



Emmanuel

Ceara, Brazil, 1987

Emmanuel invited me into his living room, which was furnished with a single chair. He asked if I would mind if he sat facing the open front door, for as he explained he enjoyed the feel of the sun falling upon his face. It was as if God was casting a smile and he felt that it would be unwise to turn his back on the graces of the Almighty.

## *Vision of the Heart*

by Eugene H. Johnson



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### Commentary

It may not be completely politic for me, as the editor of *LensWork*, to admit that of the images we've published, I have favorites. Honesty demands that I do so. In the 7000+ photographs that have been published in the first 129 issues of *LensWork*, this is one of my favorites.

The photograph itself is beautifully composed, perfectly timed, tonally spectacular, and a portrait that I suspect any of us would be proud to have made. But this portrait is more than the image. Johnson includes a small bit of text with every one of his images in his portfolio — which, by the way, is a subset of the images from his book, *A Photographic Pilgrimage*. This text, about Emmanuel, tells us so much about the man, the moment, and even the photographer. We understand the subject in ways that simply cannot be communicated with an image. His words are necessary. That Johnson chooses to use this text with this photograph tells us a great deal about himself, as a man and a photographer.

In my youth, I stumbled upon an old Kodak brochure that proclaimed, "A good photograph is one that makes the viewer so aware of the subject that he is unaware of the print." This advice may be a bit dated, but it's core idea I can still agree with — at least for a certain kind of photography. Perhaps we can paraphrase Kodak's maxim with Johnson's image and text in mind: *A good portrait is one that tells us about the subject in ways that transcend the media.* Using this image *and* text, what we learn about Em-

manuel through the combination is more important than any arcane rules about how we are supposed to use the photographic medium. If someone advises you that a good image shouldn't need text, just smile and let them deal with such self-limitations on their own.

Elsewhere, I've spent a great deal of ink advocating the combination of image and text, picture and idea, in both *LensWork* and in my personal work. This example, I think, proves my point better than all the pages I've expended extolling the virtues of image and text combinations.

The rule of thumb I employ is simple: if the image simply illustrates the text, then the image is unnecessary; if the text simply tells us what's in the image, then the text is unnecessary. But if the image and the text combine so that the elimination of either diminishes the whole, then the use of image with text is not only justified, but perhaps mandatory.

Without the use of any text, this is a fine photograph. The same could be said for the text. The *combination* of the two create an observation that is so much more emotionally moving. What more can we ask of a photograph? What more could we ask of the photographer?.