

# Joe Ziolkowski

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## *Okinawa Pinhole Series*

Photography allows me to generate images documenting my life, my inner thoughts, my journey onward. Between 2004 - 2014, I have had the opportunity to travel and explore the small island of Okinawa, Japan . Over the course of 7 trips to Okinawa and adjacent islands, my photography has allowed me to capture hundreds of these remarkable images. Two of these trip were part of my healing process after the passing of my Mom in 2004 and my Dad in 2009.

The process I utilize is called pinhole photography. This unique style camera without a viewfinder uses a tiny hole the size of a pin prick pierced through a thin sheet of brass in lieu of an optic lens. The process requires that I estimate composition and exposure intuitively before exposing the 4 x 5 inch black and white sheet film. Exposures take from a few seconds to several minutes depending on available light.

These photographs are not taken from the eyes of a tourist nor are they images seen in travel brochures. Rather, these are images of natural beauty in uninhabited pristine locations. The often challenging journey of “getting there” made each day’s location even more rewarding. At times I would make my journey alone, and at times I went with friends on our pinhole photography excursions. Driving to these coastal destinations were adventures in themselves through rural areas, over dirt roads, past sugar cane fields, across swampy lowlands, around winding rock-strewn terrain, ending up on some sand and coral coastal outcropping. Each bend of the road or path revealed an unexpected beauty more inspiring than the previous. We travelled as far as we could go by auto. My friends would drop me off and either leave only to return many hours later, or sit back and settle into a good book after watching me navigate the rocky shoreline until I disappeared in the distance in search of an even grander vista.

For hours I searched alone for revealing sites with only a pinhole camera, 4” x 5” film holders, and tripod in hand. I never knew exactly just what was ahead. I came to expect the unexpected, and that continued to drive me further. When feelings of isolation and abandonment overtook me, I would find comfort in the crashing of a wave or the lone flight of a bird.

Many variables influenced “ideal locations” for shooting--weather being the most profound--because on this island weather can, and frequently does, change without notice! This made the task of bringing together light, terrain, tides, and vantage points an artistic and logistic challenge. Some days I was able to walk out hundreds of yards from the coast which, perhaps hours earlier, had been covered by many feet of seawater.

My latest two trips differed from previous years due to yet another factor. Since I was unable to use 4” x 5” Polaroid to preview my exposure and composition, I had to rely more heavily on chance and almost exclusively on the unexpected approximation of the pinhole process. Scenes, weather, tides and events are always in flux. This is what I feel is at the heart of my photographs. Considering the randomness of events and factors, I am still able to bring it all together and capture intriguing and captivating images. This surprises me even to this day!

Looking back on this trip Dad and Mom were with me in spirit each step of the way. My first trip to Okinawa was only months after my mother’s unexpected death from a massive stroke in 2004. During our lives together, whenever we had the chance we would take the time to stop what we were doing and watch the setting sun, reflecting on the beauty of fleeting moments. On my most recent trip I had more opportunities to capture sunsets and sunrises than any trip previously. Mom and Dad still shared those sunsets with me, only from a different perspective than mine.

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