peace and calm. There is a depth and quietness that has an almost immediate effect on quelling our disturbed and restless soul. Anxiety and anger dissipates quickly when viewing the images. Imagine the beneficial effect on our being if one was to actually be there and sit relaxed, meditating amongst the sacred site.

Much has been discussed in previous editions about the power of combining analogue and digital to achieve images that become even more powerful because of the extraordinary control over all technical aspects. All the images on these pages were captured with a conventional film camera. Richard felt it suited his style when travelling to use a traditional film camera. His choice was primarily a medium format camera, either a 645 or 67, with a 35/45mm lens. The wide angle lens forced him to interact with the subject and provide an enveloping presence to the image. The increased depth of field provided a more painterly feel versus a photographic sensibility. The developed B&W film was then scanned via a Nikon 9000 scanner or a Scitex Eversmart scanner and, similar to a traditional darkroom workflow, each image is processed using Macintosh computers and Photoshop.

The exhibition prints were produced via a relatively new carbon digital printing system. During a 2002 sabbatical, and after investing several months of frustrating research and testing, he settled on the most permanent inkjet process currently available that could closely mimic traditional chemical based imagery. Interesting to note that after 30 years of traditional photography he felt that silver gelatine was recognised as the best quality, and all new media had to emulate the look, feel and longevity of silver. In fact most paper manufacturers and printer manufacturers also recognise this; the products they promote advertise this fact. Using readily available wide format printers, photographers are now able to produce truly spectacular images with an unprecedented degree of control, repeatability and image stability.

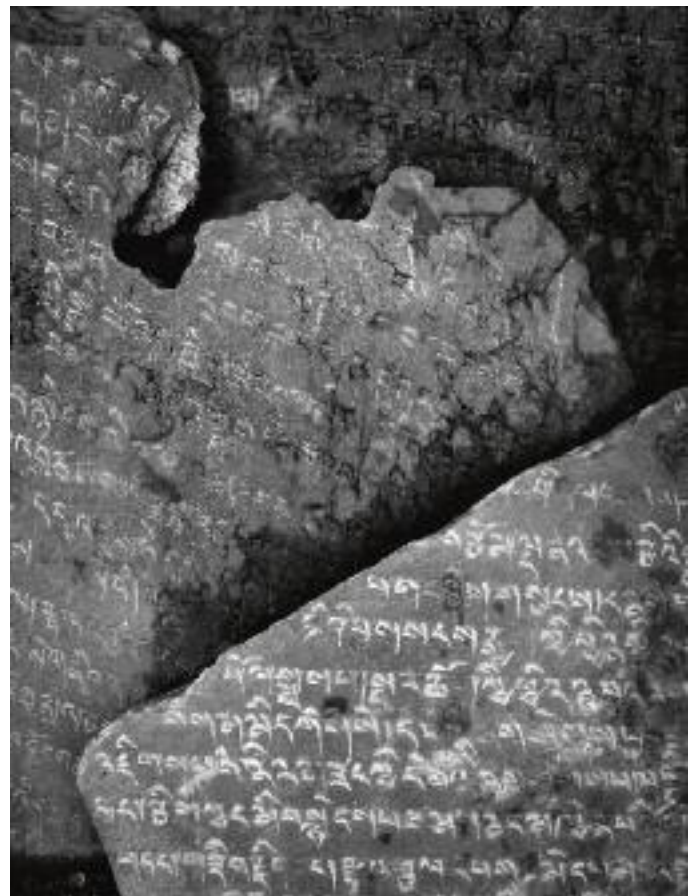
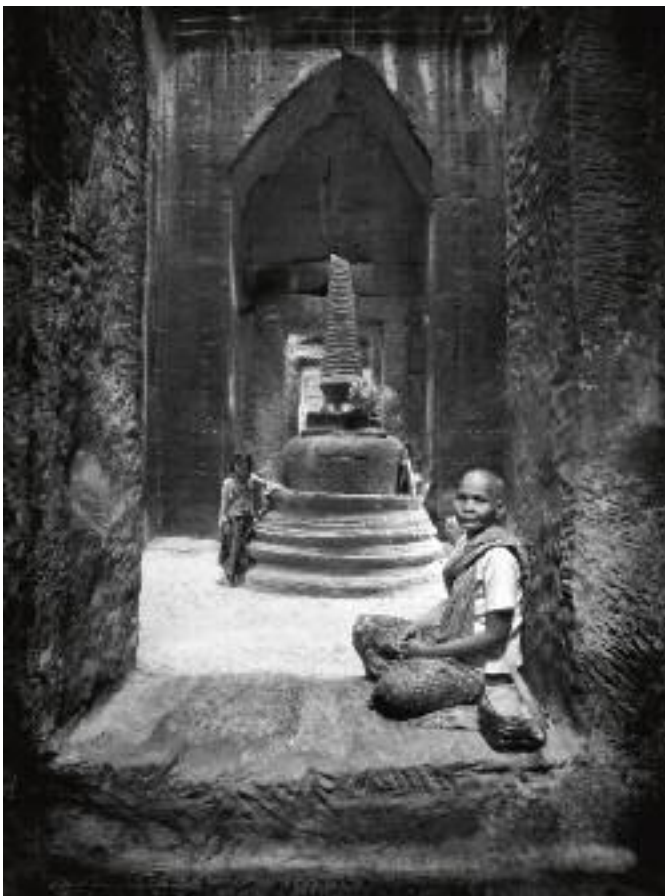
**Pilgrim, Nangkor Kora (Circuit)
Jokhang Temple, Lhasa, Tibet**







Left: Circumnambulation: Butter Lamps, Jokhang Temple, Lhasa, Tibet 2006
Top: Sunrise from Bule' Thee Paya, Bagan, Myanmar 2004
Bottom: Alms Bowls, Bagan, Myanmar 2004



Top Left: Apsara, Upper Tier, Angkor Wat, 2004
Top Right: Strangler Fig, East Entrance, Preah Kan Temple, Angkor Thom 2002
Bottom Left: Grandmother/Granddaughter, Preah Kan Temple. Angkor Thom 2002
Bottom Right: Mani Stones, West Gate, Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet 2006



Reclining Buddha, Manuha Paya, Bagan, Myanmar 2004



Touching Earth: Hand of Buddha, Shwezigon Paya, Bagan, Myanmar 2004



Top: Prayer and Devotion (Horizontal Woman and Prayer wheel), Jokhang Temple, Lhasa, Tibet 2006
Bottom: Snail Gatherer, Ton Lé Sap Lake, Cambodia 2002



There is a big advantage to using a film camera because you retain the best of both worlds. You still have a negative to print from in the darkroom or a digital file to print from using a variety of media. The files are then printed using Epson Stylus 3000 and 7000 wide format inkjet printers and, at the heart of the system, third party Piezography/Pro24 printer software (RIP) and Piezotone B&W carbon pigment inks. He does not encounter any disturbing colour shift/metamerism using a dedicated B&W ink set versus attempting to produce a neutral image via colour ink set.

After researching practically all high quality inkjet papers for their image permanence and surface texture; his work prints are proofed on Epson Enhanced Matte and final prints are produced on Hahnemüle Photo Rag, Although not the panacea that many envision, he believes that the digital process, once understood, can provide a powerful tool that can support and extend one's creative vision.

After receiving his BA and MA from San Francisco State University his photographic career has included commercial and editorial assignments. He has combined this with over 25 exhibitions and numerous workshops; his most current workshop is Digital Darkroom work flow. In between travels he has taught at a number of Institutions. Richard Murai now teaches creative photography in Northern California's Central Valley. More of his work can be viewed at www.richardmurai.com

**Left Top: Avalokiteshvara
(Buddha of Compassion), The Bayon,
Angkor Thom 2002**
**Left Bottom: Lightning,
Banteay Kdei Temple,
Angkor Complex 2002**



Incense (Sitting Monk), Samye Monastery, Yarlong Sampo, Tibet 2006