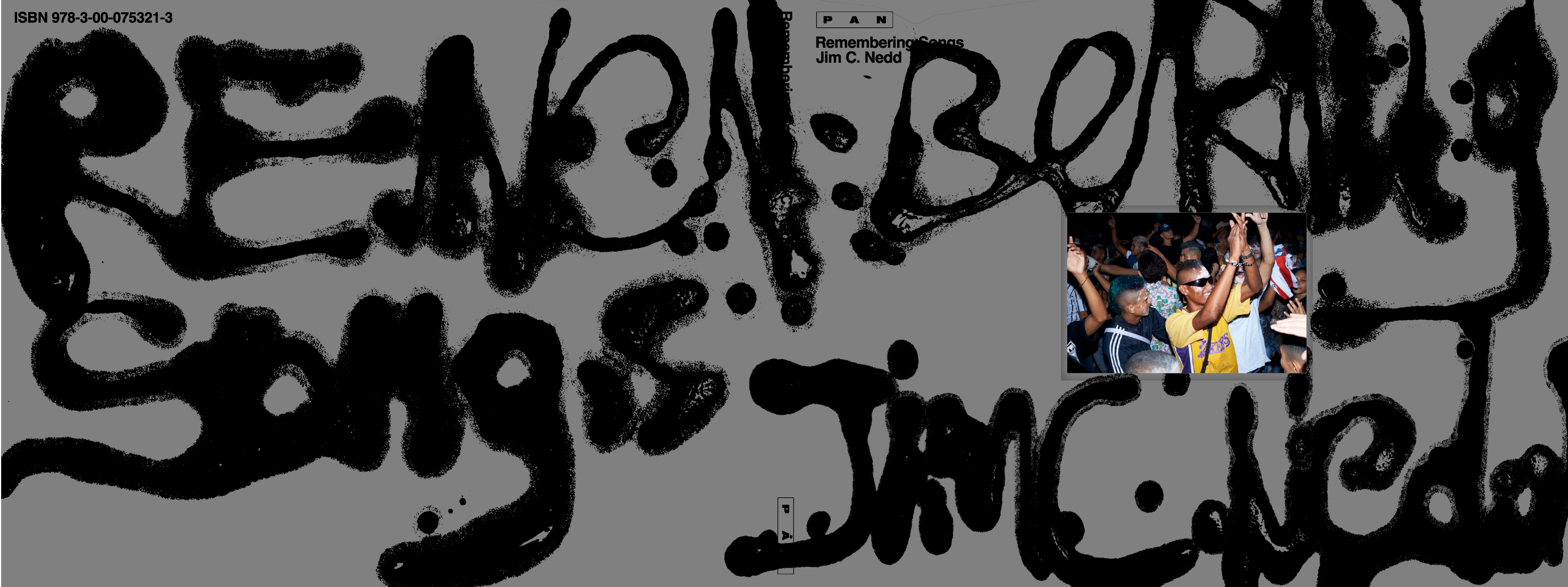


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Remembering

P A N

Remembering Songs
Jim C. Nedd



P A

It's the remembering song. There's so much to remember. There's so much wanting, and there's so much sorrow, and there's so much waiting for the sorrow to end. My people, all they want is a place where they can be people, a place where they can stand up and be part of that place, just being natural to the place without worrying someone may be coming along to take that place away from them. There's pride in it, too. The man singing it, the man playing it, he makes a place. For as long as the song is played, that's the place he's been looking for.

Remembering Songs

Jim C. Nedd

"Untitled, No. 3"
09/22/22 Beatriz E. Balanta

1:56 AM

**A tired question:
What is photography?**

**An obnoxious answer:
Photography wants to be a
plastic Rimax chair.**

**That is, it wants to gum itself
to human existence, it wants
to be indestructible, quiere ser
indispensable e impermeable;
it wants to be synonymous with
ubiquity.**

**An obvious question:
who is Jim C. Nedd?**

**A satirical answer: It
seems to me that he, like
most photographers who long
for songs that reverberate
elsewhere, wants to be a plastic
Rimax chair.**

**A stranger sends me an email.
He tells me that he has been
searching for me after reading
my work on photography as a
technology of race-making. He
has an ulterior motive—he wants
me to write an essay for a book
of photographs he is planning to
publish. I suck my teeth. I don't**

want to write about photography although I think that like the wheel and plastic, it changed the course of human history. After a few messages back and forth, I (begrudgingly) agree to a meeting.

We videochat.

The first thing I notice is that Jim C. Nedd is bald. He is sitting in an empty room. Was it empty or does my memory betray me? I remember a single light, a yellow light...perhaps. Or is my memory of this encounter a pack of lies?

I move around, phone close to my face. I think he saw a round head, con una bamba deliciosa; ojos chiquitos y lejanos, gafas grandes.

Was I bald in September?

(Un)fortunately there is no photographic totem of this (virtual) encounter. I wonder if at this point in the history of mnemonic technologies we are able to narrate our experiences without their help. I wonder if a photograph (or better stated, a screenshot) of this meeting can help me discern the physical

manifestations of its truth (the color of the walls, Jim's attire, the brand of the cigarette) and the imprints of the encounter on my flesh.

I think he heard the sound of the berimbau.

Jim C. Nedd is bald. He is sitting in an empty room, I remember a single light, a yellow light... perhaps. Shadows.

I listen impatiently as he talks about family albums and migrant memories. I am annoyed, I could care less about distant tokens of a long-lost home. I recoil and land on sarcasm: Once upon a time, I was also a migrant animal that licked her wounds with melancholic gestures. Nowadays, my nose and mouth refuse to go on the hunt for sancocho or pandebono. I am baffled when Jim tells me that he listens to vallenato every day. I wonder why he revels in such rituals. I stomped them out long ago because after the baby is delivered or the immigrant is reborn in the concrete jungle, the umbilical cord must be cut.

I am a cosmopolitan hypocrite: I don't listen to vallenato but I wander the streets of NYC, Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona, Boston, Durham looking for bars where I can dance salsa.

When we spoke, I must have told him what I usually say: that all photographs are fables, that when I write about photography I write about what is not in the image, I write about noise, what does not make sense, the misplaced object that instigates a set of urgency. I must have told him that I am suspicious of photography; its calculations, its assumptions; its modus operandi: the orchestration of a scene. I wonder what I sound like when I say such things.

I shift, I walk around the house: the video feed goes dark as I go from the living room to my bedroom.

He frames himself cinematically: a lamp and shadows.

I cannot help but move.

I should frame myself cinematically.

I am not prepared for this call.

I light a cigarette. He lights a cigarette.

Later Jim tells me that I was slippery and he was trying to catch me. His strategy: to mirror my gestures. He caught me in the splendor of a cigarette that is lit to provoke.

I am being an ass. I speak loudly and fire a succession of questions that he cannot possibly answer but he does. Jim's answers are deliberate and he embellishes them with smoke. I plop on my bed. I

ask about problematic images. He sends screenshots of the following photographs:

- A close-up of two mouths with braces: I am tantalized, I have been thinking about orthodontics and contraptions made for disciplining the mouth.

- A cigarette that has just been lit by someone that stands on top of a building and which the photographer has cut out of the picture frame. The cigarette is an enigmatic object—it is imprinted with the word “Venezue;” the letters “l” and “a” have been turned to ashes. The photograph burns me with a quick sting—esta es una fotografía que no debería existir, pienso.

Who is burning Venezuela?
Who burns Venezuela?

Es una foto extraña de un objeto extraño. Venezuela (no) es una marca. Venezuela no es un cigarillo.

Venezuela no se fuma pero

se quema en la cima de un edificio blanco en la zona play de una ciudad costeña donde los Venezolanos dan miedo.

- La última imagen es una fotografía de otro acto fotográfico en curso. Vemos el brazo (de lo que asumo es un joven negro) sosteniendo un teléfono-cámara que toma una foto de la misma escena que Jim C. Nedd registra. (Do you find it annoying that I keep on calling him Jim C. Nedd?). El encuadre es raro. Lo primero que mi ojo ve es el culo redondito y rico (pero borroso) de la muchacha color chocolate de cabello largo con shorts blancos. Pero, en la otra fotografía de la misma escena, ella no existe. In Nedd’s framing of the other photographer’s photograph of this scene she’s eliminated.

These photographs make strange noises. I hear the static and I am seduced by it. I agree to write the essay.

In the book proof that I receive, Venezuela burning is placed at the beginning of Nedd’s visual narrative. It appears after the photograph emblazoned on the cover, a picture of the sound of the

wind. Las sillas Rimax están allí: son testigos de la conversa y podrían (si yo les preguntase y si ellas pudieran responder en un lenguaje que yo entendiera) reproducir el playlist de la noche:

“Me sobran palabras”,

Binomio de Oro

“Olvídala”, Jorge Celedón

“Caracoles de Colores”,

Diomedes Diaz/Iván Zuleta

Nedd’s book, *Remembering Songs* is an impeccable memoir of the mundane. Es un archivo de aquello que pasa todos los días sin pena ni gloria. Like the the plastic Rimax chair, this book is an archive of the fundamental desapercibido: un paseo de río, un vigilante que se cree dueño del mundo porque tiene las llaves, una pareja que baila muy pegaito, un tatuaje nuevo en un pecho joven, la fiesta de 15 años. Jim’s photographs mimic the style of documentary: his camera (re) produces the quotidian ideal and minutely records a series of sensations: the clammy moisture of sweat when it clings to the back of the ears or the forehead; el fresco que se siente debajo de un palo

de almendras o ese viento— casi imperceptible--que crea el vaivén de la mecedora y que acaricia la memoria, endulza el chisme y apacigua la turbulencia del estómago cuando llega la noche y solo se ha comido aguapanela con arepa de huevo.

My suspicion returns. In a book so preoccupied with the everyday, there are no snapshots of the convoluted reality of Colombia; no protests, no street children, no trash, no despair. Jim’s photographs halt my desire. As a photographer, he doesn’t give me what I want and what I want is a coherent story. What I want is photographs that make the black and white political statements that I recognize. Instead, what I get is a book that oozes with images de fiestas, de picós, of outings to the river; moments that humans steal from time to escape from the gut-wrenching humdrum of History.

I hate the fact that I want Jim C. Nedd to become a griot; I want him to mystify the everyday and offer insight about the manusha of history. But alias, I am an old-school critic whose

eye was not trained to revel in the carnivalesque joy that transpires in this book. As a critic, I am most comfortable as a detective in a marxists police procedural.

I want to identify the criminal and analyze the colonial history of his crime. When I tell Jim that I crave documentary drama, he recognizes this desire as the desire of a properly trained old critic and tells me: "if I am giving you songs why do you ask for statements? Statements are gray-scale repetitions of the same phrase; I am interested in the color of sound, the rhythm of survival and the defiance of picardía." I literally see his point.

The sensory identity of Colombia tends to be saturated with the color of murder and the disappeared, the smell of war and burned air, and the metallic taste of misery. Nedd's camera evokes sounds and looks for visual choreographies that coexist and sometimes drape the ugly.

I look at the photographs again. Suspicion wanes. I land on a picture of a braid strewn on a dusty road... es decir, me doy duro con el enigma banal de la realidad.

Remembering Songs is an attempt to transubstantiate the delicious snippets of everyday life into plastic matter. It is another ode to the plasticity of the photographed event. As Jim reminds me, photography is akin to plastic: It can be molded but it also molds, it is the result of manipulation and it can manipulate. Like the plastic Rimax chair, Nedd and his camera wander and seem to be everywhere. Nedd's camera is most comfortable on the road and thus the archive that it produces is a careful mise-en-scène of public life. Cabe anotar que el fotógrafo no titula muchas de sus fotos. Decisión que, de cierta forma, entorpece el proceso de interpretación que debemos asumir aquellos que consumimos la imagen. Pero los títulos no son necesarios y como analista de las imágenes en el libro es interesante ver a una imagen sobrevivir sin su frenemy, la palabra escrita.

A pesar de que Remembering Songs es un

montaje de espacios y eventos ordinariamente cotidianos, al autor no le interesan los orígenes: no hay un registro de dónde ocurrieron los hechos que la cámara reproduce. Sé que se hicieron en el Caribe colombiano porque Jim me lo dijo. As far as I am aware the book does not enunciate its place of origin. Moreover, this record of life somewhere in the Colombian Caribbean is set in "no-time." Es decir, no hay un registro explícito del año o del momento en que se hicieron estas imágenes. Este "no-tiempo" es el tiempo de la memoria de lo común y corriente (de lo que pasa y se olvida fácilmente o se confunde o se entreteje con otros eventos similares). Este es un "no-tiempo" del disfrute.

But unlike the Rimax chair, it is impossible for man and camera to appear everywhere. For example, most photographs are images of events that take place on the street and the photographer prefers to

shoot from a considerable distance. Although Nedd is fond of photographing dwelling spaces, there are almost no images of events that happen inside a house or an office or a pharmacy. The living room or bedroom or the kitchen do not exist in this universe.

La foto de los culos ricos es una de las pocas que muestra un evento que ocurre al interior de un recinto pero no es una foto que inspira intimidación. Podemos ver o adentrarnos en el contorno de los cuerpos de 3 de las personas que son retratadas, pero ellas (los protagonistas de la escena) could care less about the photographer/us. The women's attention is directed somewhere beyond the frame and the guy wearing a baseball cap is caught looking at the floor (or is he admiring his torso?).

A pesar de que Remembering Songs es un montaje de espacios y eventos ordinariamente cotidianos, al autor no le interesan los orígenes: no hay un registro de

dónde ocurrieron los hechos que la cámara reproduce. Sé que se hicieron en el Caribe colombiano porque Jim me lo dijo. As far as I am aware the book does not enunciate its place of origin. Moreover, this record of life somewhere in the Colombian Caribbean is set in “no-time.”

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Jim C. Nedd is bald; showed up wearing a very stylish guayabera shirt and brought cake.

He frames himself cinematically.

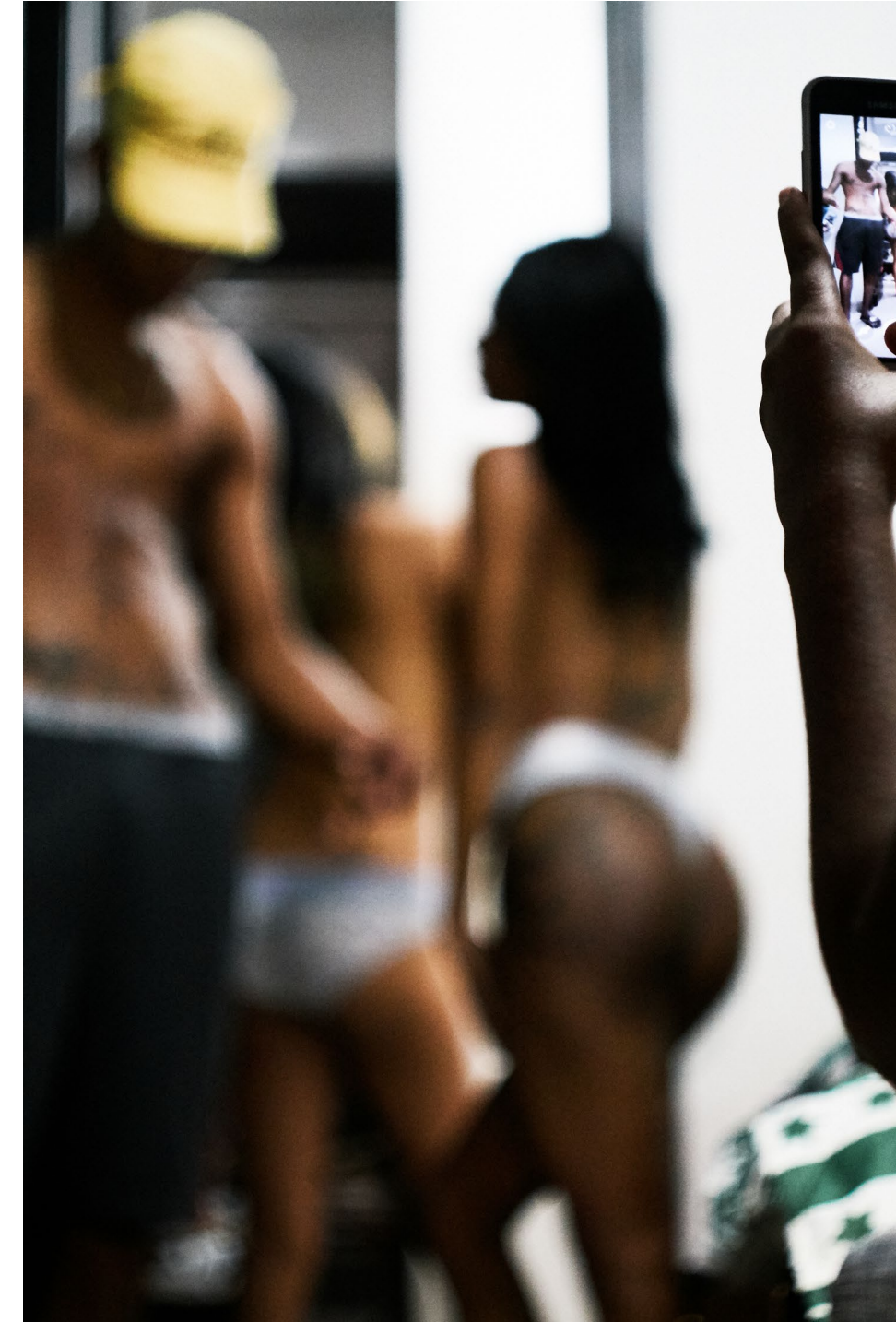
I am behind the camera and have forgotten if I had hair or if I told him I believe that photographs lie or that I am mesmerized by people who use cameras to create plastic truths and memorable lies.

An old question:

Can the photographer sing?

**A volatile answer:
He is a technofile that insists
on turning memories into sweat.**

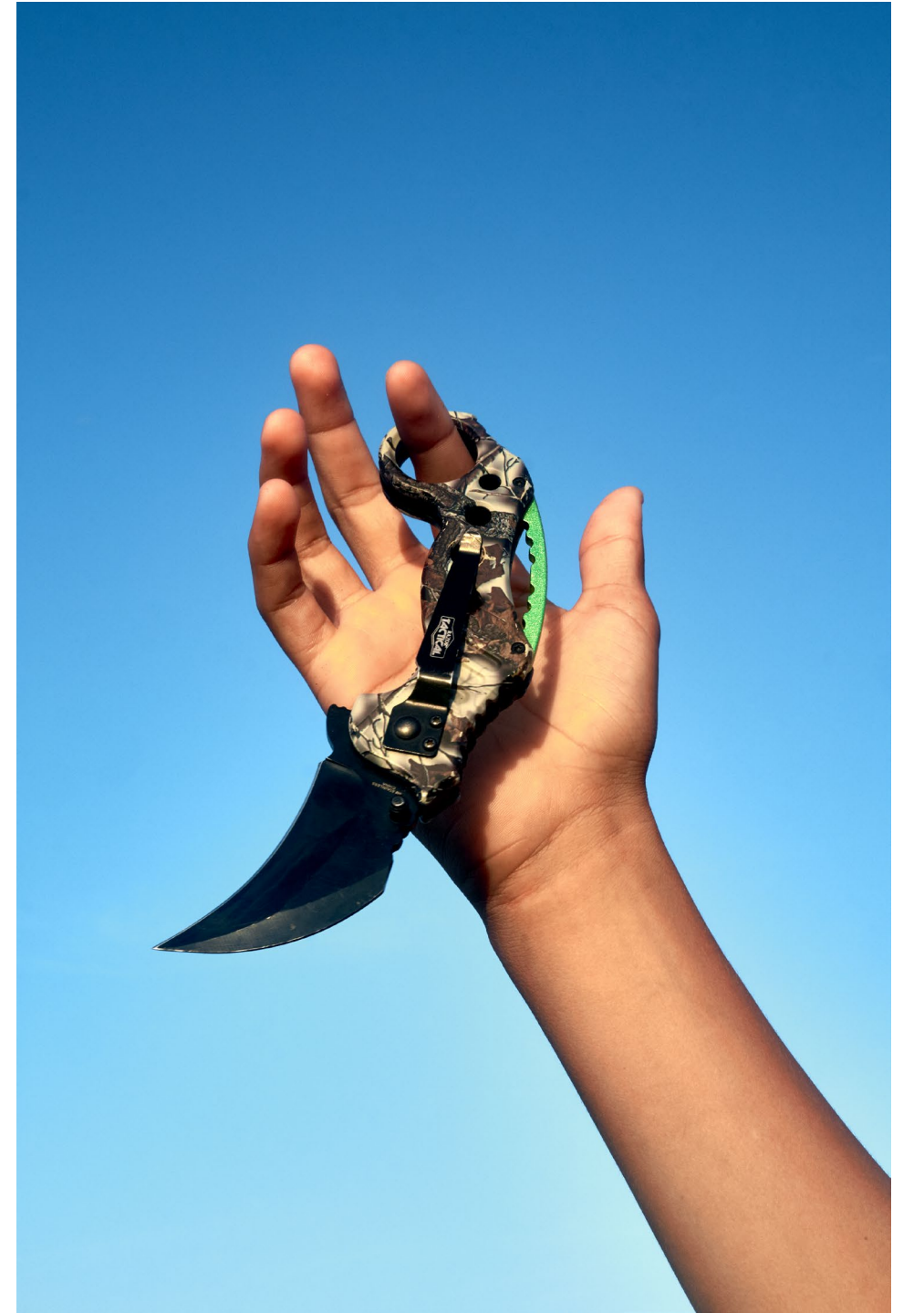
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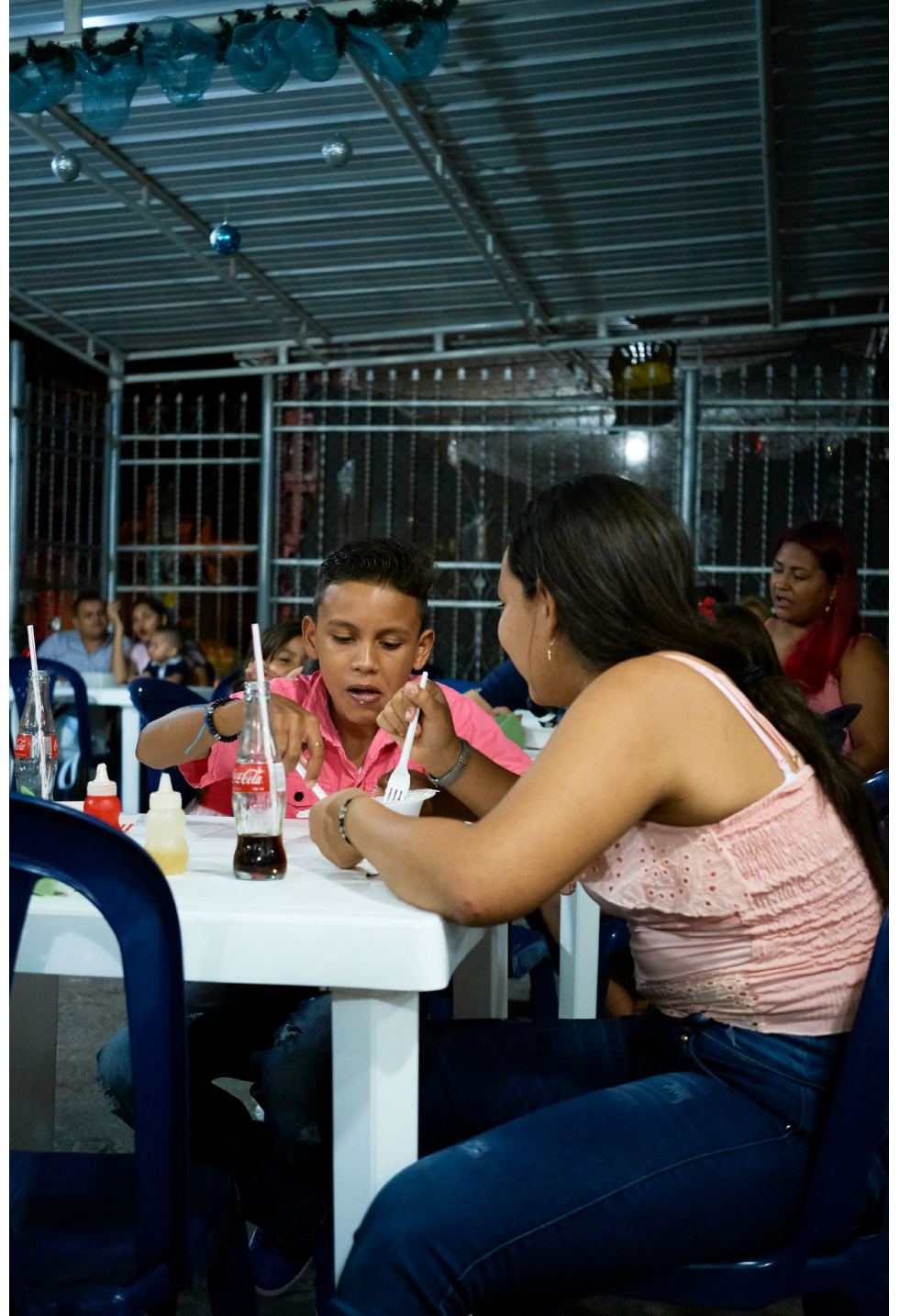


































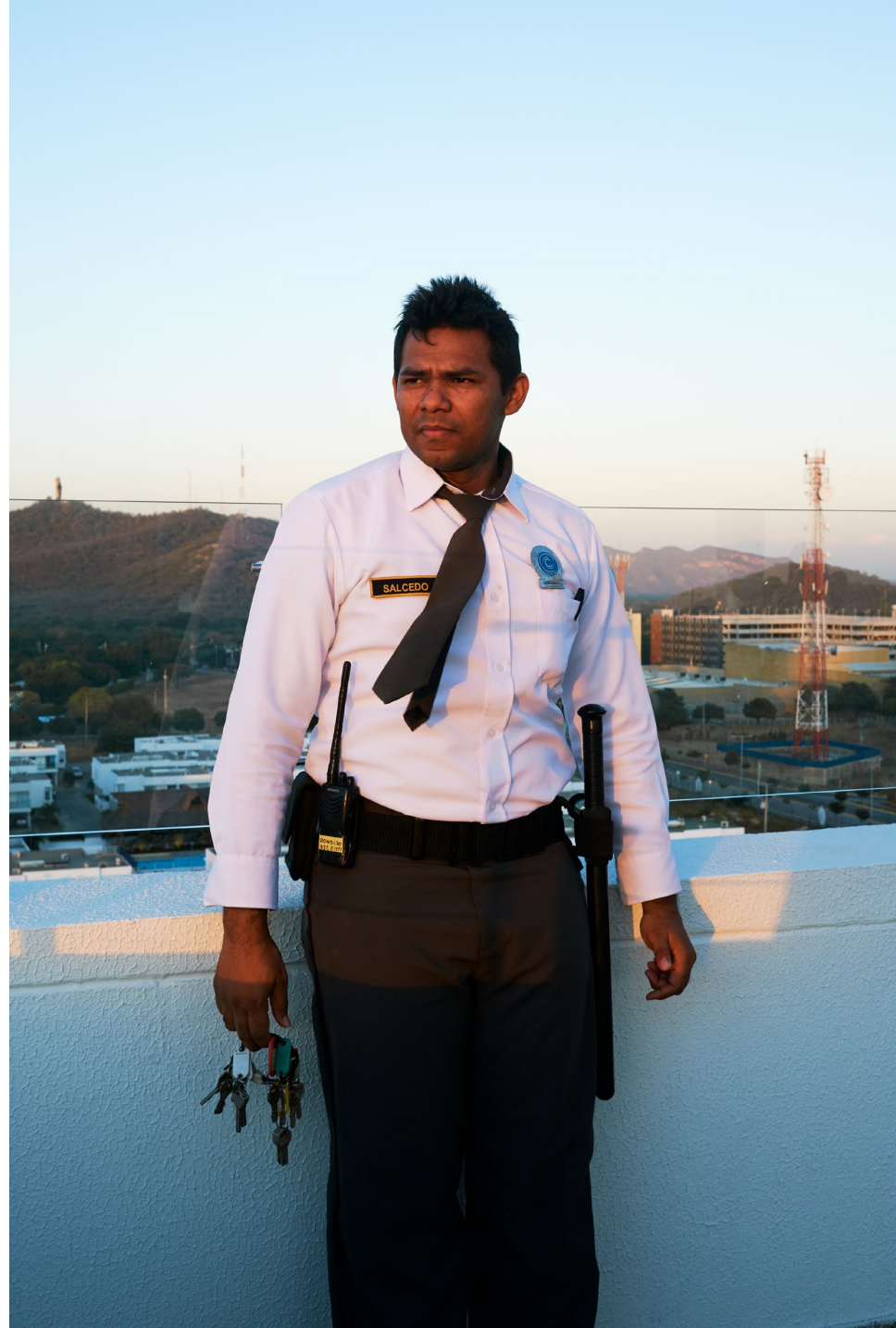












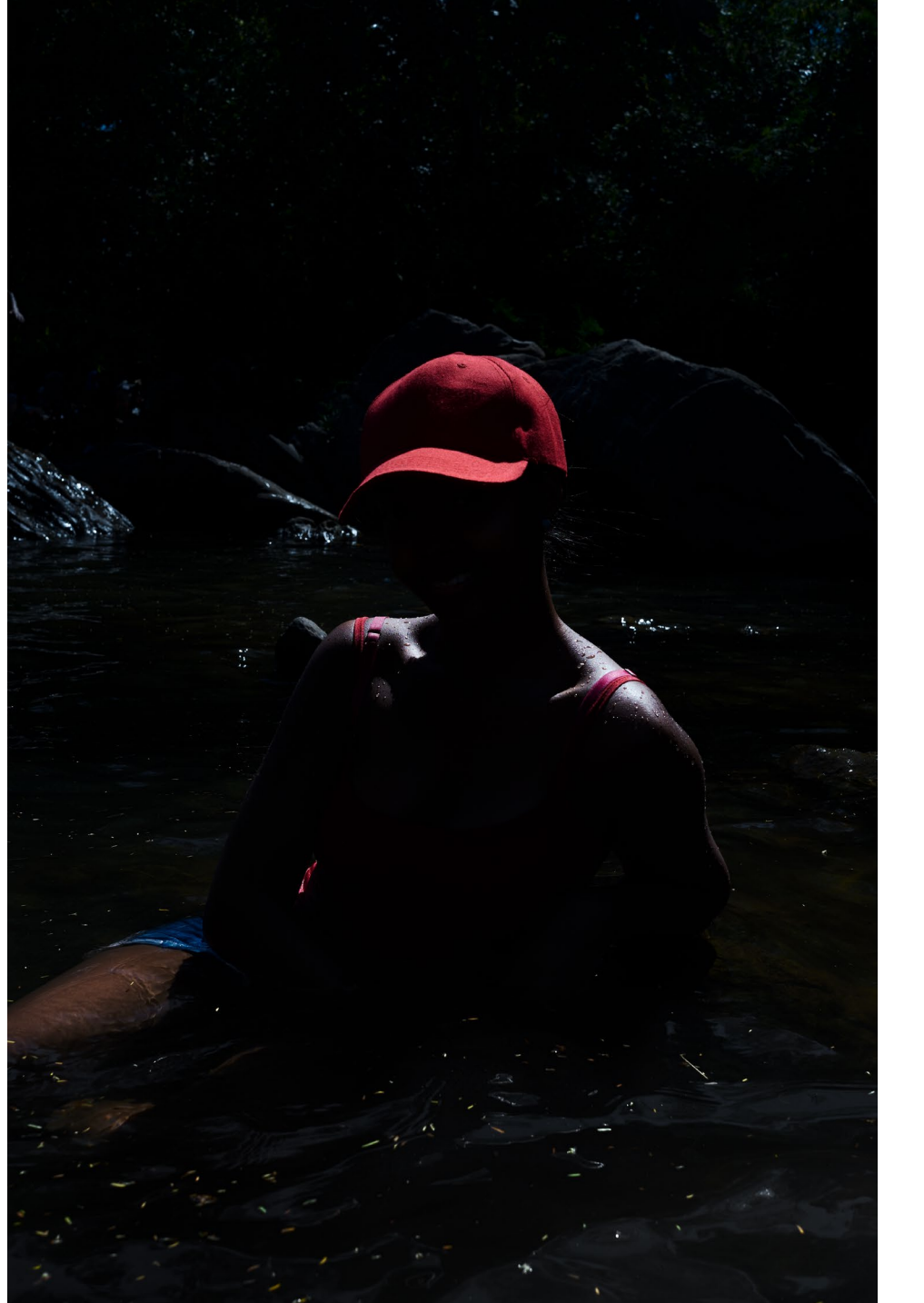


























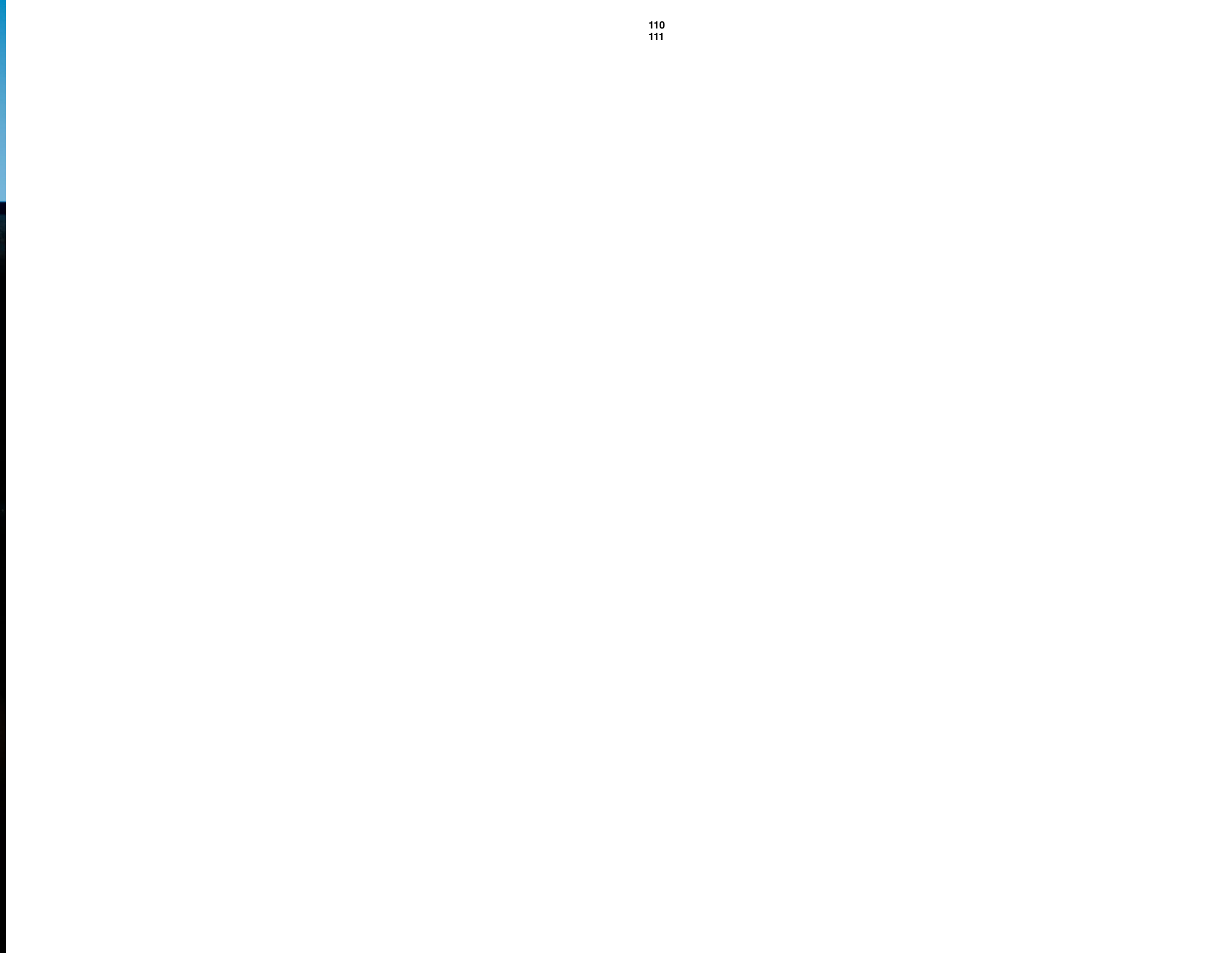






















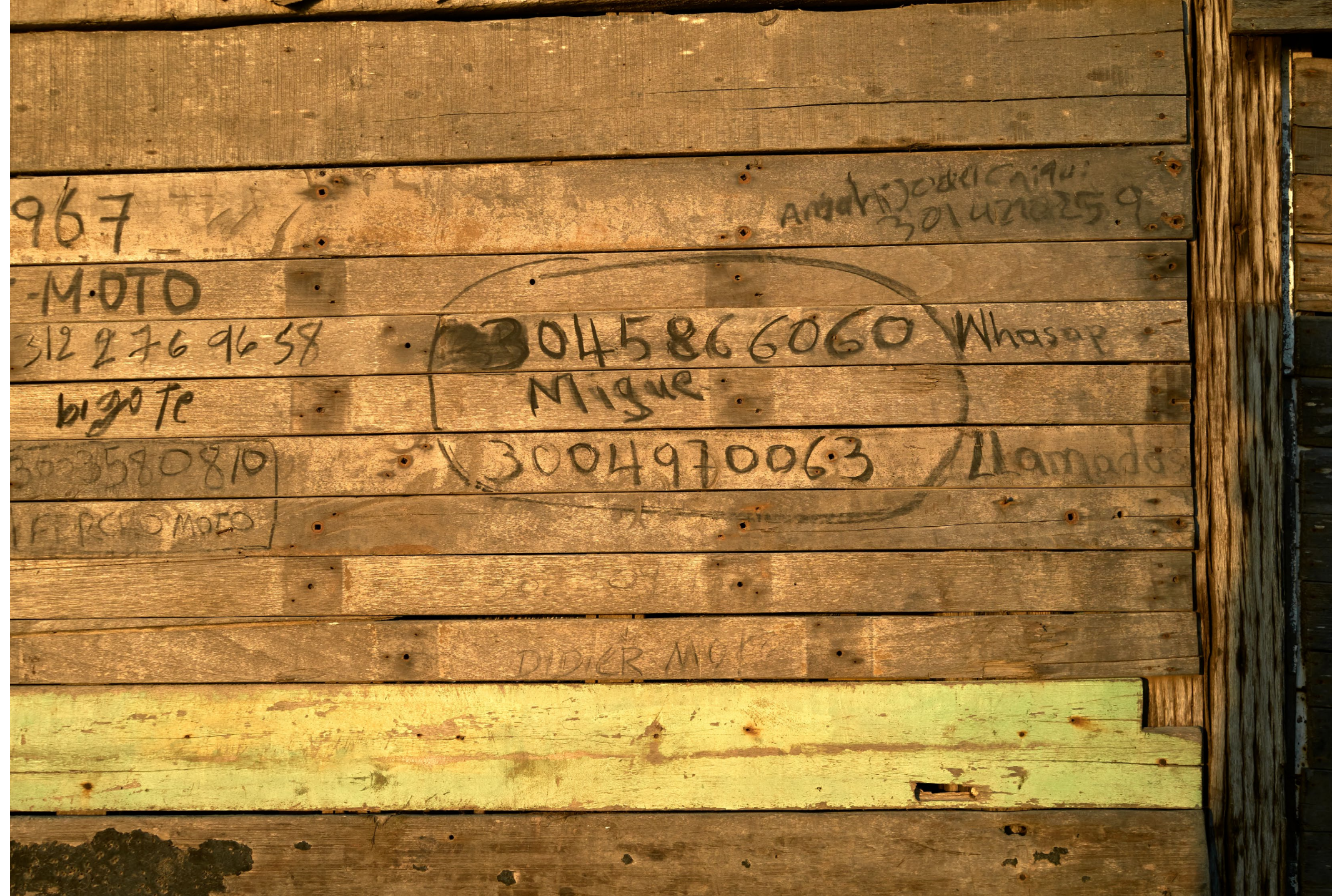


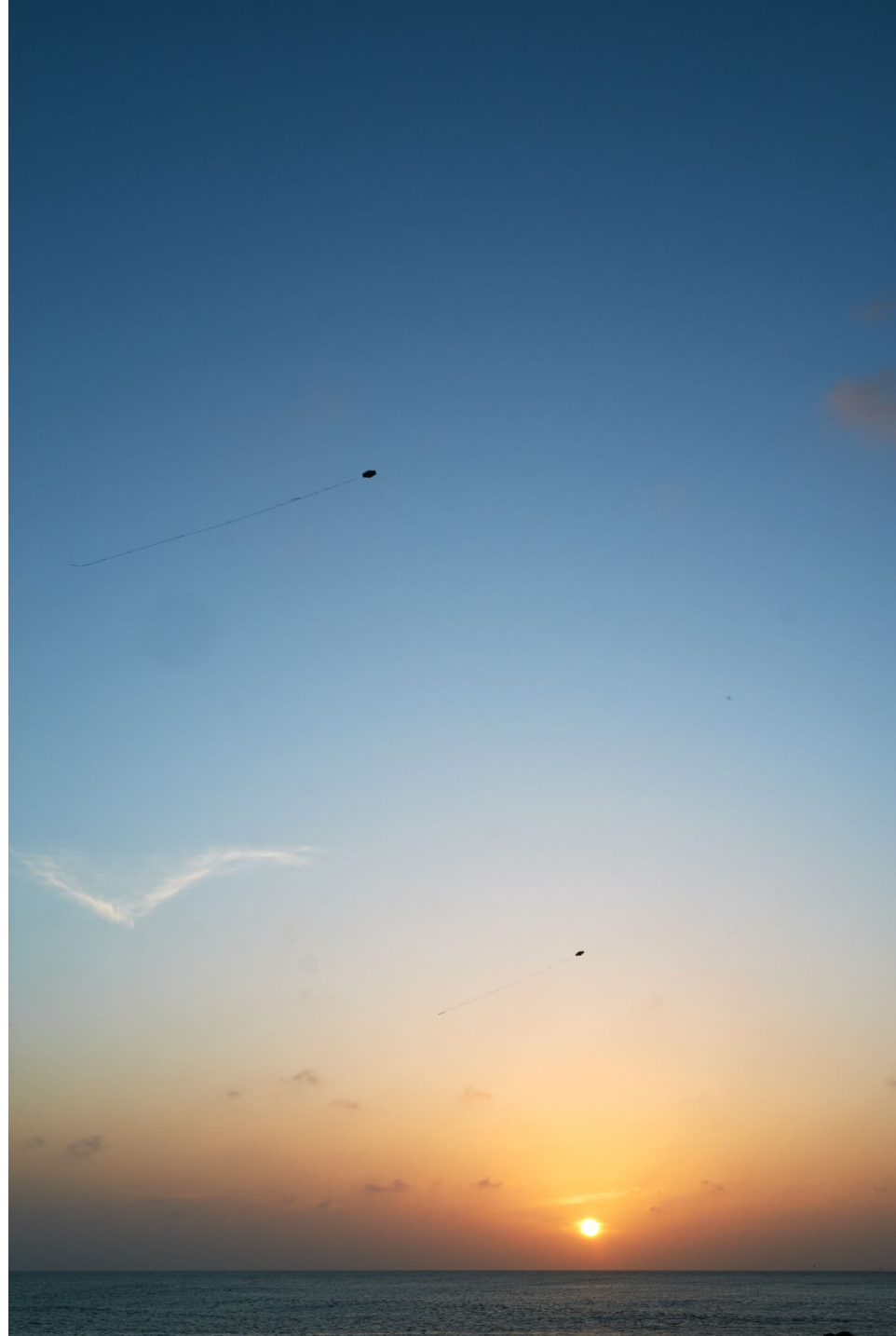


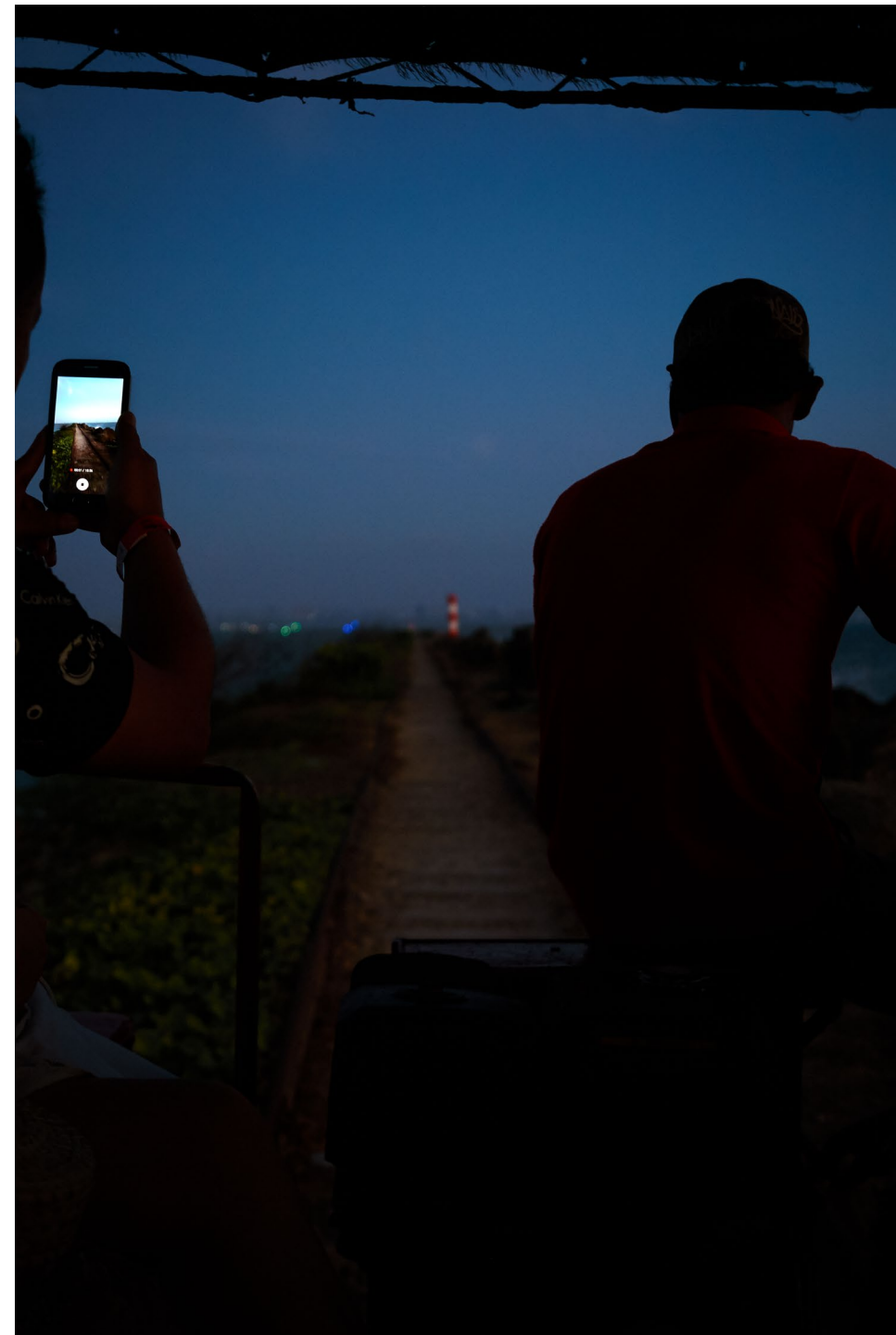


















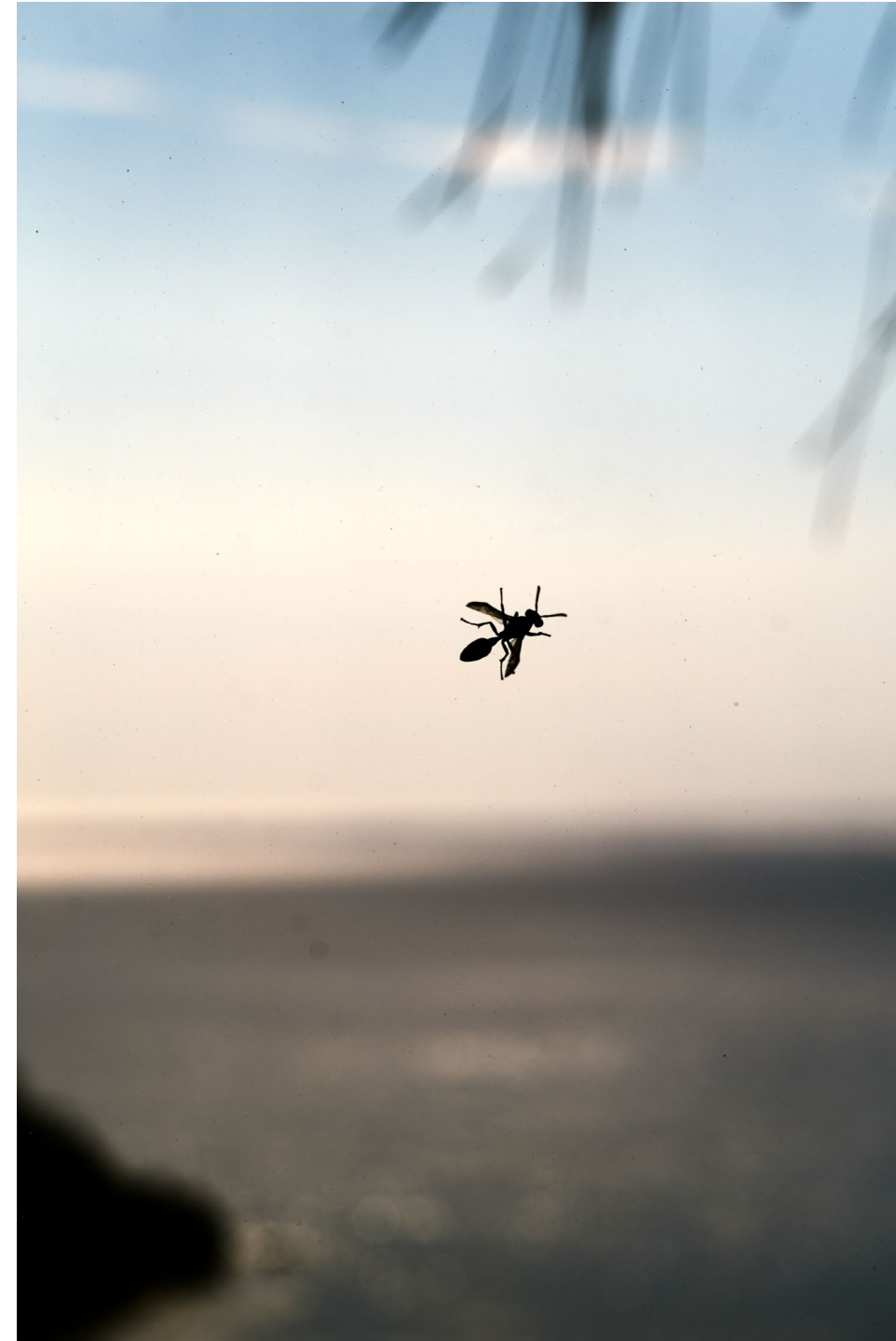




























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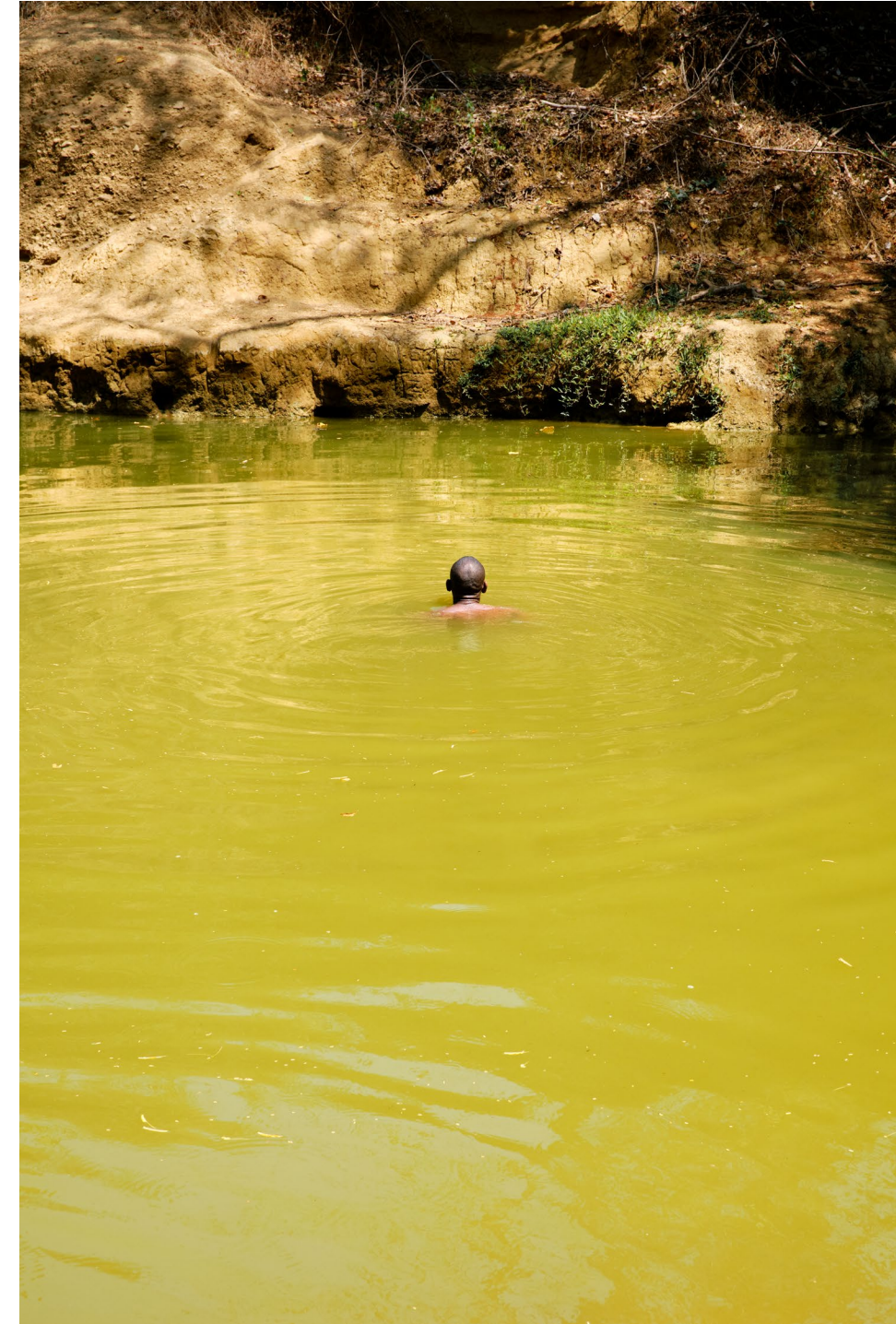


















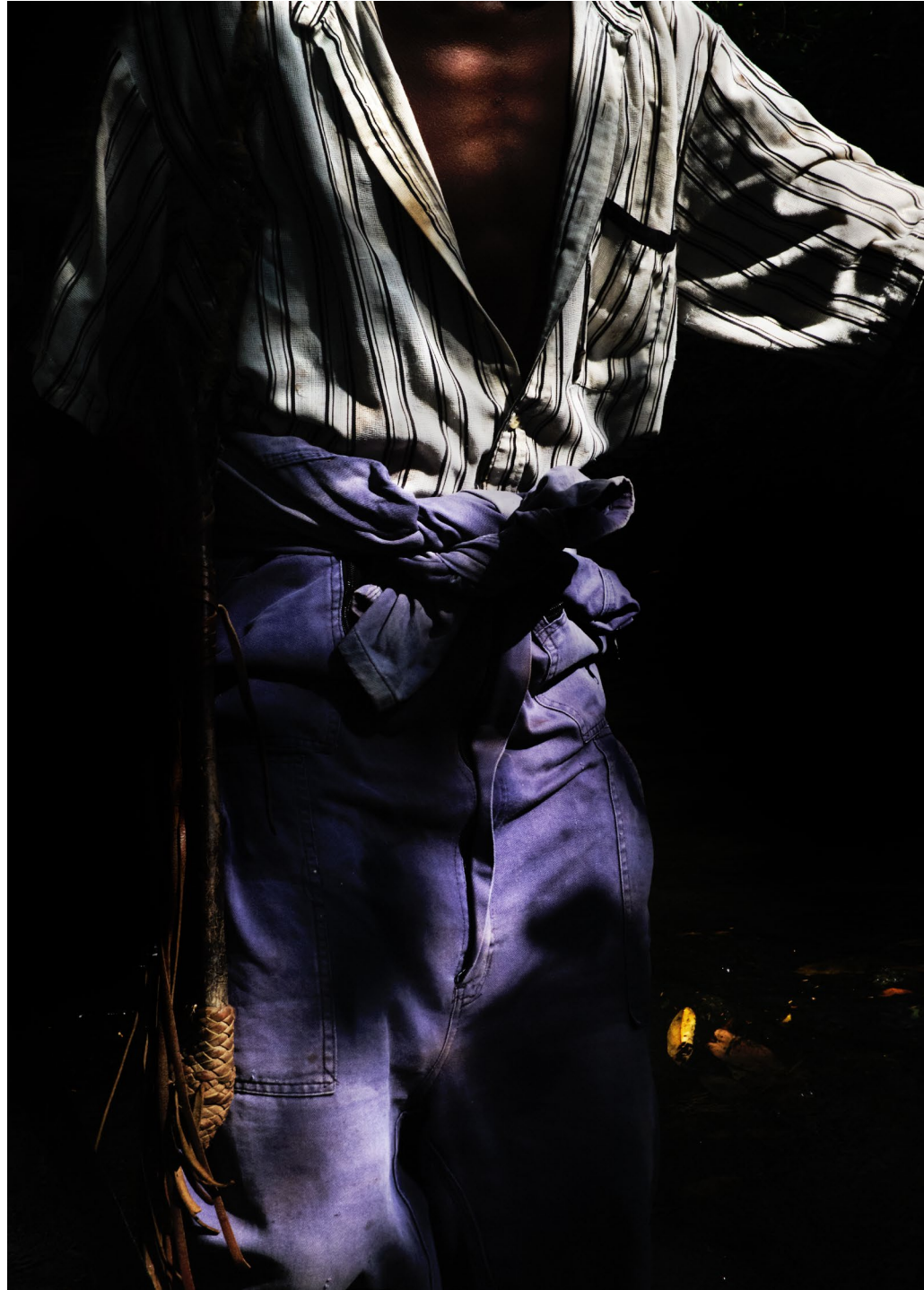


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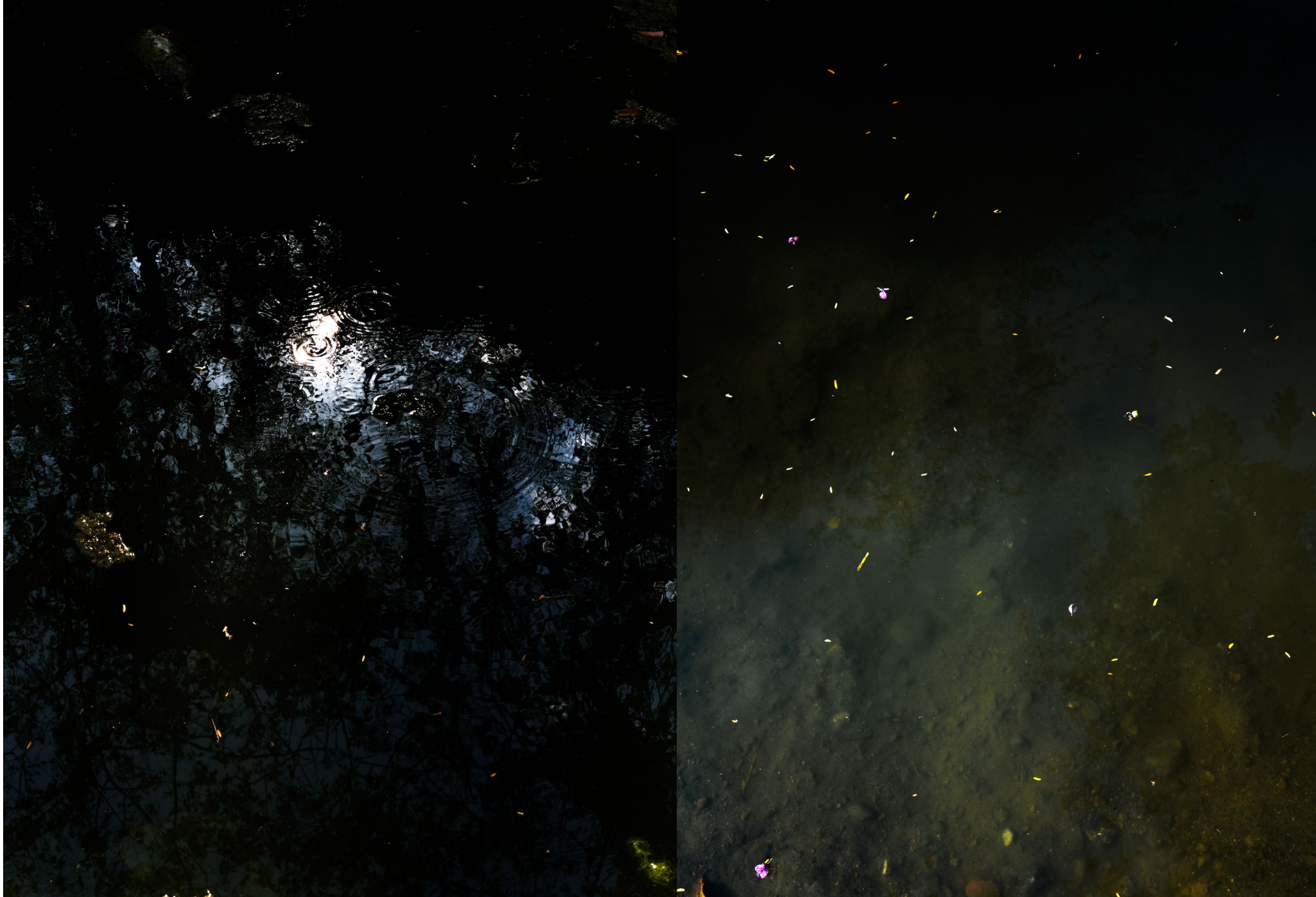




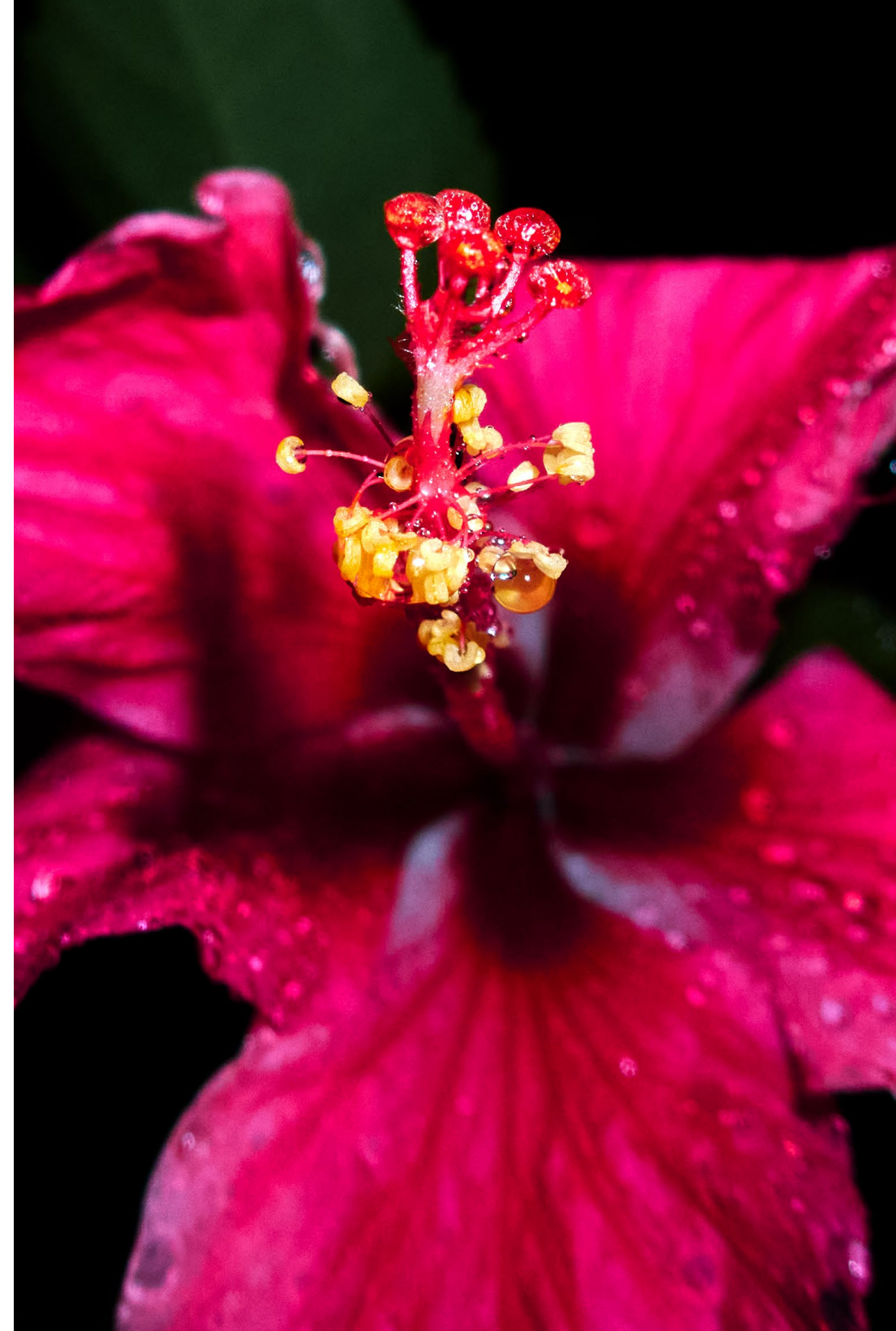






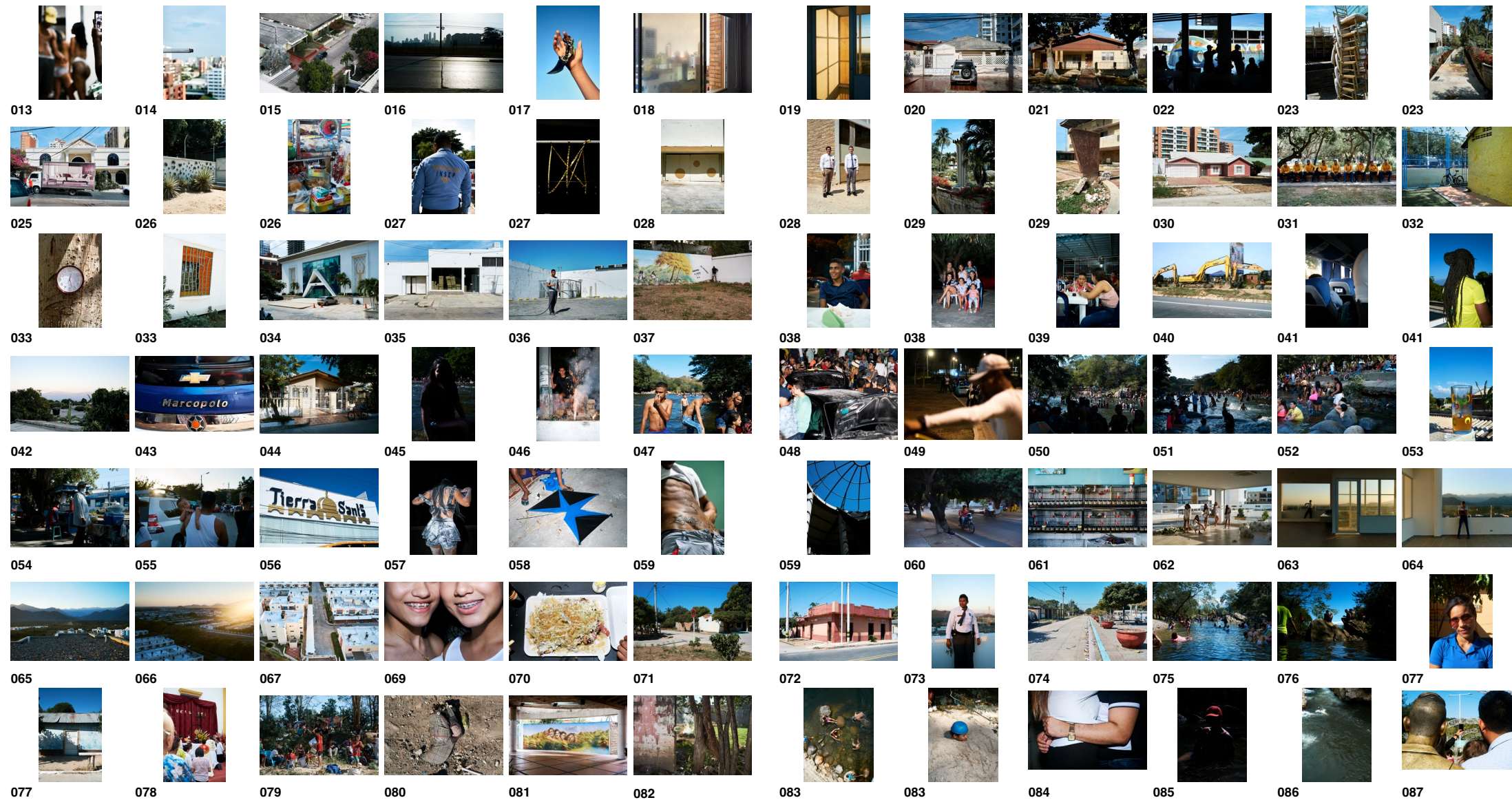










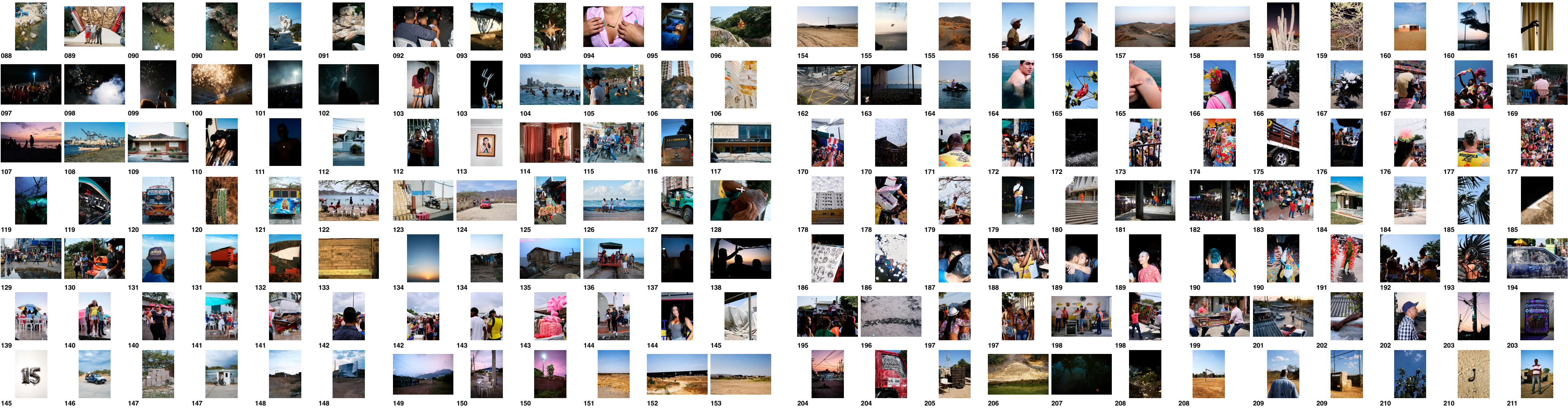


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 156 "Chico Wayuu #2", Cabo de La Vela, 2019.
 157 "Al Fin y Al Cabo #2", Cabo de La Vela, 2019.
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A Language Shaped by Absence:
Jim C. Nedd in conversation with Octavia Bürgel.

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222 "Untitled", Barranquilla, 2020.
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224 "Amor", Barranquilla, 2020.
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227 "L"Ouverture", San Basilio de Palenque, 2020.
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231 "Oro", Don Diego, 2021.
231 "Cantos del Río", Don Diego, 2021.

233 "Untitled", Buritaca, 2020.
233 "Untitled", Buritaca, 2020.
234 "Untitled", Buritaca, 2020.
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239 "Untitled", Santa Marta, 2022.
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242 "Un Día en Gaira", Santa Marta, 2021.
242 "Untitled", Santa Marta, 2021.
243 "Aeropuerto", Santa Marta, 2021.
244 "Gaira", Santa Marta, 2021.
245 "Untitled", Don Diego, 2021.
245 "Untitled", Don Diego, 2021.
246 "Frank", Don Diego, 2021.
247 "Loren", Don Diego, 2021.
248 "Untitled", Don Diego, 2021.
249 "Omar en La Mula", Rincón Hondo, 2020.

OCTAVIA BÜRGEL:

Flipping through these pages, again and again we return to the riverbed and the stream—occasionally glimpsing views of the industrialized coastline. You can almost hear the water rushing, the sound of jet-ski motors as they fade under a din of happy chatter.

JIM C. NEDD:

I'm so glad to hear you say that. I somehow feared that these soundscapes never became dimensional. I probably mentioned to you at some point that I am also a musician. I have been in a band called Primitive Art with Matteo Pit since 2011. I use my voice as my main instrument, although it can't really be called singing—I've always applied a lot of reverb and echo to my vocals. As Primitive Art, we melted our experiences into something we simply defined as "Caribbiterranean"; an imaginary place between the Mediterranean and the Caribbean Seas where anything could happen. I often try to translate music into photography. Sound effects like echo, reverb, chorus, pitch, and gain, as well as editing techniques like sampling, overdub, and arranging, can be conducive to image-making. This relationship between sound and image is partially why I titled the book, *Remembering Songs*, and also explains why it was so valuable for me to publish it via a record label. The sound of rushing water has been on my sonic palette from the very beginning. For me, the river is a

particularly important symbol, because it is the source of the mythology of my city, Valledupar. I used to spend all my Sundays at Rio Guatapuri from morning to night, experiencing the *realismo magico* first-hand. The amount of information that you can gather on the banks of the river every weekend is incredible. It feels like half a million people turning their indoor lives out. It's a unique, convivial experience that I have not found anywhere else. I love crowds. I think of festivities as large-scale emotional crossroads, when the group becomes one single flexible entity. There is a specific kind of Caribbean literature that particularly focuses on rivers from a post-colonial point of view, which is sometimes referred to as "Tropical Gothic." My favorite book of all time is *My Bones and My Flute* by the controversial Guianese writer, Edgar Mittelholzer, in which the author outlines the eerie and violent temperament of the Berbice river, but also the ways it is a life source.

OB:

You often photograph people "turning their indoor lives out," in various festive and social settings. What lies beneath the recognizability—or its inverse—of certain places, faces and events?

JCN:

I was initially inspired by the photography archive of my family. I realized that I kept going back to the same places, taking similar photos to the ones I found in our family albums. It was a way to continue

compiling images after my life at home was interrupted when I immigrated to Italy. Going through this archive has become sort of a ritualistic process leading up to my 20th anniversary of living away from home, away from Colombia. In my opinion, we should consider languages as maps, and images as results of those languages. In the book, there are some controlled and some spontaneous attempts to connect those two coordinates. I think it makes sense to go back to the beginning, before language or image: the heat, the music, the rivers, the sea, the infinite landscape, the humidity that makes every Caribbean sunset purple, the absence of recognizable seasons, the festivities, the worship of life and the respect for death that results in our own kind of magical realism.

One of my heroes is Marvel Moreno, a writer of novels from Barranquilla who left the country furious and never touched Colombian soil again. She died in Paris, writing and thinking about Colombia constantly. She illustrated her memories in her texts, and they are so vivid that reading her work feels like being in real-time with her. I particularly felt akin to Moreno when I discovered her book, *En Diciembre Llegaban las Brisas*. Her punctuality, the sense of belonging without being, confirmed many of my own thoughts, even though her memoir is from the 1960's. Maintaining memories can be really complicated—they can fool you, they can keep you attached to something that once was, but is no more. The magic of images—translations of a kind of fiction-reality—is that they can always be remade.

I did not receive any formal artistic education. I actually never finished high school. At age 17, I was forced to leave home, but despite the challenges I quickly learned a wide range of skills. Most importantly, I learned how to take care of myself. I wanted to share this context with you to better understand my language, which has been shaped over time by what was missing instead of what was present. I love learning while producing, and this speaks to the overall experience of making *Remembering Songs*—this book is a “first” for a number of the people who worked on it. It actually was not intended to be a book or a body of work at all. I only realized later on that I had all this material that I was ready to let go of.

OB: What you're saying about a language shaped by absences feels applicable to the employment of light and contrast in some of your work. At what point did this

reveal itself as an aesthetic device in your practice?

JCN: I use underexposure and shadows to leave space for the imagination. Before I began working as a visual artist, I was fortunate to work at Toiletpaper for a long time. When I first joined, I was greatly influenced by Maurizio Cattelan and Pierpaolo Ferrari's radical method. Their boldness, the way that they make images seem to burst with colors was impressive. In my own work, I like to see how images hold up to post-production manipulation. I would say that my process is similar to sculpting in that sense. When I started taking photographs, it was the beginning of the renaissance of film photography, which I considered to be very bourgeois at the time. I was tired of the overload of low-contrast film images that I was seeing all over the internet. I wanted to see more and pursue my own version of elegance—especially in my fashion or editorial work.

OB: Why is the back of a head so compelling? What gets lost in a face?

JCN: In general, I think that we tend to misunderstand the idea of portraits. We think of them as being mainly focused on people's faces, which I consider to be overvalued and one-directional. In my portraits I like to invert that. I want to make the observer feel observed. In many of my portraits, eyes are not visible but you feel that the person in the image is watching you. I tend to crop and section bodies and landscapes. I have made a conscious decision in my work to focus on posture instead of posing, or any other physical expressions that the environment might trigger. I came to understand that the face only represents a small fraction of a person's being, which has allowed me to communicate multiple souls and identities to a particular individual.

The experience of being photographed without having agreed to it has made me appreciate the value of obtaining consent before photographing others—it is soil that I never trespass. Doing otherwise is a colonial and predatory attitude. Reading Beatriz E. Balanta's research in *Anthropometric Specimens and Picturesque Curiosities: the Photographic Orchestration of the Black Body, Brasil circa 1865*, much like my encounter with Marvel Moreno's work, was a confirmation of a lot of thoughts I was having on my own about the relationship between colonialism and photography.

OB: In the essay that opens this volume, Balanta writes that your photographs depict, “Moments that humans steal from time to escape from the gut-wrenching humdrum of history.” It reminds me of something that the Italian photographer Luigi Ghirri wrote, “...On beaches, in spaces dedicated to amusement – these are the moments in which man dispenses with his everyday identity, and takes on a liberated, unfettered, more authentic character.” Ghirri was also fascinated by the way that the camera's lens can multiply or fabricate identities, which was for him an attempt to “emphasize the existence of multiplicity, and of there being more than one image.”

JCN: There is a form of resistance to be found in banality, in performing life and all of its fundamentals. In recent years, Colombia experienced a massive outbreak of protests that left the country divided, but that also reunited its national identity with leftist values. My photographs do not cover these protests, but in some way or another respond to their results. Sidney Bechet writes in his autobiography, *Treat It Gentle*, “My people, all they want is a place where they can be people, a place where they can stand up and be part of that place, just being natural to the place without worrying someone may be coming along to take that place away from them.”

OB: Viewed from one angle, the photographs in this book are part of a burst that documents a particular frame of time. Viewed elsewhere, these images become a disparate abstraction of infinitely more individuals and potentials than the camera could hope to contain. There is no limit to the picture plane...

JCN: I never trusted mathematics. I don't believe that photographs are two-dimensional. The possibilities of an image's impact are multi-dimensional, so I have to imagine that the photographic image is, too. Which is the photograph in your opinion—the scene, or the image of the scene?

OB: In my own practice, the question of a photograph's “surface” comes up often. I think of the camera as a really ineffective tool, if you understand it as being inherently capable of relaying the truth. If the question were, “Which is more true—the scene, or the image of the scene?” I would say the former, without a doubt. In terms of which one counts as a photograph, call me traditional, but I would say the latter—

only because I'm so interested in the image specifically as a reproducible object. In terms of your work having an external life of sorts, our divergence on this idea makes sense. Which questions or considerations informed the sequencing of these images?

JCN: The first draft was a sleek book made of roughly 60 images, in a style similar to the majority of publications on my bookshelf. But, honestly, something was off. I doubted my criteria of selection—what each photo would need in order to work, why certain images became the so-called “hero” shots, and why others would need to be the “breakers.” I found this attitude towards hierarchies to be not so Colombian. After a mix of considerations, I reached a synthesis. I threw everything in the bin and started laying it out again, with repetitions. It didn't matter if it was working—whatever “working” means, anyway—I wanted it to feel like a 16mm strip. I wanted it to be chaotically linear. In short: the synthesis I was looking for wasn't synthetic at all.

OB: There is no way to reduce these images to a monolith of Colombian identity. Such identification, in your work, is not traced cartographically—it is found in the “liberated, unfettered, more authentic character,” as Ghirri says, of the individuals photographed.

JCN: I couldn't agree more. This work is not meant to be a statement of what or who is Colombian. People can become very preoccupied with creating didactic instructions to make the viewer understand their version of reality. I focused specifically on my memories, and my intimate relationship with the Caribbean territory. In other words, I don't feel that this work enters the realm of ethnography, which history has proven can be problematic.

OB: The medium of photography, because of its longstanding and presumptive alignment with “truth,” and “fact” has disabused audiences of making critical distinctions between the image and the reality the image seeks to represent. We assume that the photographic representation is accurate, because we assume that the photographer has the best interest of the subject at heart. But we have no reason to believe this.

JCN: I'm terrified by the idea of power—no one should be infested with that curse.

Essay by Beatriz E. Balanta
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Jim C. Nedd, a Colombian-Italian artist born in 1991. Working in the richly creative space between fiction and documentary photography, Jim C. Nedd makes images with an illusory and carnivalesque vision, and in gloriously sensuous flights of imagery, he crafts visual stories of energy and identity, rhythm and rapture, glitter and grit. Fusing episodic encounters with moments from daily life and elements of the dreamlike and surreal, Nedd transforms the figures and landscapes of his surroundings into poetic works braided with recurring concerns and themes, often inspired by a mix of collective memories, shared experiences and his Caribbean culture.

Internationally recognised, Nedd’s work has been published in magazines and journals including *Aperture*, *Vogue Italia*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Revue* and *Alla Carta Magazine*. He has exhibited work at *MACRO, Rome*; *MAMBO, Bogotá*; *Cinemateca Distrital, Bogotá*; *Autoitalia, London*; *Damien & The Love Guru, CFA, Milan*; *Athens Biennial, Athens*; *Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin*; *Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool* and *Sandy Brown, Berlin*.

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