

ROBERT KEZIERE  
UNTITLED SUITE

*We have begun to recognize a new fellowship with the silent vegetable world,  
because it purifies and renews the earth about us, because it comforts us,  
and because it reconciles us to death.*

Norma L. Goodrich in Jean Giono's *The Man Who Planted Trees*

## Robert Keziere / JOURNAL NOTES: GREECE 1983

*July 10, 1983: Santorini to Sifnos*

I begin packing up at 6 am as the man with the mule is due at 10 am. He arrives at 9 am. Departure times in Greece seem to mean *gone by* not *leaves at*.

After a final, essentially palatable breakfast on the beach, I leave to start up the thousand foot cliff and eventually to Apollonia on the island of Sifnos. The mule packs everything except the driver and me. Once in awhile the animal slows or stumbles and is jabbed with the stick, the nailed end first. It takes about an hour or so to get a cab from the outlying village into Thira. There is still over two hours before the departure of the *Alkyon* for Sifnos, *et.al.* Lugging the equipment and baggage is slow; you are nearly insane to have brought so much stuff. Once down the cable car to the port, I buy a bottle of wine, some bread and feta: 200 dr!

While waiting, I run into Agnes Cory, a cellist from London and so begins a long day's journey. This nice lady, whom I had met earlier on the road down from Old Thira, is clearly in search of something. She is intelligent, curious and until recently has apparently dedicated her life to teaching and playing the cello in a London opera orchestra. She has the most extraordinary hands.

We board together and it seems today we are travelling together. Eventually the ship sails, oddly *on* time and not *before*. It's wonderful, in many ways, to be sailing away from this island. I'm at the rail watching the sights float by and Agnes starts a conversation with a young Australian man wearing a tee-shirt that says: "Drillers go deeper and rout about longer," or close to that. He is young and quite weird. I offer him some of the food and wine. He says no thanks, he is trying to straighten out; he's feeling kind of strange, attempting restoration. He asks Agnes if we are together, and when she says we are travelling together "at least to Sifnos," he smiles awkwardly and leaves.

So the ship goes through several stops over the next hours and

somewhere between Milos and Sifnos, in the pitch black of an Aegean night someone, a man, jumps overboard. He climbs up onto the handrail next to a young Greek woman, and jumps into the rolling black sea.

I had just walked past, without seeing him, and I'm only moments later about 30 feet away when a lot of commotion begins among the multilingual crowd. I am not certain I understand correctly, but it very soon becomes evident no one is kidding. In perhaps 30-60 seconds, one of the crew is notified and he immediately runs toward the bridge. Still it is a dreadful 4 to 5 minutes before that ship actually slows down! The officers eventually materialize at the back of the ship and are clearly very doubting. I urge the woman who had seen the jump to go down and tell them it was the real thing. When she does there is more commotion but little action. By the time the ship finally comes to a full stop, it seems the guy is three or four or five miles back. As far as I know, only one life preserver was tossed into the sea, a good two minutes after he jumped. I remember thinking "Nice try." These ships travel at 15-20 mph. And yet where were you RK. I had looked for something in the life boats, without success. The life rings are on the railing.

About here, the officers and the young woman, who is *the* witness now, come up the to the deck from which the man jumped. She explains in fluent Greek what happened, where he stood, that this was his pack sack and he seemed to be alone. She is most affected; "Did he slip?" or "jump?" She is certain, he jumped. He stood on the railing, paused, then jumped.

After some discussion she goes forward with the officers and the pack sack. And an announcement is made, first in Greek, which is long; then in English, which is short: "A man has jumped off the ship. Passengers are requested to go to the sides of the ship and watch for the body." It has been 20 minutes. The ship, as far as I can make out, has not turned around and is just drifting in the water. It is not going forward, neither is it in slow reverse. Now the search begins, at RK's best estimate a good 4 to 5 minutes from where the man jumped, or quite some miles away!

All this, in the near dead blackness of night on a rolling and choppy sea. It would be difficult to see a good sized log and unmitigated luck to see a man floating, one way or another.



Time passes. Everyone lines the rail and looks into the darkness. There are few lights, essentially just the running lights of the ship. In time, it seems, someone finds the flares, as suddenly into the sky screams this hissing light which bursts over and lights a vastness of unoccupied, turbulent sea. The seductive Aegean blue of a calm sunny day is nowhere to be seen. It is black. The boat shows no signs of turning around or moving forward or backwards. Ten to twenty flares are fired. Some go nearly straight up, in a reasonable attempt to shoot into the wind, first lighting one side of the ship, then as the wind pushes the flare, the other side. But one worries about this burning magnesium object immediately above your head. You watch the flare and not the sea.

A man, in his mid-forties, well groomed, in short sleeves and European accent, comes to the rail where Agnes and I are standing. He is anxious about the delay. At this point it has been about an hour. He understands the man has jumped and is "not well." "Why are we waiting? You know in Grecian times they would take these people into the woods...." He goes on at some length along similar lines. I am appalled and bluntly suggest the man's life is worth at least an hour of our time. Agnes is Czech, and has been living in London since the mid-sixties. She lost much of her family to the war and the Nazis. The man has a determinedly German accent. Agnes is incensed by his attitude. She asks or insists: "Where are you from?" The response is not forthcoming or necessary. His face stiffens and he walks away. Agnes is livid.

Agnes apparently has two knives. She is simply enraged. The man is a neo-nazi. I tell her I don't visit people in jail. It is not the appropriate comment. She starts looking around, right past me. I'm hanging on to her, giving some bullshit about it being a free world and people are entitled to their opinions. She says: "Where's the free world?"

About an hour and a half has passed. Still the bureaucratic search continues. Flares are fired, people lean over the railing, the boat continues to drift with occasional propelled movement for brief periods of time. Sometimes forward, sometimes backward. I'm disillusioned; they're searching miles from where he jumped and there is no one else on the horizon. This guy has been in the rolling Aegean for well over an hour after jumping 60 ft into the prop wash of a 300 ft



long ferry. In B.C. waters he's dead from exposure alone. The chances of finding him are so remote. Agnes says the family would like the body, which is probably true.

A group of young people are sitting in a circle: one plays guitar and the others are singing. It kind of pisses me off as it is really less than appropriate. Reactions differ but this grates. The mood is worsening.

After two hours, an announcement is made: "Will John E. Collins please come to the bridge. John E. Collins please." After 15 minutes another announcement is made that the search will continue for 20 minutes more.

One of the chief officers and the witness again appear on our distraught 2nd class back deck. A group forms around the discussion and it goes on for 15 minutes or so. I would like to know if she still is convinced that he jumped. That he slipped and fell into the sea, to watch the lights of that ship diminish as it sailed away is an unthinkable horror. There is no land in sight. She is convinced. She looks very strained. There have been better days for this woman. She tells me they have found out that it is a 25 year old Australian.

I have not seen the guy with the obscene T-shirt since just after boarding. There are only so many places for us 2nd class passengers and he could not have disappeared; not with that face. It finally hits me: Jesus, it's the Aussie. I tell the woman that I think I have spoken with him. She asks, "Do you want to see his passport picture? You should if you can!" On the bridge it is definitely busy and all business. In fact a coastguard ship has joined the search, which explains the occasional bright lights out there now. It's been almost two and a half hours and the mood is rotten. The officer and woman show me the passport, and then begin to go through his pack, much as neo-archaeologists. It is a bit grim. This face looks out at me. It looks Australian: young beard and moustache, the eyes, but the mouth is closed. The man I had spoken with had rather large unattractive and awkward looking teeth. It is mainly what I saw. I'm aware that here I am a photographer yet I am not at all sure this is the same man. It's a photo for his mother but it is not a likeness, and I could not be formally certain. It's possible, but I am not *certain*. The witness and I start to leave the bridge and there is a radio communication from somewhere in the background; she grabs my hand and says: "He is alive! They found him!"

It is a small coast guard boat, from where I have no idea. When it arrived or joined the search is also totally unknown to me. The woman immediately takes off running through the ship. It is unbelievable; I am completely stunned by this impossible conclusion.

Somehow he had managed to find the life-preserver. It was said that when the coastguard found him he was clinging to the ring and screaming for help. They brought him to Sifnos, to the small hospital. I have thought, briefly, of visiting him.

Our ship makes Sifnos at Kamares much later. With all the stuff, it takes awhile to get a cab. I am welcomed by a silent and darkened Apollonia. It's beautiful, but there will be no rooms. Dora Katsoulakis, my landlady, has undoubtedly been in bed for hours. I find some chairs outside a restaurant I know, augment the situation with a few questionable cushions and make ready for a 5 hour attempted sleep through the night. It is more a long wait for some light.

Agnes sailed on to Pireas. We are to get together if I come to London.

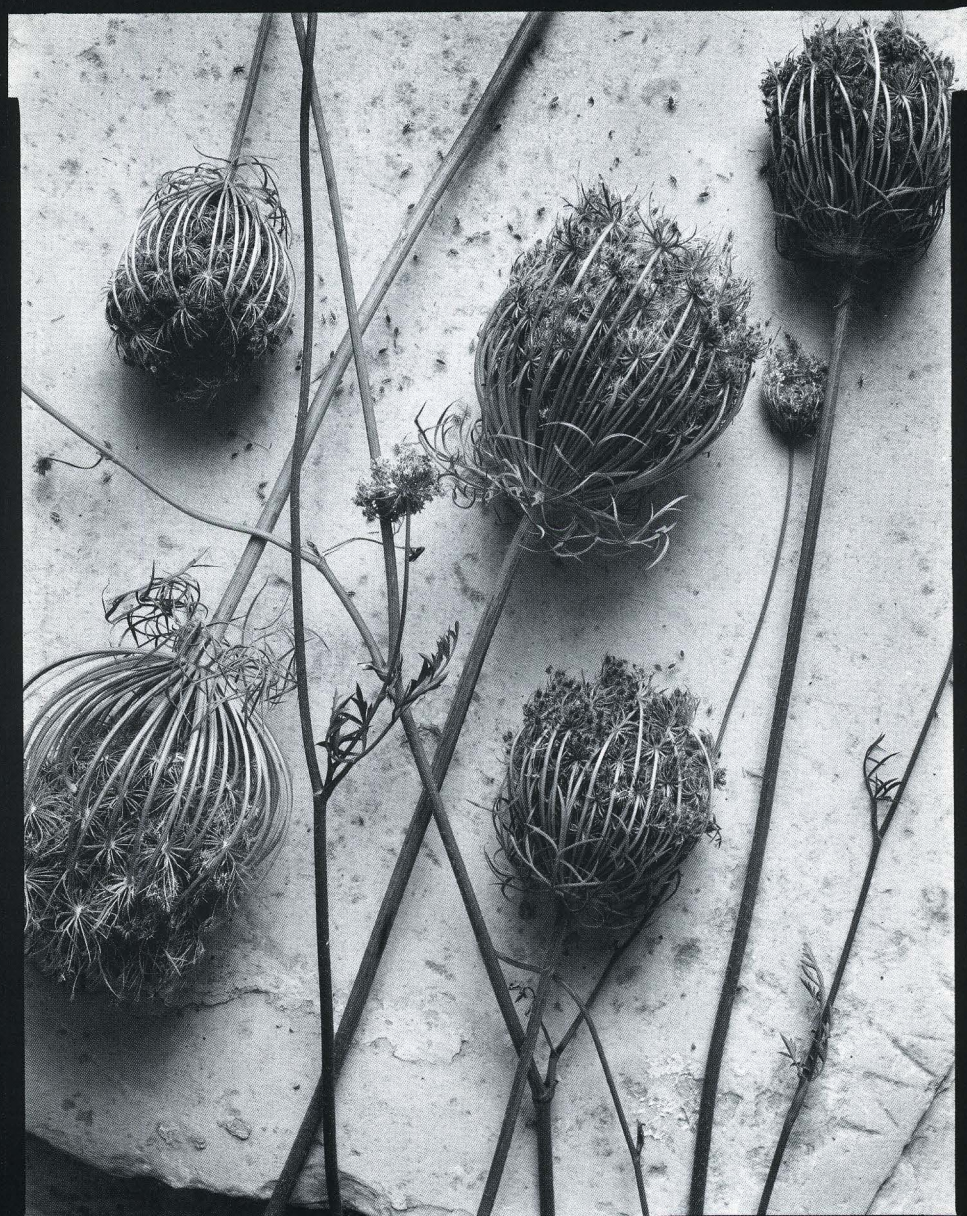




























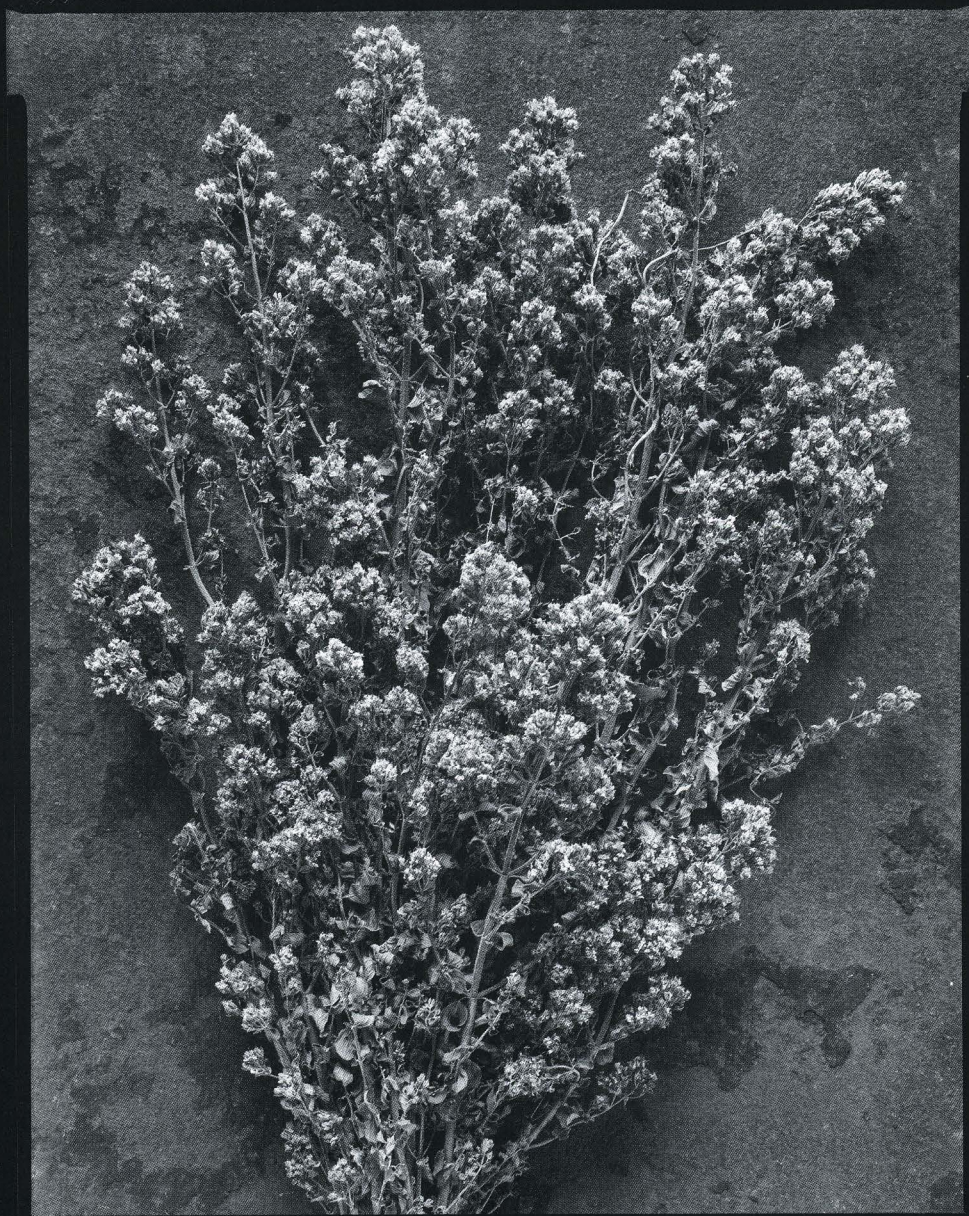




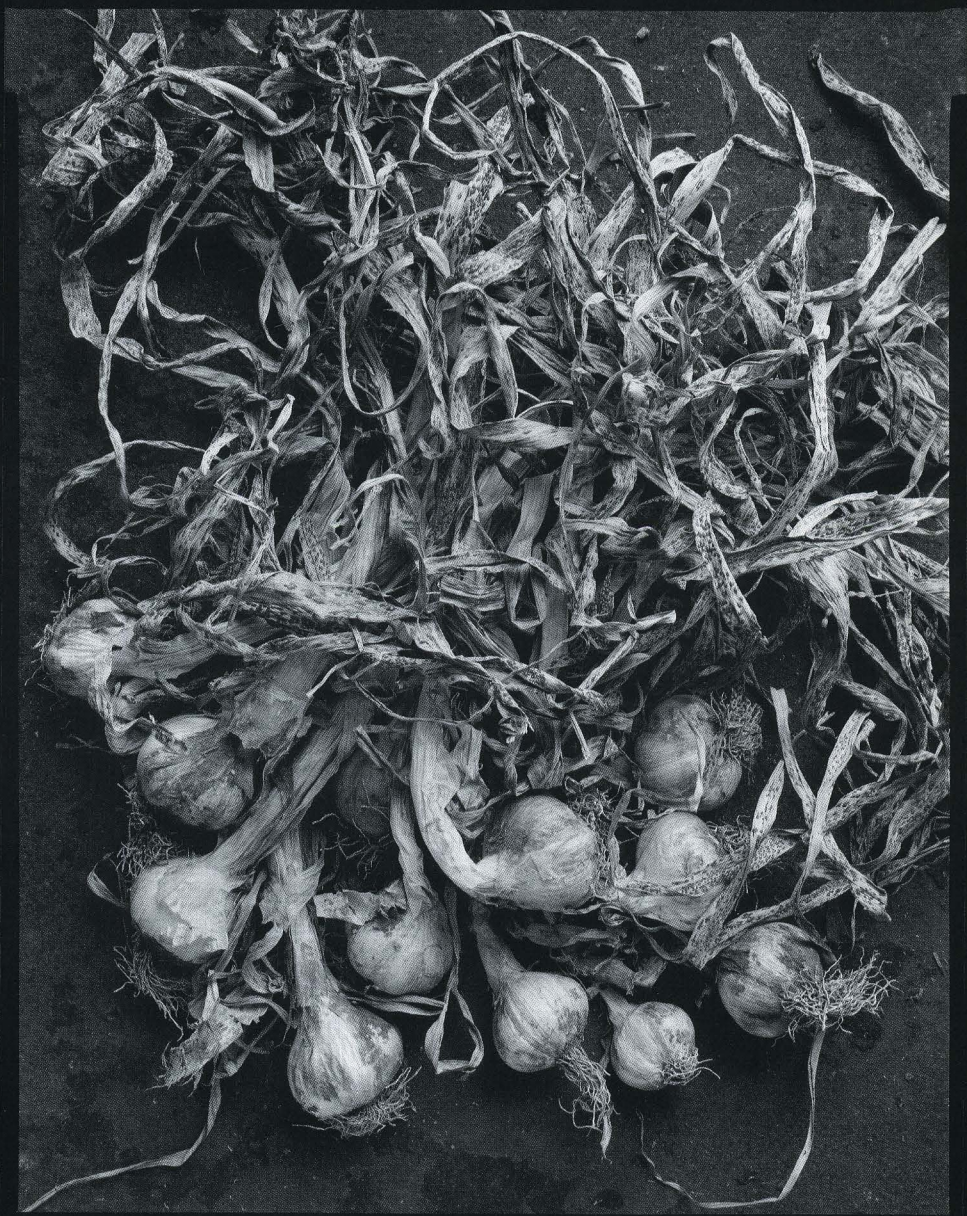


































## ROBERT KEZIERE

### *Notes*

A few summers ago I began work on a series of photographs of botanical objects. The photographs were taken during a stay on the small Mediterranean island of Sifnos. The unusual plant life on this dry, rural island has been of increasing interest throughout recent visits there.

Most natural things on the island are kind of tough. Most everything bites, the bugs are fast, the plants aggressive. There are numerous and varied thistles; a lot of things have spikes. One plant produces small green melons which when touched literally explode, showering the offender with an unknown, *albeit* survivable, liquid.

On this island, one spends a lot of time walking through the terraced countryside. It is mainly how a visitor gets from village to village. Yet along these narrow stone trails one watches the ground, for indeed there are vipers. In truth, at first I constantly watched the bush for snakes but, after awhile, I began just thinking about the bush.

These pictures were taken during 1989 & 1990 on the islands of Sifnos & Pantelleria. They were made with an 11x14" field camera, set stationary in a summer "studio."

### *Untitled Suite*

1. Akoronas
2. Untitled (the Kastro leaves)
3. Villa Dora; probably Queen Anne's Lace
4. Fiori; L'Arco dell'Elefante
5. Gadourankatho
6. Alubarbaras
7. Tsouknida
8. Faux Dill; I Mulini
9. Untitled (bush near Chrysopigi)
10. Oregano Centro
11. Ferrandez Garlic
12. Succulent, Cala Levante
13. Agrioselheno
14. Staurankatho
15. Koluzia
16. Gadourankatho

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*Selected Exhibitions:*

- 1991 *On Reason*, Canadian Cultural Centre, Rome.
- 1990 *On Reason*, Centre Culturel, Université de Sherbrooke, Québec.  
*On Reason* (Selected Works), Whatcom County Museum of History and Art, Bellingham, Washington.  
*On Reason*, Art Gallery of Windsor.
- 1989 *On Reason*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (Catalog).
- 1985 *A Requiem*, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.  
*A Requiem*, Canadian Cultural Centre, Rome.  
*A Requiem*, Canadian Archaeological Institute, Athens.  
*A Requiem*, Charles H. Scott Gallery, ECCAD, Vancouver (Catalog).  
*A Requiem*, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge (Poster/Catalogs).
- 1983 *A Requiem* (In Progress), Villa Anderson, Kastro, Sifnos, Greece.

*Selected Bibliography:*

- Hunter, Robert and Robert Keziere. *Greenpeace*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972.
- Speare, Jean E. and Robert Keziere. *The Days of Augusta*. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1973.

*Collections:*

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