

Cool Water

by Walter Robinson



[Sun, Clouds, Water](#)
1998



[Portrait of the author by Hope Sandrow.](#)
ca. 1982



[Within a Golden Rectangle: Moon Snail shells...](#)
(detail)
1998

Take a gleaming stainless steel cocktail shaker, add equal parts blue sky and blue water, a splash of sun, clouds, waves and flickering reflections of flashing light. Garnish with a swimmer plunging into the sea and toss a bird up into the sky. Pour into a rectangular frame like a tall, thin glass, and there you have the new photographs by Hope Sandrow. They're on view in "Hope Sandrow: Water Life" at the Whitney Museum at Philip Morris in New York, July 24-Oct. 8, 1998. It's a perfect cool blue cocktail for the summer art season.

I was once photographed by Sandrow, the East Village photographer who showed at Oggi Domani and Gracie Mansion back in the 1980s. She took me up to the Metropolitan Museum, one of her regular hang-outs, and led me into the air-conditioned Egyptian mummy room. Under the baleful eye of a museum guard, she had me strip down to my T-shirt and stand nose up to a chrome strip on one of the display cases. While I swayed up and back she swayed sideways with me, madly taking pictures.

The result was pointedly a product of light, movement, mirrors and glass -- the material constituents of the single-lens reflex camera. Sandrow's black-and-white photos were a witty counterpoint to the typical glare-at-the camera art portrait (see Timothy Greenfield-Sanders) or the goofy celebrity pose (see Annie Leibowitz). Plus, it is a great picture of me. I still have it. It's exotic and arty, and disguises me enough so that I can bear to look at it!

A year or two later Hope and I hooked up in Los Angeles in connection with an exhibition at Zero One, the bizarre night-club-cum-art-gallery run by John Pochna. There we visited Disneyland and went on the roller-coaster, where Hope wanted to do a second portrait, this one with color film. I had great hopes for the roll, but Hope accidentally processed it with a bunch of black-and-white film and the pictures were ruined. They say the "Water Life" series are Hope's first color pictures, some 15 years later.

In addition to the ten photographs, the gallery also contains a collection of shells, arranged in almost 100 cardboard boxes that are stacked in the center of the room. The artist gathered the shells out on Mecox Bay on Long Island, the same place where the photos were taken. I understand the impulse to harvest the sea's bounty, but it's an impulse that should be resisted. For me, the Zen of collecting shells and stones from the beach includes leaving them behind when I go home.

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