

# **ELEGANT GORP**

**Brett Weston**

**“The Golden Prince”**



Dallas Camera Club

1

I had as many as 4 or 5 potential titles for this presentation.

My original top contender was “Shadow Detail is Overrated”.

But Brett’s own “Elegant Gorp” was too good not to use.

**“The taint of age can be very beautiful. The wreckage of man-made objects is something more beautiful than the new. Rust and weathering adds a patina of . . . well, I call it ‘elegant shit’ or ‘elegant gorp’.”**

**— Brett Weston**

This is from Brett’s notes.

**“Photography is 90% sheer,  
brutal drudgery!**

**The other 10% is inspiration!”**



The Westons in 1935

Dallas Camera Club

4

Brett Weston (1911–1993) was born in Los Angeles, the second son of Edward Weston, and perhaps artistically the closest of the four Weston boys to their photographer father. But they had very different lives and careers.



Lily Stalks 1925

Dallas Camera Club

5

I am going to take a different approach to Brett than I did with his father.

Edward was pivotal and matured as an artist at a time when photography was changing in a big way.

Brett arrived essentially fully-formed from the first time a camera was placed in his hands.



Brett at Point Lobos

Dallas Camera Club

6

I want to separate talking about his life from talking about his photographs. Not that his life isn't interesting, but it was much more conventional than his father's.

Edward's life directly affected his photography. Brett's life was coincidental to his photographic vision.

**Edward's was the  
grander vision,**

**Brett's the purer.**

Edward's work is tied to the drama in his life. Not unlike Lord Byron's poetry or Beethoven's music.

On the other hand, one can experience Shakespeare or Bach without knowing anything of their personal lives. Brett is in this second category.



EW: Brett at 16

Dallas Camera Club

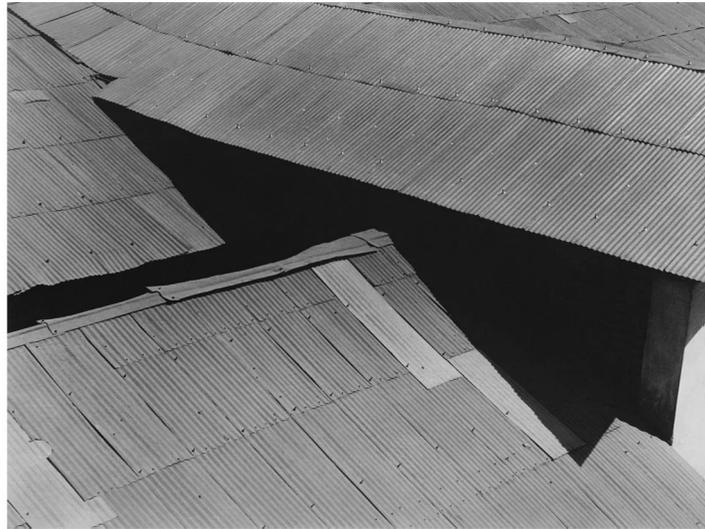
8

In 1925, Edward removed Brett from school so the thirteen year old could become his apprentice in Mexico City.



Dallas Camera Club

Brett began making photographs with his father's Graflex 3¼ by 4¼ inch camera.



Tin Roof 1926

Dallas Camera Club

10

In 1926, Edward Weston signed a contract to make photographs for a book about Mexican folk art.

During the following six months, Brett received a crash course in photography from Edward Weston!



Untitled 1927

Dallas Camera Club

11

Early exposure to modern art impacted Brett Weston's sense of form and composition, and his early images of natural and man-made subjects reveal a strong sense of design.



Junked Car 1977

Dallas Camera Club

12

He appreciated how the camera transformed close-up subjects; how photography's black-and-white tones further obscured an object's appearance.

This tendency toward abstraction characterized much of his work throughout his nearly seventy-year

career.

**“By emphasizing forms and patterns that take shape on the surface of the picture, photographers can surprise our visual expectations by divorcing objects from their usual meanings.”**

**“... artists can construct new realities through configurations of lines and shapes that emerge only once the photograph is made.”**

After the 1950s, his work becomes even more abstract. Most of the books and portfolios post date 1960, so that most of the work seen, and that he is known for, comes from the 60s 70s and 80s.

**Edward wrote in his Daybooks: “The camera should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself...”**

Edward thought the camera should record reality.

Brett thought the camera should “(divorce) objects from their usual meanings.”



Paul Strand



Charles Sheeler

Although he acknowledged the artistic influence his father had on his work, he spoke of his admiration for other photographers including Paul Strand, Charles Sheeler, ...



Henri Cartier-Bresson

Dallas Camera Club

16

... and Henri Cartier-Bresson.

But Weston believed non-photographic artists impacted his work more.

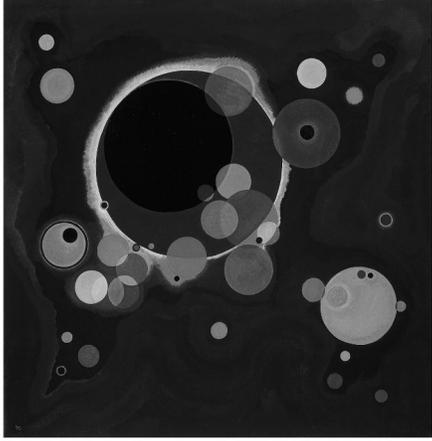


Georgia O'Keeffe

Dallas Camera Club

17

In his opinion, Georgia O'Keeffe was the greatest American painter.

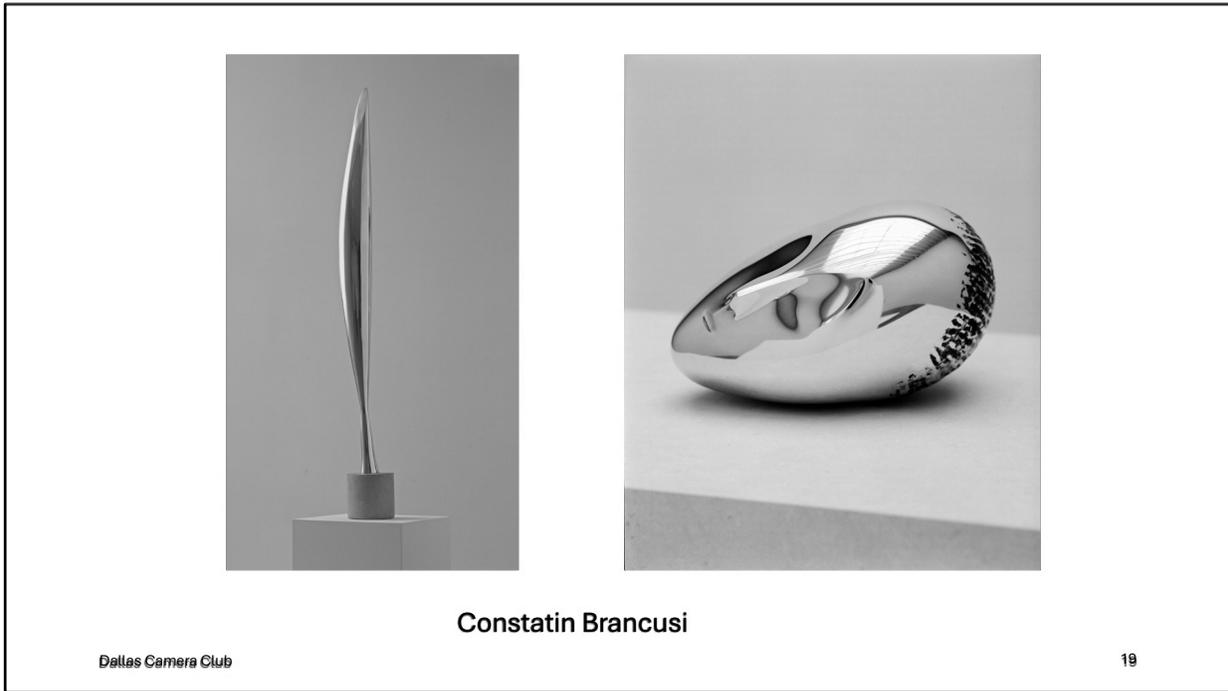


Wassily Kandinsky



Paul Klee

He admired Die Blaue Vier (the Blue Four), a group of Russian and German Expressionists known for the vibrant color and emotion in their paintings.



He was also fond of Constantin Brancusi and Henry Moore's sculptures, and Weston carved wood from an early age.

He was also deeply influenced by music and dance.



Henry Moore

I will discuss Brett's sculptures a bit later.

**In 1927, Age 15 :**

**Having returned from Mexico, Brett:**

- **Learns to drive, begins lifelong passion for cars.**
- **Has first and second joint show with his father and a solo show.**
- **Sells first print for \$2.50.**

**He got a running start ...**

In 1929 (Age 17)

- Work chosen for *Film und Foto* in Stuttgart. Becomes internationally known.
- First visits Point Lobos and introduces area to his father.

Edward is introduced to Point Lobos and the dunes at Oceano by his sons – not the other way around.

- 1930: moves out of Edward's house. Gets a job house sitting a Frank Lloyd Wright house in Hollywood.

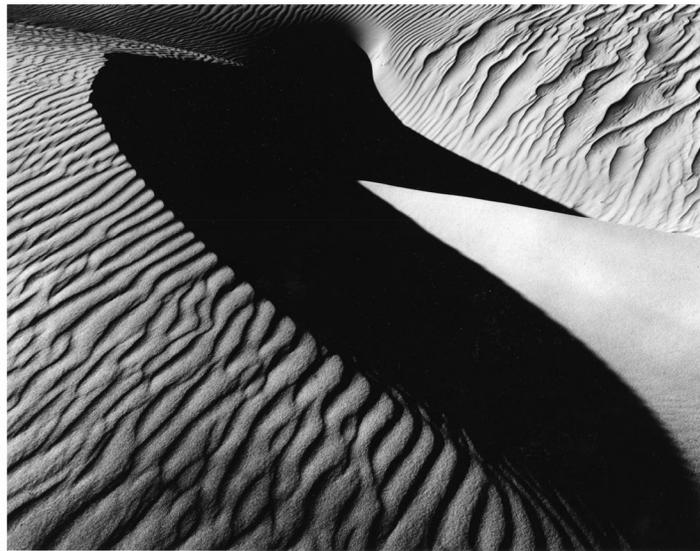
**“Frank Lloyd Wrong”**

- 1931: Marries first wife. 1932: Divorces first wife.
- Has solo exhibition at the De Young Museum in San Francisco.
- Invited to exhibit with “Group f.64”.

All by age 21!

Starts wearing a black cape and beret (like Edward years before) but soon gets over it.

Buys a Packard sports car once owned by Greta Garbo. Makes money house sitting another house.

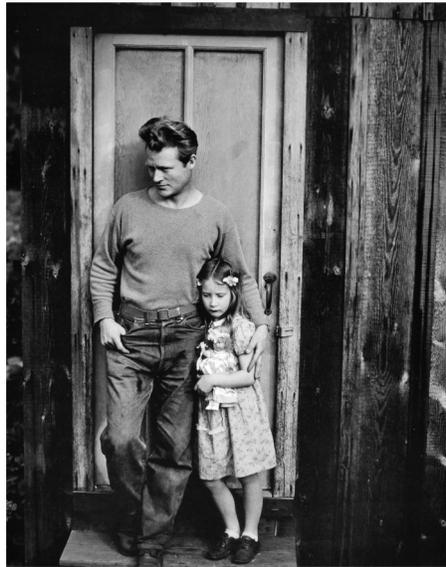


Dune 1934  
"Bird Dune"

Dallas Camera Club

24

1933-34. Several exhibits, including a one-man show in New York. (Age 22?)



Edward Weston 1945

Dallas Camera Club

25

1935. Marries 2<sup>nd</sup> wife.

1938. Daughter Erica is born.

Attempts commercial assignments from Kodak, magazines and other clients, but doesn't do well.

“I did them badly. I was eager to try, because it was bread and butter, but I

just couldn't compromise.”



Untitled (San Francisco) 1938

Dallas Camera Club

26

Produces 1<sup>st</sup> portfolio in 1938: ten 8 x 10 prints of San Francisco for \$50. Chooses portfolio work as principle means of promoting his work. (age 26)

1. San Francisco (1939)
2. White Sands (1949, 1976)
3. New York (1951)
4. Fifteen Photographs (1961)
5. Ten Photographs (1963)
6. Baja California (1967)
7. Fifteen Photographs of Japan (1970)
8. Europe (1973)
9. Oregon (1975)
10. Portraits of My Father (1976)
11. Vintage Collection (1976)
12. Twenty Photographs (1978)
13. Alaska (1978)
14. Hawaii - Leaves and Lava (1980)
15. Abstractions #1 1925-1980
16. Abstractions #2 1927-1980
17. Prints for Students
18. Special Edition of 1951
19. Career Overview  
(Numbers 18 and 19 in one binding.)

The Portfolios

Weston produced a series of portfolios, grouping together sets of his photographs for sale and distribution.

Ranging from between ten and twenty prints apiece.



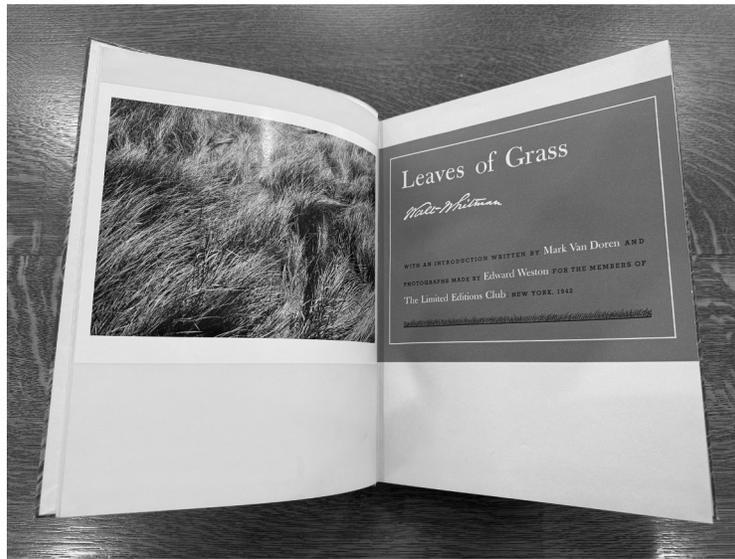
The Portfolios of Brett Weston - Complete Set  
\$3,000.00

Dallas Camera Club

28

All of these reprints in book form are in the Amon Carter Museum Library.

Or available for sale online.



Dallas Camera Club

29

1940 – 42. Develops Edward's negatives for Leaves of Grass



Dune (Oceano) 1934

Dallas Camera Club

30

Has 4 photographs in a show at Museum of Modern Art in New York and is named the outstanding photographer.



Air Vents, New York 1945

Dallas Camera Club

31

1943. drafted into Army. (age 31).  
Stationed with Signal Corps in New York.

1944. Meets Paul Strand, who lets him  
use his darkroom. Meets Nancy  
Newhall, acting director of photography  
at MOMA.

Applies for a Guggenheim Fellowship



White Sands (no date)

Dallas Camera Club

32

1945 Stationed in El Paso. Photographs White Sands and West Texas in his spare time. Receives the Guggenheim.

1946 Discharged and returns to California.



Dallas Camera Club

33

1952. (Age 40) Interrupts career to help ailing Edward print 50th Anniversary portfolio edition of 100.

Completed “project prints” of 830 of Edward’s negatives. (with brother Cole)



Graveyard, Spain 1960

Dallas Camera Club

34

Edward dies in 1958, and Brett begins traveling,

Baja California, Alaska, Europe, Japan, Hawaii. All over US.



Village 1960

Dallas Camera Club

35

1964. Experiments with color, but writes: “If I wanted to do color, I would become a painter.”



Rolleiflex  
SL66

Dallas Camera Club

36

In 1968, there was a life-changing event for Brett Weston. Rollei (German Optics Co.) gives him a Rolleiflex SL66 in exchange for “comments and some prints”

(Ansel Adams use a similar Hasselblad)



Dallas Camera Club



37

This camera had an integrated bellows and the lens could tilt to control perspective, much like his large view cameras, (He was using 11x14 at this time), but was much more portable and made it easier to get in close for abstractions.



Dallas Camera Club

38

Doesn't he look happy?

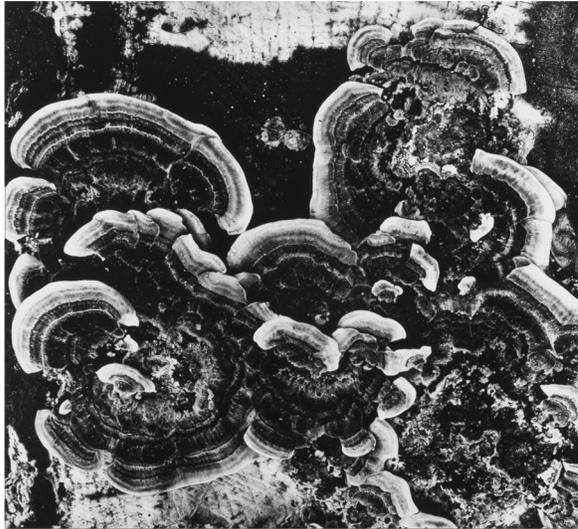


This is a two minute excerpt from a TV show in 1971, where Brett contrasts the view cameras and the Rollei.

“...the little camera enlarges one’s horizons and makes new things possible.”

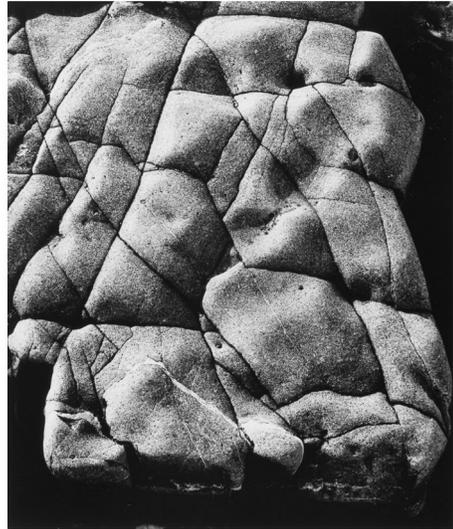
**“The camera for an artist is just another tool. ... Beyond the rudiments, it’s up to the artist to produce art, not the camera.”**

**It’s the photographer, not the camera.**



Lichen 1970

Dallas Camera Club



Grooved Rock, Point Lobos 1969

41

The main disadvantage to this camera was its square format. Negatives were 6 x 6 cm. (2 ¼ inches) Most images from this period are cropped to a rectangle.



Pines in Fog, Monterey, CA 1962

Dallas Camera Club

42

This was made with the 11x14 view camera.



Mamiya RB67

At some point, he obtained a Mamiya RB67. This version (Pro S) was introduced in 1974.



Mamiya RB67

The Mamiya used the same roll film as the Rollei, but had an image format of 6 x 7 cm, closer to the aspect ratio of both 8x10 and 11x14.

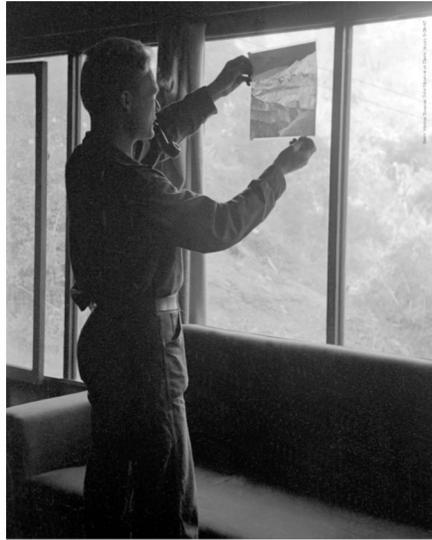


Plastic Paint 1955

Dallas Camera Club

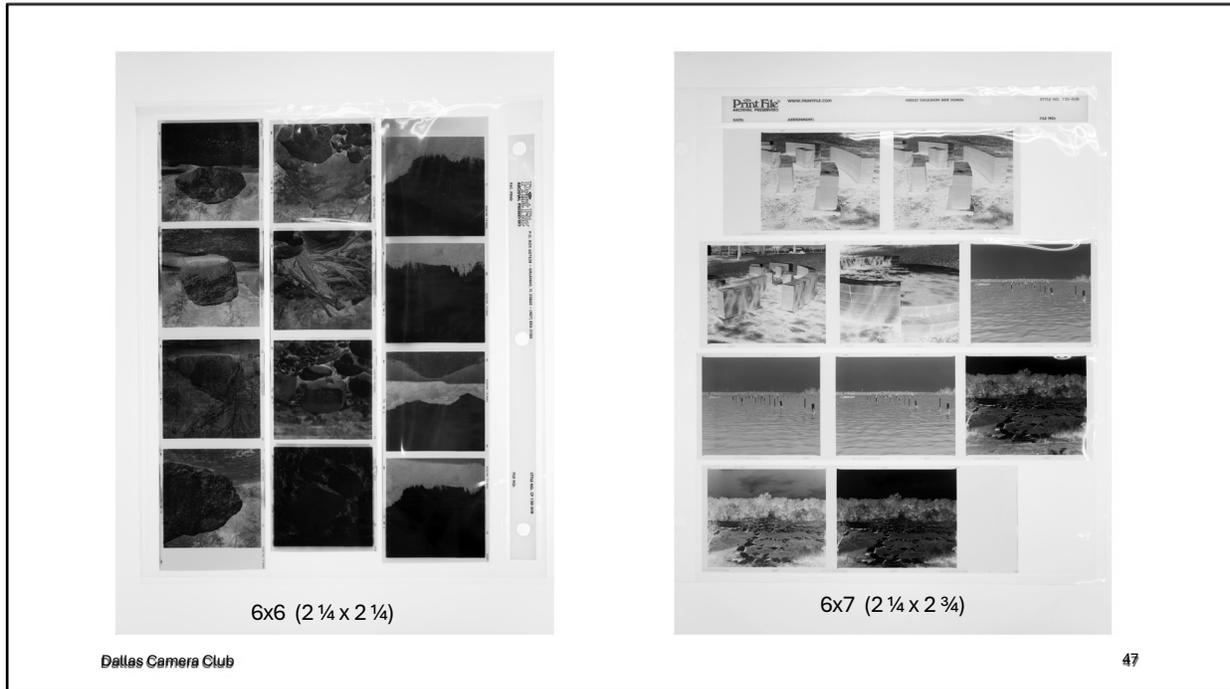
45

This is an 8 x 10 negative



Weston examining an 11 x 14 negative

Here he is with a 11 x 14 negative.



On the left are 6x6 negatives (12 to a roll of 120 film) and on the right are 6x7 (10 on a roll of the same film).

(Not Weston's negatives)



Boats on Bay (Japan) 1964

Dallas Camera Club

48

By 1980 he had over 100 one-man exhibitions. There were more to come and continue to this day.



At his home in California

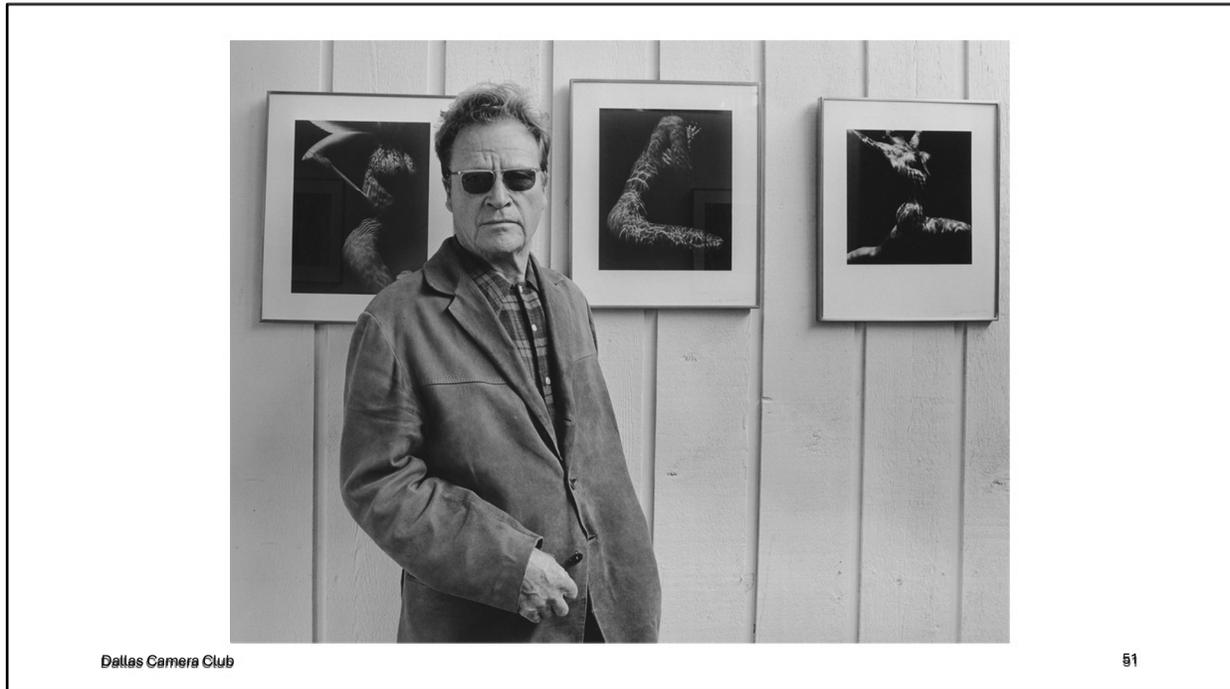
Brett had a home near Carmel. His darkroom was on the property and he had pretty much the same routine everyday.



Dallas Camera Club

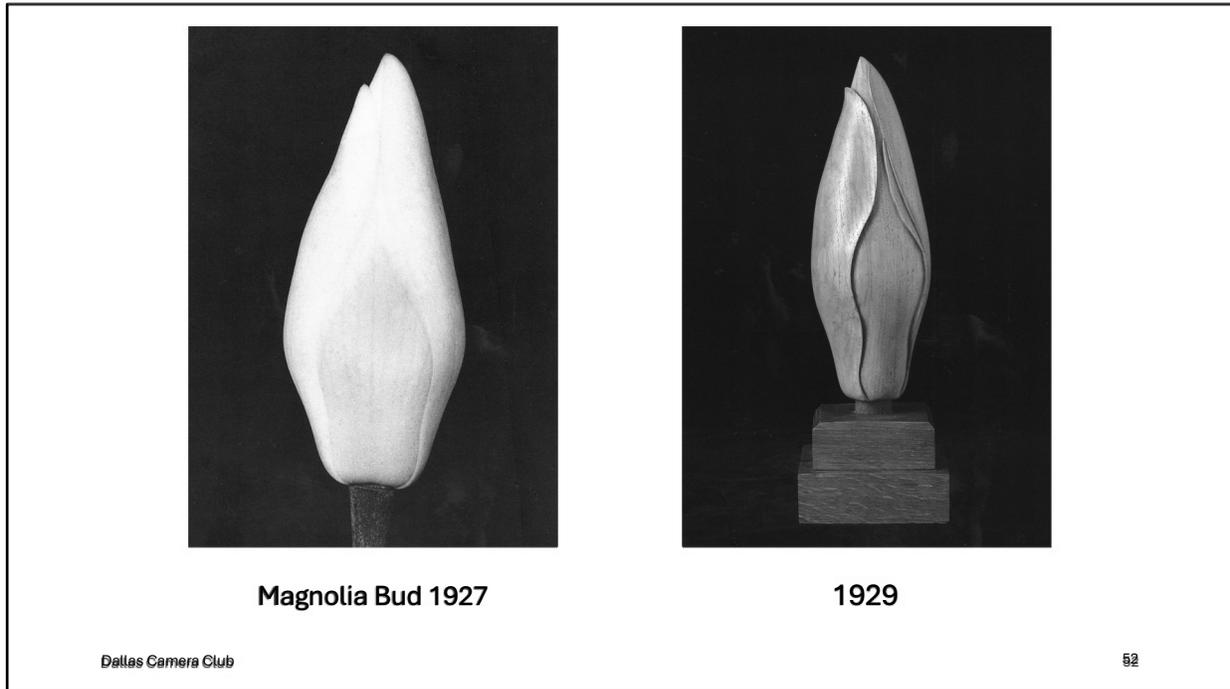
50

He would wake up early, 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, work in the darkroom for hours, photograph in the afternoon, and then a quiet evening with dinner and “Snake-bite” medicine. (whiskey)



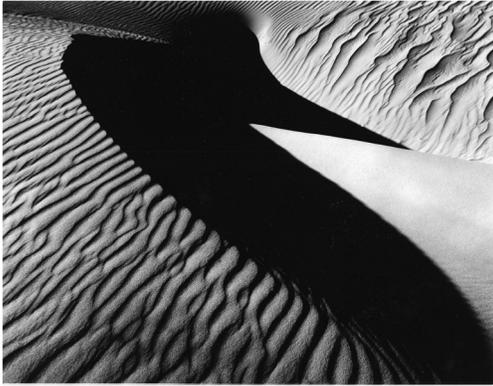
In the 1970s, he had his brother Neil build a house on the Big Island of Hawaii near Kona. For much of the latter half of the 70s and all of the 80s, he split his time between CA and Hawaii.

In 1993, he had a stroke while in Hawaii, and died at the age of 81 in the hospital at Kona.

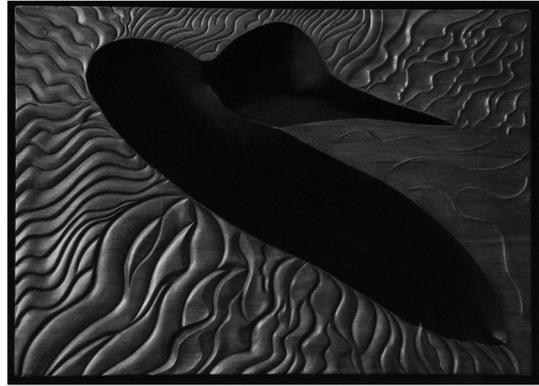


Before we spend more time with the photographs, let's take a look at his other artistic endeavor: Sculpture.

He would carve some of his photographs into wood!



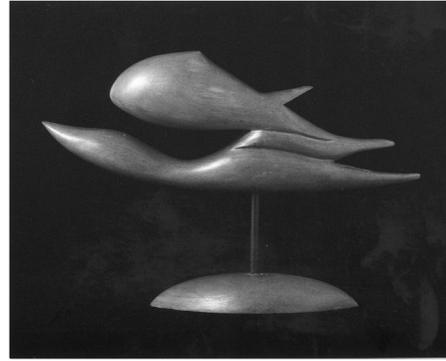
Dune 1934



1936



Dune Shadow 1936



1961

Often years later. He did give it up into his 60s, citing not enough time to do both.



Brett's sculptures and Edward's photographs at Wildcat Hill.

Dallas Camera Club

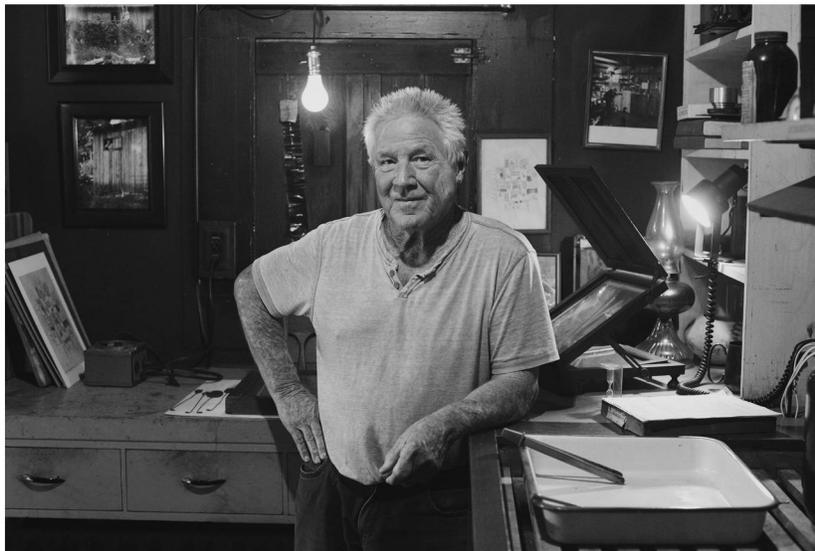
55

Edward Weston's grandson and Brett's nephew, Kim Weston lives in the house on Wildcat Hill where Edward lived the last 20 years of his life.



Edward's darkroom at Wildcat Hill

The original house is kept much the same, including Edward's darkroom, and Kim is happy to give tours.



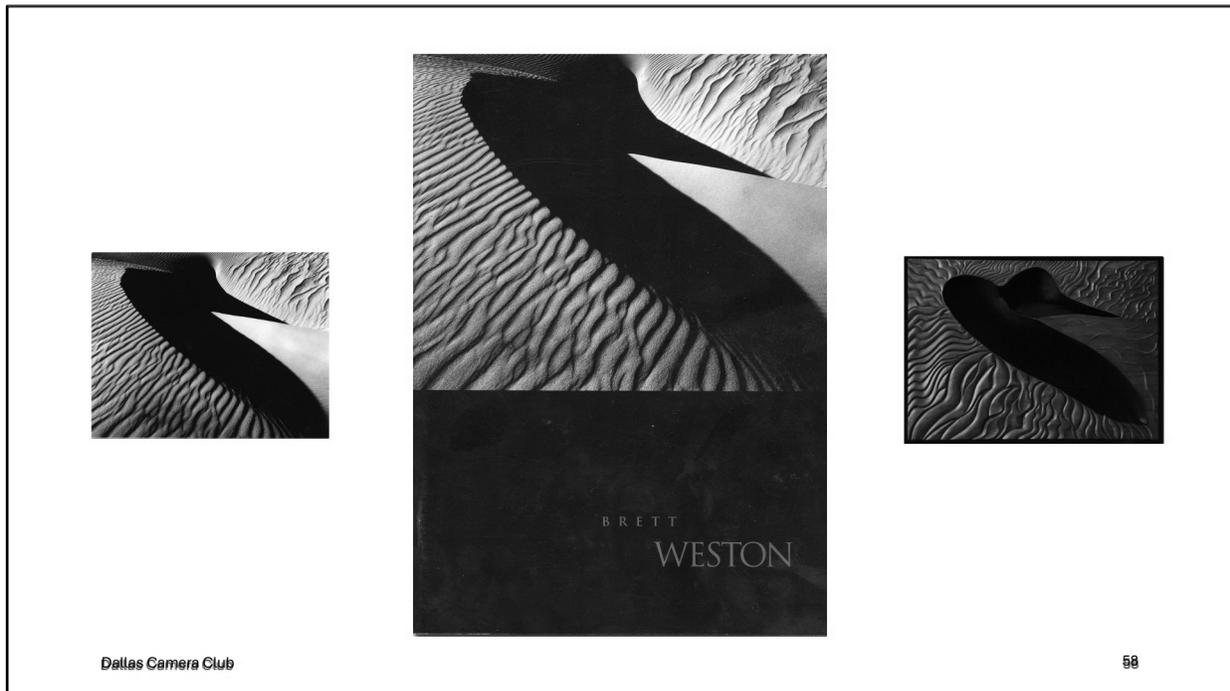
Kim in his grandfather's darkroom.

Dallas Camera Club

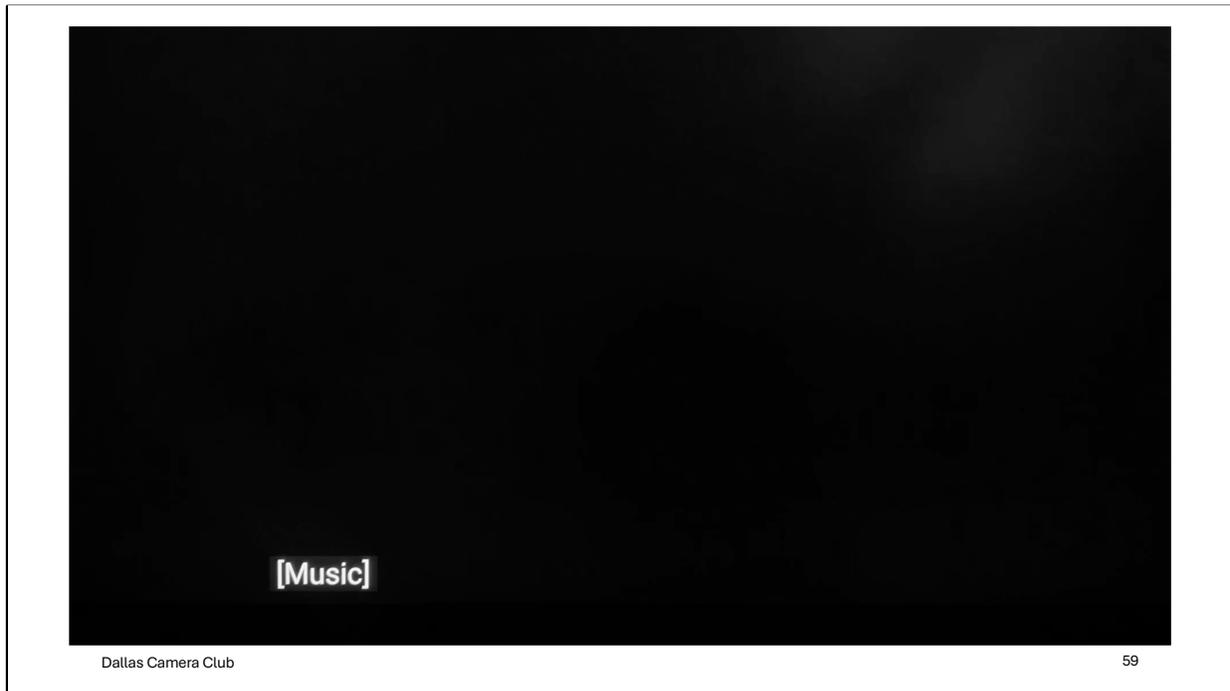
57

There are now studios, a gallery, and Kim's (separate) darkroom on the property, as well as the one-bedroom apartment where Charis Wilson did much of her writing.

In 2014, my wife and I spent 3 days there while photographing and painting at Point Lobos and the central CA coast.



While talking about Edward and Brett, I mentioned that I knew Brett had carved wood and Kim just lit up! He said “I have something for you”, and came back from another room with an exhibition catalog from a 2002 exhibit of Brett’s carvings and photographs. He said very few people know about this. I was pleased to receive the book!



He made this video in 2021.

(I am not taking credit for it, of course.)



(EW) Iceberg Lake 1937



(BW) Mendenhall Glacier 1973

Dallas Camera Club

60

Edward obviously influenced his son. Brett even says so. But, Brett also called his father “My biggest fan”.

They had a very good relationship, which made it easy for Brett to devote years of his own life helping his father in the 1950s.



Edward Weston 1932

Dallas Camera Club

61

And now, some photographs.

The dark nails are from the paper developer Amidol. It stains everything.



**Edward Weston and Ansel Adams 1935**



Ford Trimotor 1935

Dallas Camera Club

63

Brett would revisit corrugated metal.



Lake Tanaya 1937

Dallas Camera Club

64



**San Francisco Bridge 1939**



**Reeds and Fog 1946**

Dallas Camera Club

66



**Garapata Beach 1954**

Dallas Camera Club

67



Mono Lake 1955



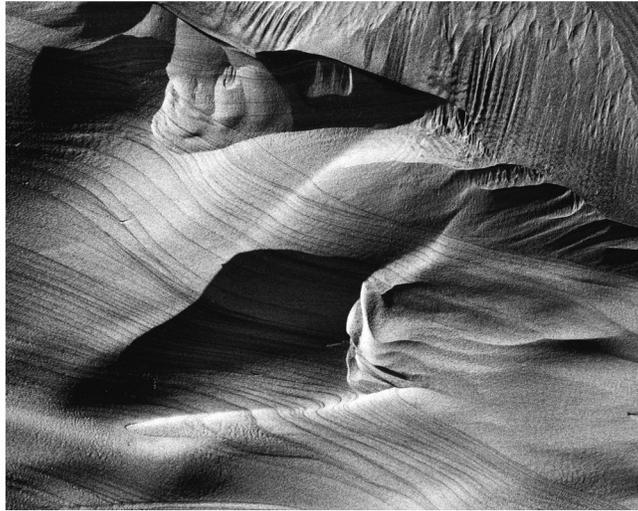
**Rock, Water, Tree, High Sierra 1960**



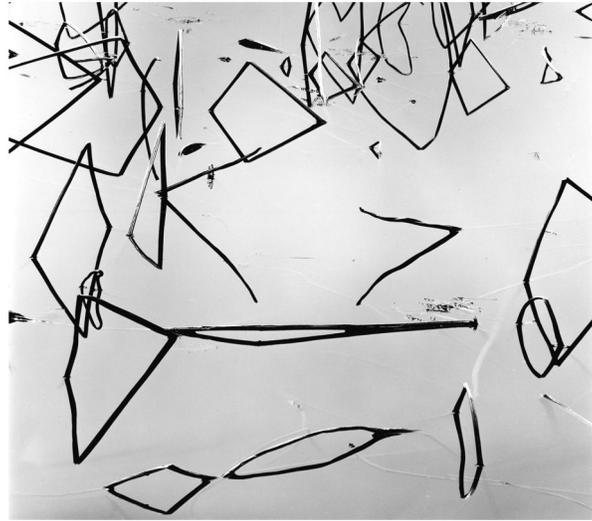
Clouds 1968



**Rock Form 1968**



Dunes 1968



Reeds 1970

Dallas Camera Club

73

Japan



Monument Valley 1971



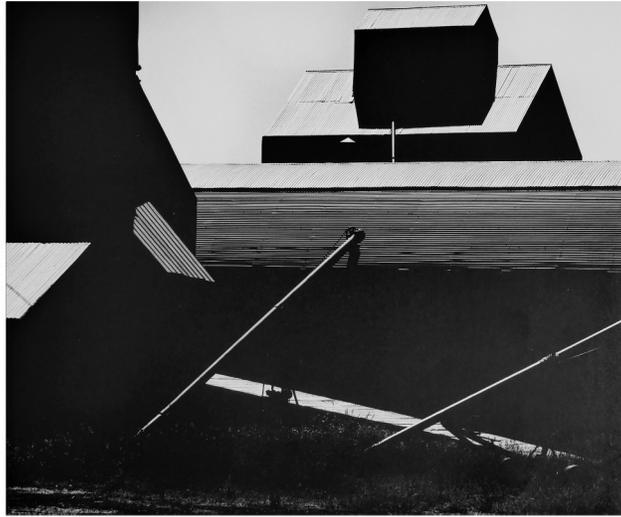
Sierra Lake 1971



Holland Canal 1971



**Bank of America Building 1975**



Grain Silo, Oregon 1975



**Nude 1975**



**Nude 1979**



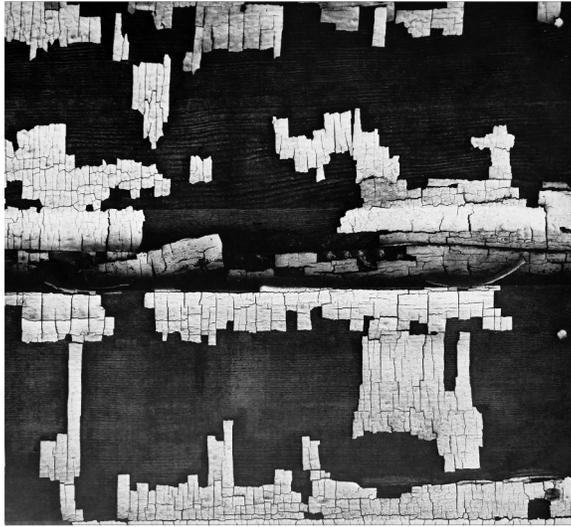
Pan Grease 1976

Dallas Camera Club

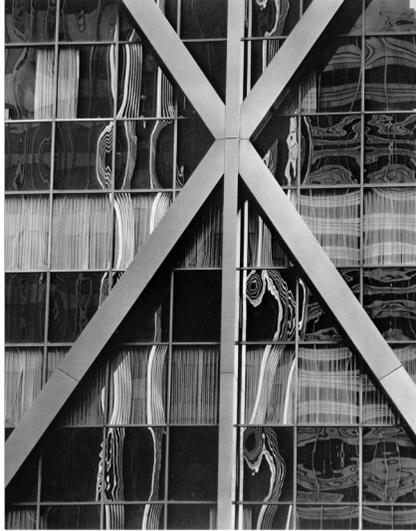
80

John Sexton tells a story about this image.

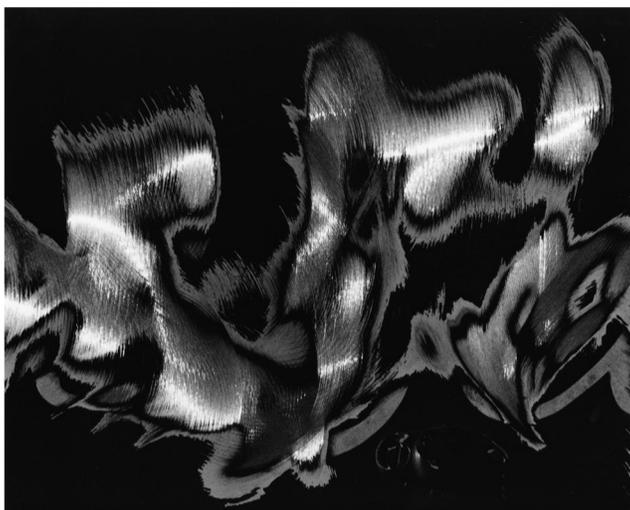
“The switch was always on.”



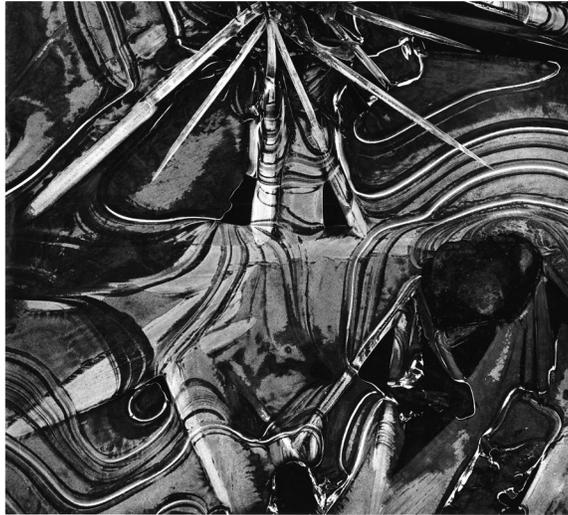
Cracked Paint 1976



**Alcoa Building 1977**



Abrasions 1977



**Ice Forms 1977**



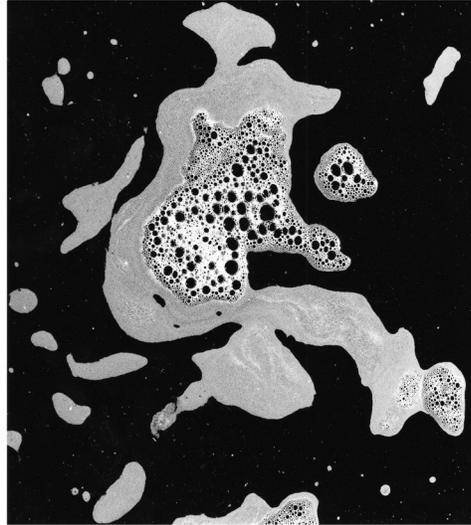
**Volcanic Devastation 1978**



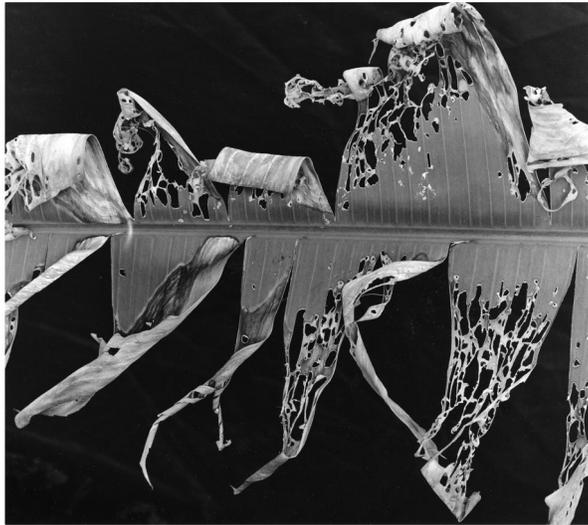
**Beach, Rocks 1978**



**Leaf on Asphalt 1978**



Foam 1978



Torn Leaf 1978



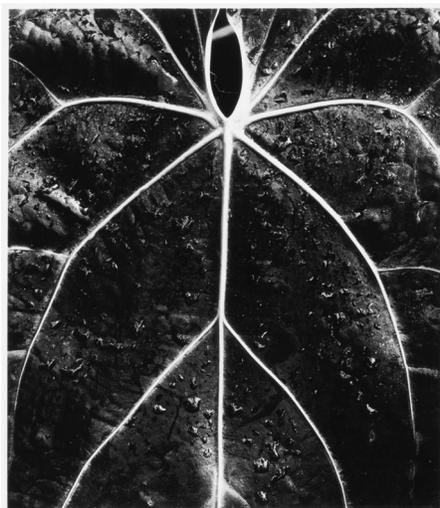
Reflections 1979



**Banyon Roots 1979**



Lava Facade 1979



**Leaf Detail 1980**



Leaves, Hilo (ND)



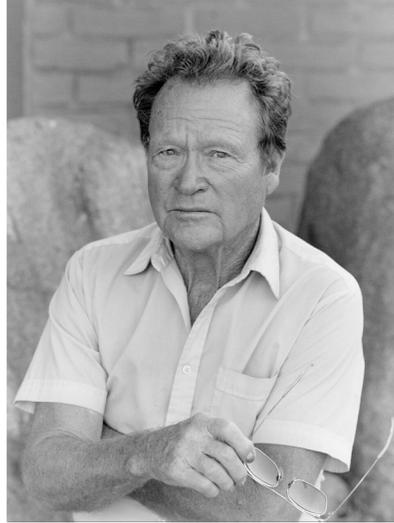
**Dune Oceano 1984**

Dallas Camera Club

95

**“Anything more than  
500 yards from the car  
just isn't photogenic.”**

**- Brett Weston**



**BW in 1984**