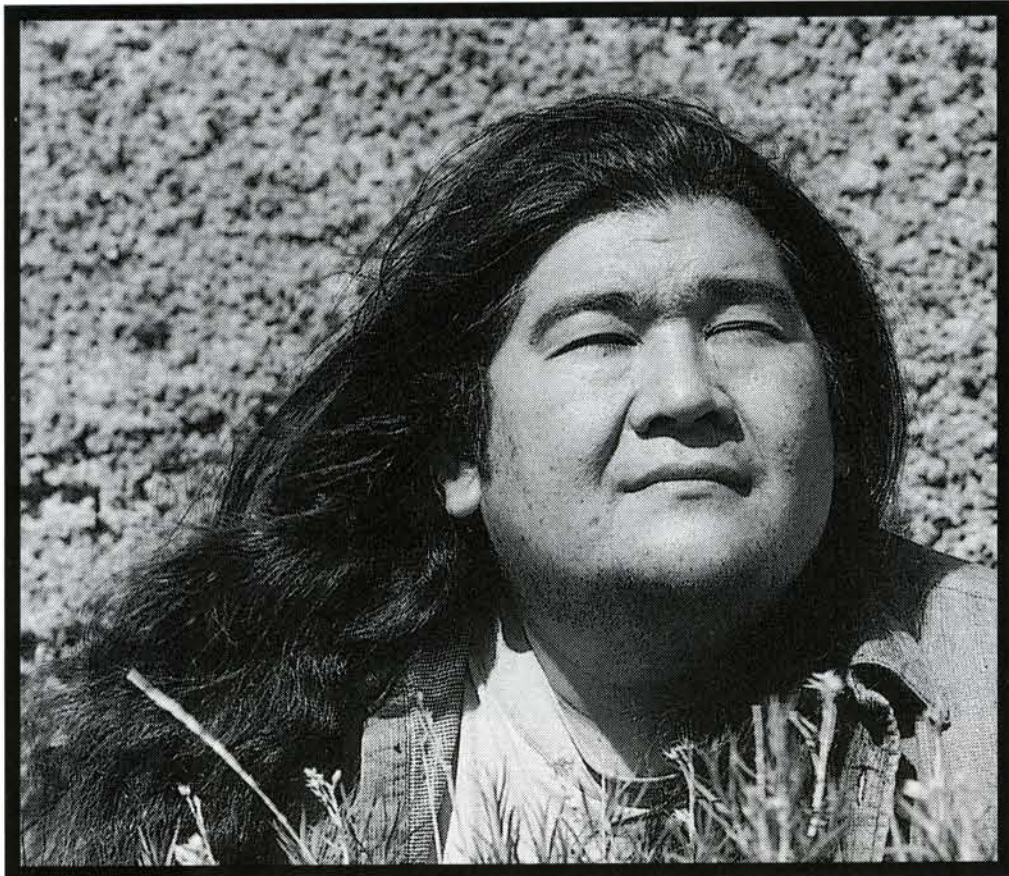


DOUG

BEASLEY



There came a time 10 years ago when Doug Beasley knew he had to reconcile the two sides of his photographic personality. He was working as a commercial photographer in Minneapolis, shooting 35mm fashion photos in a spontaneous, intuitive way. His personal work, on the other hand, was large format, slow, contemplative, reflective. "I knew I needed to integrate the two styles," Beasley says, "so that I wouldn't feel like I was two different people with two completely different bodies of work."

Beasley made a conscious decision to change directions, phase out his fashion shoots and concentrate instead on assignments that would take him in the direction he wanted to go. He began shooting annual reports for nonprofit organizations, teaching workshops in Central America,

and also started getting grants to work on personal projects. His first grant afforded him the opportunity to photograph the sacred sites of the Lakota Indians, melding photography with spirituality. One of his most recent projects was to document how the sacred is incorporated into daily life in Japan.

"My mother is from Japan," Beasley explains. "I've always wanted to visually explore that side of my heritage. Japan has fascinated me as a place where people integrate the spiritual with the ordinary. There's a tradition of connecting with nature, and a basic respect for all living things, very similar to Native American spirituality. I wanted to examine these aspects with my camera."

In Japan, Beasley found it especially intriguing to photograph at Zen temples and Shinto shrines, where he found many rituals for symbolic purification. And when

he travels to Central America to teach workshops in Guatemala, he searches for people practicing their own form of spirituality. "I'm not trying to document anyone's religious practices," he explains. "I'm more interested in the feelings people have when they freely express their spirituality in their own way, outside the confines of organized religion."

Beasley doesn't consider himself to be a travel photographer. He calls himself an ethnographer—someone interested in symbolic meanings. He likes his work to be interpretive, depicting the inner workings of the souls he encounters. "I'm searching for subjects that are not only beautiful on the surface, but also infused with a symbolic or spiritual significance," he says.

In Guatemala, for example, he was fascinated by a Mayan man making an offering to Maximon, who was described to Beasley as the patron saint of vices. The indigenous people worship him with cigar smoke, rum and candles, and this all occurs in a Catholic church the people have adopted. "I'm intrigued by the blending of European and indigenous religions—seeing how the Mayan survived the onslaught of Catholicism and incorporated it into their own religion."

This search for higher truths has led to numerous fascinating discoveries. Beasley runs a photographic retreat in Wisconsin called Vision Quest, where the emphasis is on developing a vision rather than on camera technique.

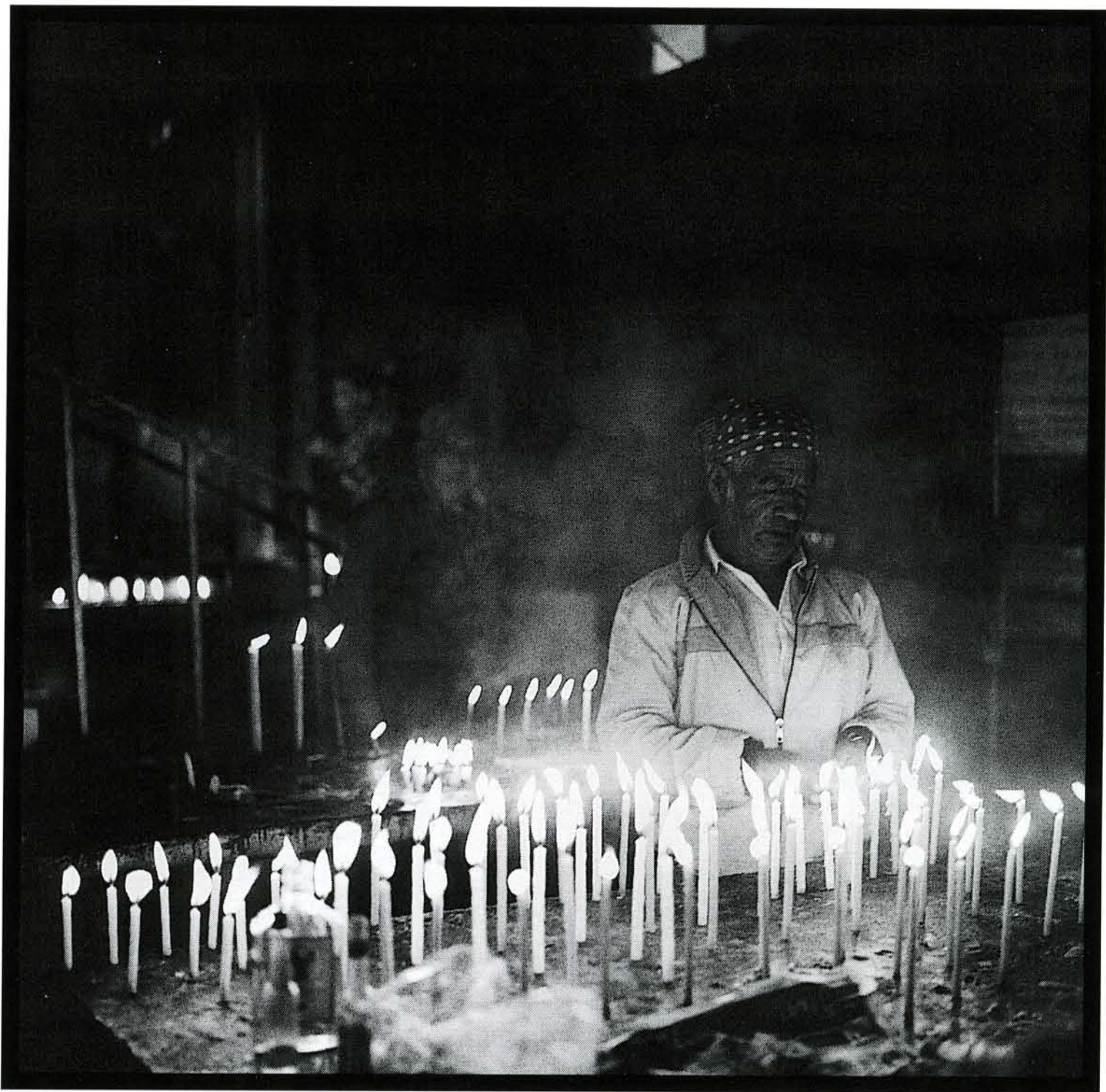
"At Vision Quest we have a number of symbolic objects for

photographers to explore," Beasley explains. "The creation of one such object made me reflect on my own heritage. For no apparent reason, I tied a thick rope around a tree. I just felt it symbolized something spiritual. Then, when I went to Japan, I saw these big ropes tied around trees all over the place. It was eerie. It was something I had done instinctively. There are numerous things I've done that I thought were just my own quirky inventions, which I later found out are actually typically Japanese. It's fascinating to ponder if these things are ingrained in my subconscious because of my heritage.

"I used to look for subjects that were more majestic, more dramatic to photograph," he continues. "Now I'm looking for things that are quiet and small. I've tried to simplify my shooting style by taking just one camera, one lens and one kind of film. Now, instead of standing on the sidelines trying to figure out which lens to use, I can immediately engage with the moment and react to what I'm seeing and feeling." —David Best

■ PRINT INFORMATION
Prints are sepia-toned gelatin silver, signed and dated. Sizes are 8x10 and 11x14. Editions are limited; prices start at \$300.

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MAYAN MAN MAKING OFFERING FOR MAXIMON, GUATEMALA-1999



TODOS SANTOS PROCESSION, GUATEMALA-1999



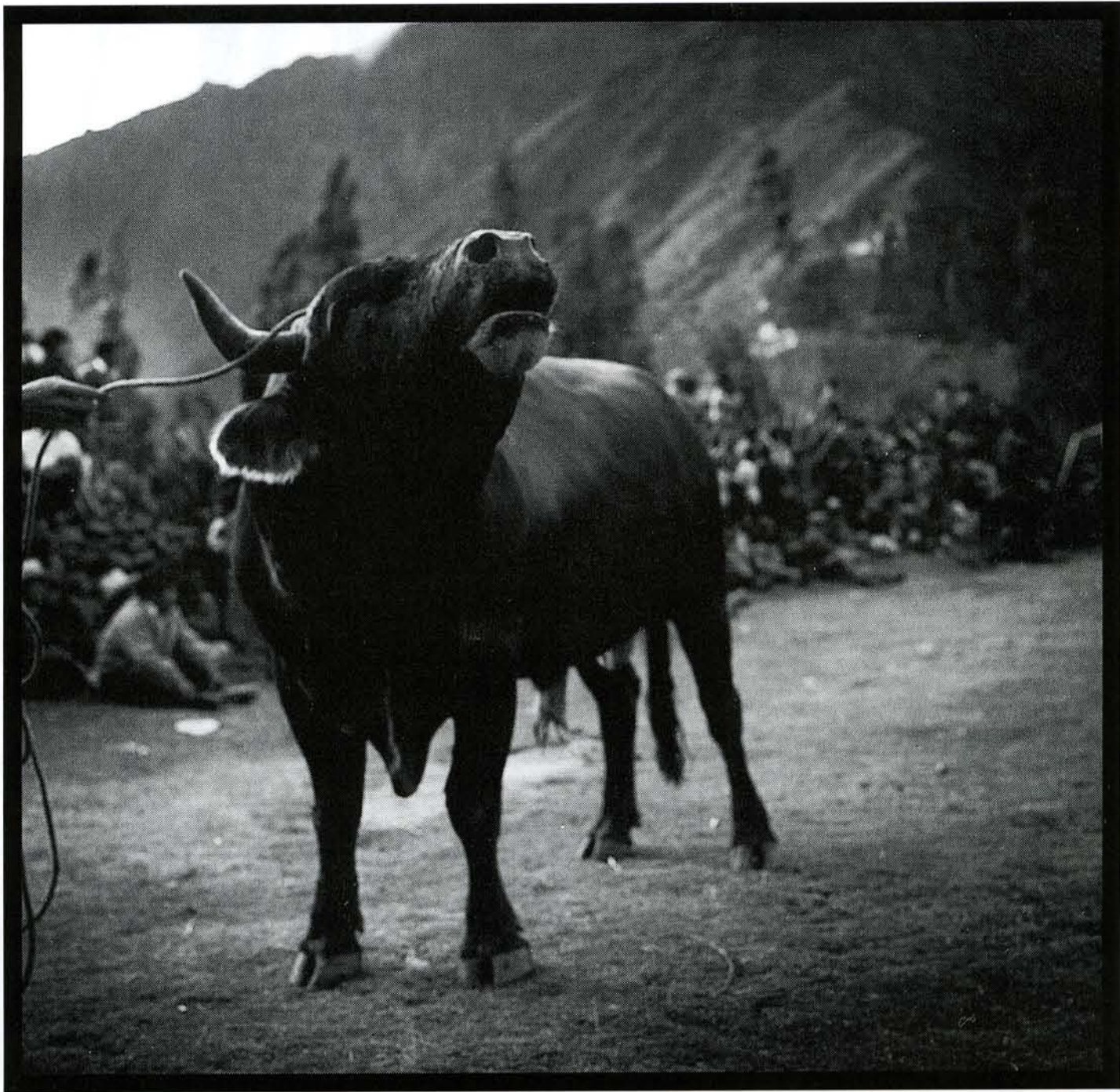
TORJI GATE AT MIYA JIMA, JAPAN - 1999



BAMBOO GROVE, KYOTO, JAPAN - 2000



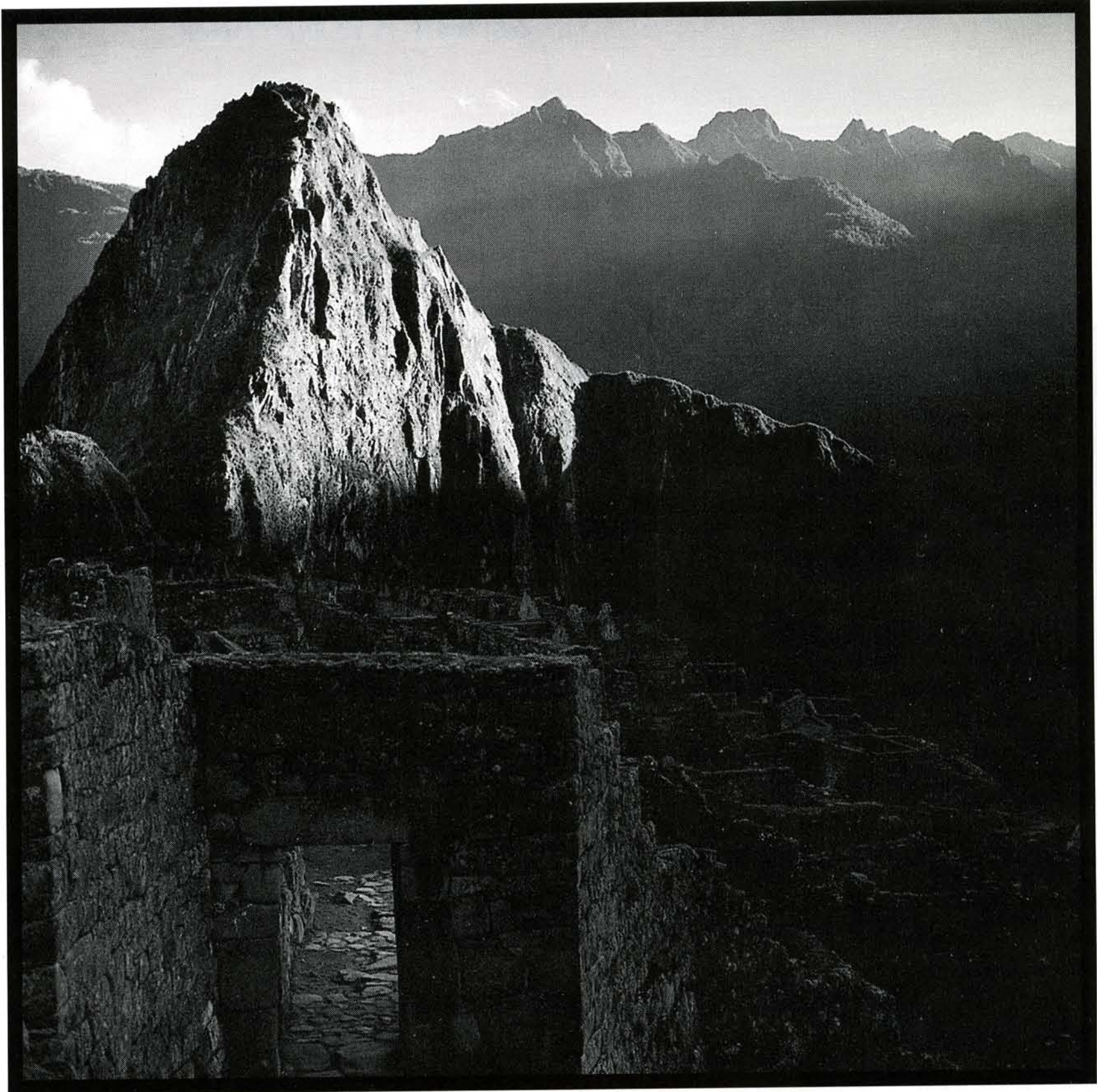
ANCIENT CEMETARY, KOMAKURA, JAPAN - 2000



BULL AT FESTIVAL, PERU - 2001



MARIA, SHAMAN'S CEREMONY, BOLIVIA - 2001



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