

Abbatepaolo: Between Sea and Sky

Photographs and text by Mario Abbatepaolo



Study 332-9, Wellfleet Beach, Cape Cod, MA. Taken with a Pentax 67II, a 55mm lens and a red filter using APX 25 film developed in Agfa Rodinal.

I was born in Polignano a Mare in Italy, a beautiful sea town on the southeast coast of the Adriatic, facing Greece. Farmers, fishermen and old families have lived and worked there for centuries. I slowly came to realize the natural beauty of the sea, the special colors of the sky, the forms of the clouds, the rocky beaches, and the changing beauty created by the ebb and flow of the tides.

In recent years living in the United States, I have come to appreciate the beauty of the northeastern coast of America. I have found eastern Long Island in New York, Northern Maine and the Massachusetts coast to be particularly wonderful places to photograph. The differences between the two worlds, old and new, are fascinating and challenging. Now, along the majestic coastline of America, I see the force and tenderness of

raw nature. There is a special quality to the endless variation of light and shade spawned by the incoming waves and the wondrous sight of cloud formations scattered by the wind. The exhilarating experience of capturing them in a unique way, at the precise moment of exposure, for me, is always new. The timeless relationship and the interactive dynamics between sea, earth and sky, their touching and caressing at every moment of the day, inspired me to create the images in this article.

I recently returned from an extended visit to Cape Cod and was fascinated by the remarkable things I saw, particularly near Truro, an old Portuguese fishing village, where the Pilgrims first landed when they came to America in the 17th century. The equally beautiful village of Wellfleet, perhaps now famous for summer-

ing psychiatrists, writers and professors, also offers spectacular scenes of surprising beauty. There are cliffs, dunes and varied beaches on both the bay and beach sides. See *Study 491-6, Head of Meadow, Truro, Cape Cod, MA* (page 50) and *Study 332-9, Wellfleet Beach, Cape Cod, MA* (left).

In my landscape photography, the process of searching for a point of view to capture the spontaneous movements of the ever-changing sea, sky, cliffs, beaches, and the striking light of early morning and late afternoon is very important. In one of Henry Fox Talbot's essays, *The Pencil of Nature*, he explained his thoughts about a *point of view*: "The

photograph is a view, a view taken from a single point in space. It shows things as they appear and not as they are."

A "view point" is not dictated; how we see a subject is created and relies on the thin line of the elements of photography and how we want to communicate that statement.

My approach to photography is to meet the landscape and accept it on its own conditions. For this patience is required; one must wait for the scene to unfold and frame the moment (*l'attimo fuggente*).

Often, the crucial choice of film, filter and exposure settings has to be made very quickly. For example, in *Study 332-9, Wellfleet Beach, Cape Cod, MA* there was very little time to ponder possibilities. The rapidly



Study 291-10, Flying Point Beach, Long Island, NY. Taken with a Pentax 67, a 55mm lens with a red and a ND filter using TMY 400 film developed in Agfa Rodinal.

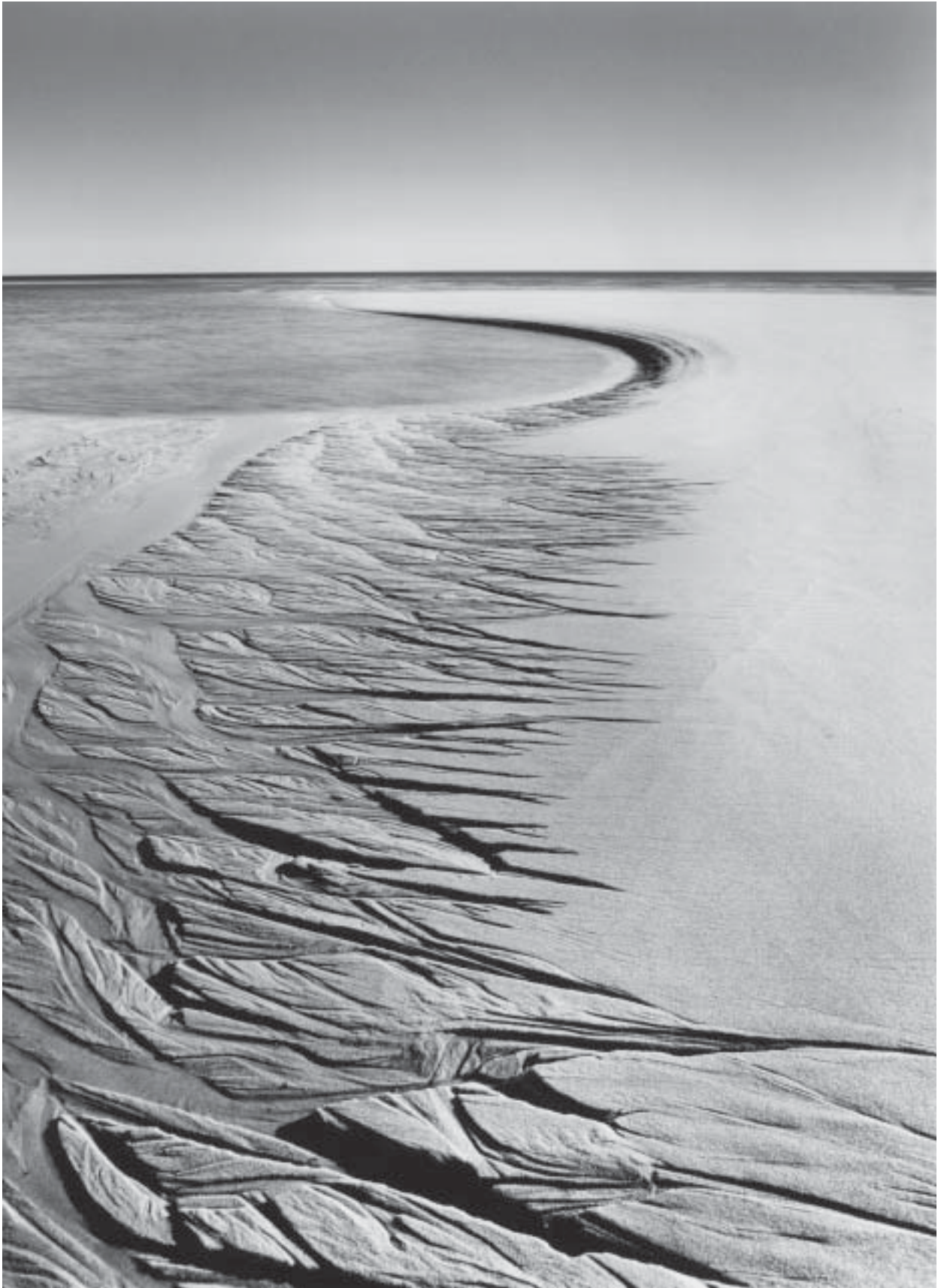
Long Island, NY (above), illustrates some of the ideas I'm trying to convey. This photograph shows the ocean and the sky in the distance and the complex patterns created in the sand by the stormy waves rushing over Flying Point Beach and flowing into a large lake in the heart of Water Mill, one of the Hamptons. I have returned there many times trying to re-capture a similar moment, without great success. (The recent construction of grand homes near the beach, not surprisingly, hasn't helped.)

Considering the 6x7cm negative I used, this particular image is very grainy. The grain, in fact, is very pronounced even on an 8x10 print. I chose, because I like

moving clouds looked special. I knew that I had to expose the film as fast as I could and hope for the best in the darkroom, after which comes the study and choices for the final print. Sunlight makes it possible for us to see the shaped landscape, with its unique form, but it is the darkroom process and the light of the enlarger combined with the photographer's control and vision that adds meaning to an image.

A photograph presents something you are not likely to see in quite the same way ever again, despite repeatedly returning to the scene. *Study 291-10, Flying Point Beach,*

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Study 491-6, Head of Meadow, Truro, Cape Cod, MA. This image was captured on APX100 film and developed in Agfa Rodinal. It was taken with a Pentax 67II, a 55mm lens and an orange filter.



Study 317-6, Montauk, Long Island, NY. For this image a red filter was used, with my Pentax 67 and 55mm lens on TMax 100 film developed in Agfa Rodinal.

the sharp grain, to print it on 13x19 paper, where the grain is even more visible. I thought the grain would successfully be amalgamated into the upper area of the image (very flat sky), along with the grains of sand. In order to accentuate this effect the negative was developed in a warmer than usual solution.

Study 317-6, Montauk, Long Island (above), attempts to display the shear strength, at times mysterious, of the ocean at low tide as it lands on the robust rocky

shore near the most eastern parts of the United States. The spectacle is truly remarkable and challenging for a photographer to capture. In this image the contrast ratio is very high. I also used a red filter during exposure, for tonal manipulation, which further accentuated the separation values. As a result, the printing session for this negative was complex, requiring 15 separate exposures at different contrast grade settings to achieve what I had visualized. ■

TECHNICAL NOTES

I try to keep my equipment as simple as I can and once I find the material and tools that I believe are appropriate for what I do, I stay with them. In this way I will have the coherence I'm looking for in my choice of imagery.

For my landscape work my camera bag is not very light, but it's worth the effort. I travel with my Pentax 67II with three lenses, a 55, 105 and 200mm; occasionally I will take a 75mm shift lens with me. However, the majority of my negatives, about 95% of them, are exposed with the 55mm lens, as I prefer to confine my perspective to one lens. In landscape photography, I often like to have all the elements of the image in focus. At times, exposing at f/22 causes the time frame to be very long and for that reason I use a carbon fiber tripod. I carry a wide selection of filters and a Zone VI spotmeter for light reading and zone/tone placement. My films of preference are Agfapan 100, Agfapan 25, Kodak TMax 100, TMax 400, Tri-X. With a few exceptions, I develop all my negatives in Agfa Rodinal.

The selection of the materials for my printing sessions is kept to a minimum. The majority of my images are printed on Ilford Multigrade FB paper. No paper is perfect but this one has qualities that I like and it combines very well with the Durst Multigraph enlarger system that I use to print. All of the photographs shown here are printed on 13x19 paper, toned in Polysulphide and Selenium and finally, dry mounted.