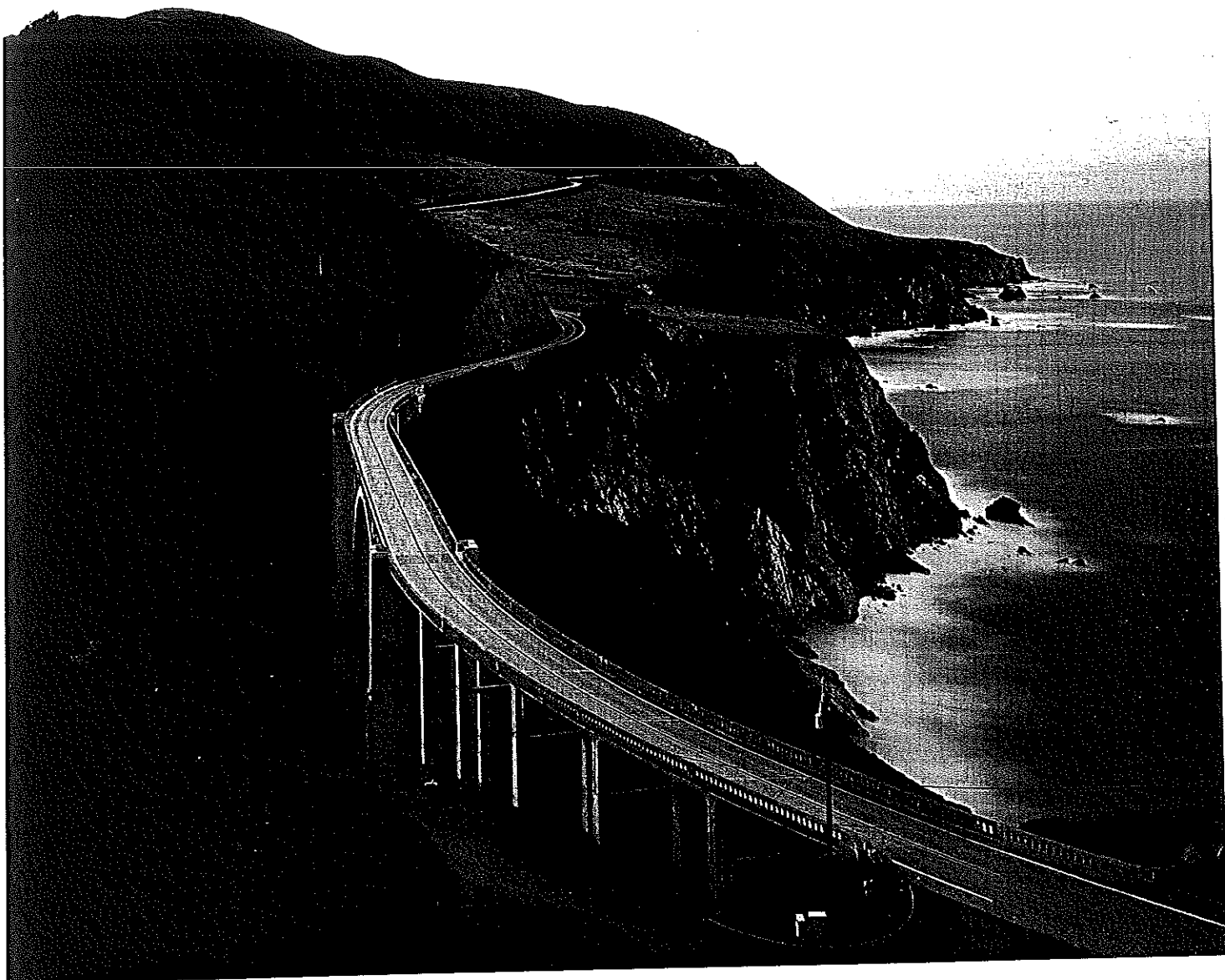


Scott Conarro



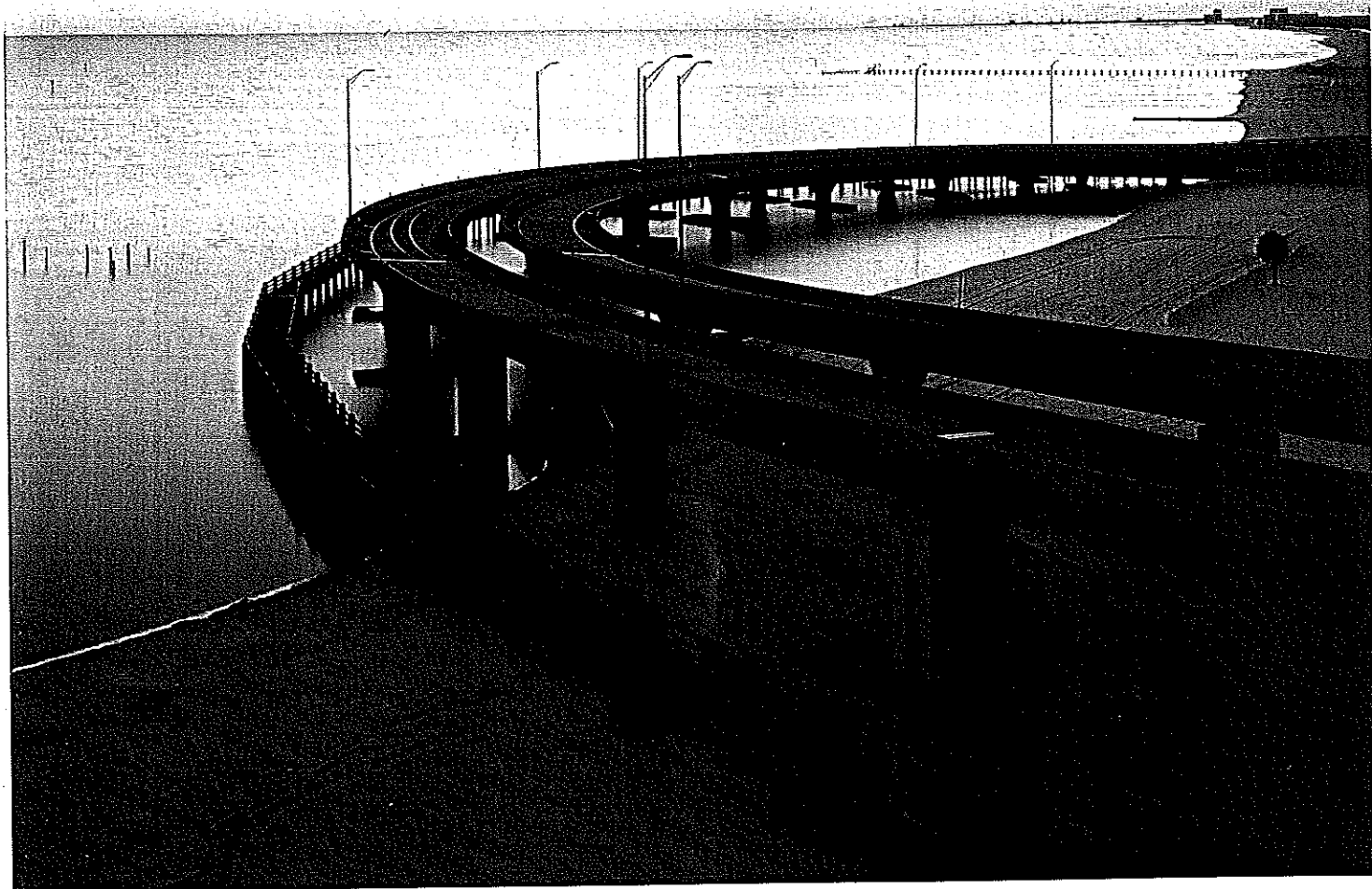
By Sea

by Cece M. Scott

Scott Conarro developed his sense that the environment “offers insights into the true values and psychology of a culture” from his formative years living in rural Alberta, as well as from visiting mountain parks. Conarro acknowledges that each one of us has an impact and inherent responsibility for both our own personal surroundings as well as the environment at large. However, his photographic mission in his current *By Sea* project is not about judgment or making a political statement regarding our infringement on the environment. “I didn’t want *By Sea* to be an inventory of climate change vignettes or [a] map of the coastline,” Conarro states in an email interview from Limburg, Belgium, where he is working on a project centred on how comparable regions deal with their industrial heritages. Instead, Conarro’s approach to the *By Sea* project is analogous to an observational essay.

“The coastline was a really useful device for discussing the way we inhabit North America,” Conarro states. “Along a single elevation, it spans the breadth of this civilization from circumpolar to subtropical regions. Through cities and sprawl and unadulterated landscape, sea level marks a visible edge where the land we can live on abuts a vast plane where we can’t. In a sense, the coastline illustrates that our dominion has limits.”

With his *By Sea* project, Conarro wanted to achieve a parallel imagery of timelessness and in-the-moment engagement. To evoke this ambiance, Conarro shot his images by using long exposures, just before dawn and just after dusk. “In long exposures, when the light changes colour by the second, the light blends and softens and a degree of uncertainty is introduced into the process. I close the shutter when things



move around in my frame, and when they become still or absent I open it again. In the end, my pictures are shadowless, slightly off-colour views that I think of as midway between an impressionist painting and a schematic diagram," Conarroe says.

By Sea is a rejoinder to *By Rail* (2008), Conarroe's series about railways in Canada and the United States. He says, "On one hand, the rail system describes the vastness of this (Anglo-America) geo-cultural bloc simply; on the other, it illustrates both our ambitious course of development and the fear that our best days might be past. *By Sea* looks at the coastline perimeter of the same civilization."

Conarroe moves from recording the history of the post-industrial environment in *By Rail*, to a prescient geographical documentation of periphery waterscapes selected throughout North America by Conarroe. Location shoots include the coasts of the Gaspé Peninsula, Quebec; Newfoundland; the Maritimes; the Florida Keys; and sections of the Pacific Coast all the way to Alaska. And, as an extension to the *By Sea* project,

Conarroe boarded a Navy ship in August 2011 to tour around Baffin Island, making photographs in northern communities while the ship patrolled and conducted training exercises. Incremental changes in the environment that "fade into New York's hum and Nanaimo's clump-clump are amplified in the quiet north," Conarroe says. But, without the Canadian Forces Civilian Artist Program, Conarroe states he'd have a "difficult time including any Arctic" in his project.

"I like the idea that the North America we know today grew from the moment of first contact when Europeans first stepped onto the shore, and that this new era *By Sea* alludes to is also slipping up past the tide line. I like thinking this culture's past and future are bookended by episodes at the water's edge, just like the physical territory is bound by distinct coastlines," Conarroe says.

Conarroe keeps his choice of equipment simple, using a Wista RF 4 x 5 field camera, a 135mm Nikkor lens, a 127mm Schneider lens, and Kodak 160 NC film. (NC film features finer grain properties for image enlargement.)