

## Richard Misrach

The story behind an artwork, in the artist's own words

THIS IMAGE IS from a new series begun in November 2011, entitled "On the Beach 2.0." It is both an extension of, and a dialogue with, my earlier "On the Beach" project (2002–05). The world has changed, technology has evolved, and so has my thinking process. I am now shooting differently. While the earlier work was made with an 8-x-10 view camera and a normal lens, I am currently working with a digital camera and a telephoto lens. This simple shift in technology has allowed me to make more intimate pictures at faster speeds with greater clarity.

I was influenced in part by Walker Evans's remarkable 1938 subway portrait series, "Many Are Called." With a hidden camera, he discreetly snapped pictures of strangers heading back and forth to work. I read somewhere that he considered the subway his portrait studio. I loved that idea. Similarly, I have come to consider my eighth-floor perch of this hotel in Hawaii as my working studio. Down below, it seems as though the whole world passes before me. It's a perfect spot to observe social interaction, our engagement with the natural world, and the sheer beauty of nature itself.

Since my first documentary work 40 years ago, I have resisted making portraits, as I was always uncomfortable with the ethical issues raised by the relationship between photographer and subject. Yet some of my favorite work in the history of photography—by Evans, Arbus, Winogrand—has been of people. In this current series, I am rethinking my own taboos. I have begun making portraits again, often where identity is still obscured—by an arm or a towel—but sometimes head-on. This picture is a little of both. I photographed a young couple on the beach in the late afternoon, unbeknownst to them. From almost a block away I couldn't tell what they were doing but assumed they were photographing the sunset. It was only back in my California studio, when I enlarged the print to 60 x 80 inches, that I discovered they were making a self-portrait with their iPhone. It was an epiphany: The couple and I were photographing the same subject at the same time. For me this uncanny picture embodies both a technological and cultural paradigm shift. Advances in digital cameras enable new levels of image capture (including surveillance), and the omnipresence of smartphones means we are not only wired all the time, but we are making pictures all the time as well. Indeed, this picture represents a new historical moment. *MP*



Untitled  
(November 11, 2011  
5:40 P.M.)

*An exhibition of new work by Richard Misrach will be on view at Pace Gallery in New York, May 4 through June 29. A book, November 11, 2011 5:40 p.m., based on the photograph discussed here, will be published by Fraenkel Gallery this summer.*

RICHARD MISRACH AND PACE/MACGILL GALLERY, NEW YORK