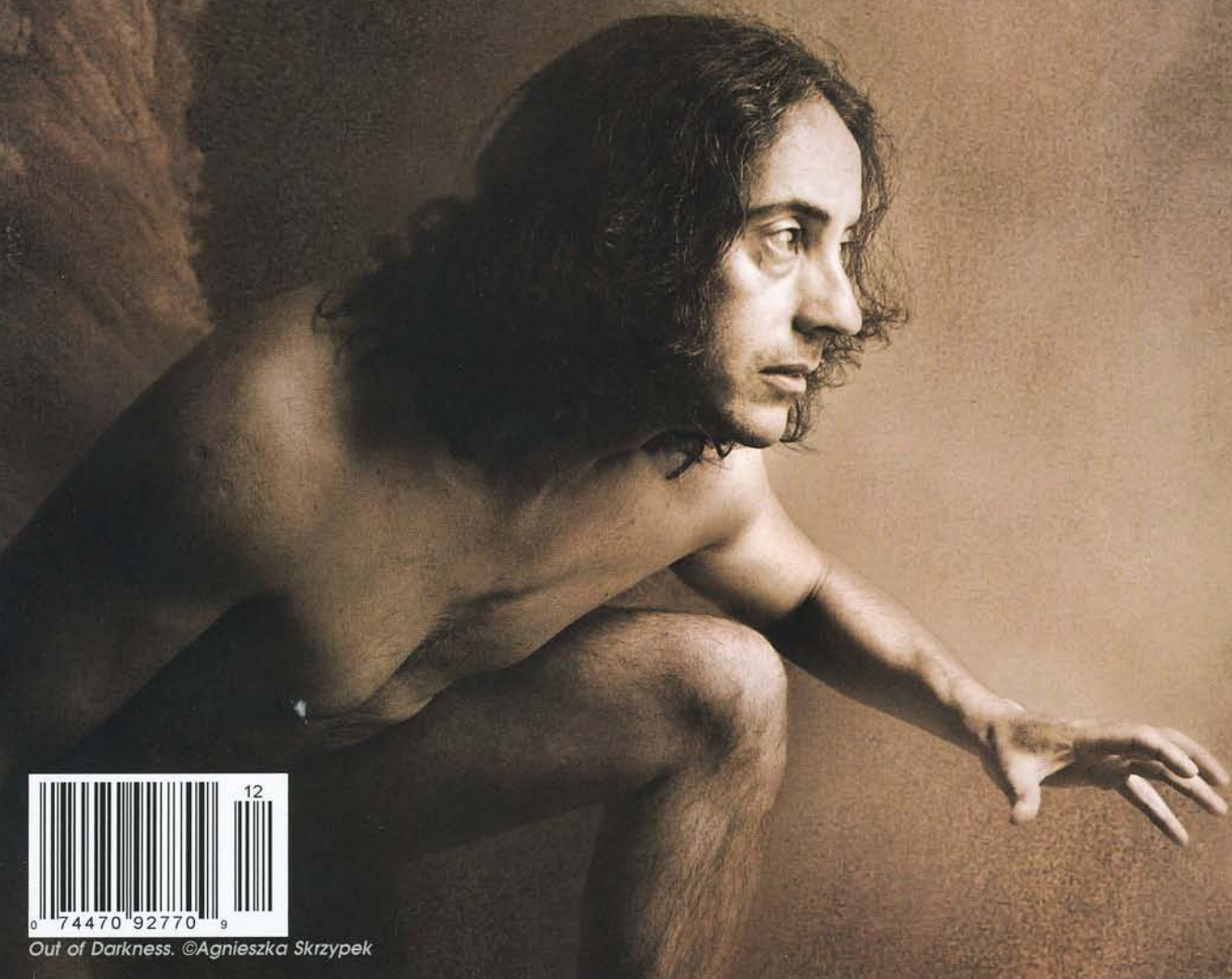


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CAMERA *Arts*

Collector Showcase Edition



Out of Darkness. ©Agnieszka Skrzypek

Phillip Nesmith, USA



Thoughts of Home.

In the spring of 2003, soon after the fall of Baghdad, I arrived in Iraq, kicking off a twelve-month stint in the capital. I spent the next year, the first year of Operation Iraqi Freedom, living with a tactical armor unit stationed in Baghdad. The experience was—perhaps not surprisingly—life-altering, affecting me physically, emotionally, and intellectually. The images in this series come directly from that experience—in the sense that they are a visual catalogue of what I saw and experienced while in Iraq, but also in that they are a way of conveying the sense, feel, atmosphere, perhaps even the taste, of my memories from that time.

My days in Baghdad seemed to repeat themselves, like a film looped to play continuously, returning to the start the moment after it ends. The repetition created routine, the routine normalizing what would otherwise be extraordinary. I became fascinated by this normative process, by the pieces of our daily lives that dropped below notice. I began to wonder at the ways in which we all, and particularly the soldiers that I lived with, adapted to the new situation—and began to wonder how new this adaptation, and the situation we were adapting to, really was.

I started to realize that the daily existence of the soldiers around me, while surrounded by different, new technologies and capabilities, still maintained a surprising similarity to the life of soldiers on the battlefield for centuries. The basic structure of life in a war zone in the midst of ground level conflict today would be recognized by soldiers from World War II, from the Spanish American War, or from the American Civil War.

Photographing throughout my time in Iraq, and focused on the idea that more things change the more they stay the same, I wondered how I might evoke this feeling in my work. I began to contemplate what process I could use that would both produce a unique, special object that could be hand held, and ultimately reflect a connection to the past while blurring the line between contemporary and historic armed conflict. In researching processes, I became interested in tintypes, both the wet-plate collodion and the more contemporary gelatin emulsion based dry-plate process in particular.



The Look.



COM4 Power Supply.

I feel that the resulting tintypes are successful in blurring the visual boundaries of armed conflict ranging from the American Civil War to Vietnam and Iraq. These images also blur the boundaries of photographic processes as well by mixing cutting edge digital technology and historic techniques. I created this series with a sense of openness and ambiguity in mind: with enough left unsaid or unknown, I hope to allow viewers to explore the images and come to their own conclusions about their meaning—to them, to others. Many who have viewed the images in person often make reference to their haunting, sometimes surreal visual impact. In this I feel I've been successful in conveying some small piece of my own experiences in creating them.

Phil Nesmith