

T R A V I S

K E N T



ALL BEST

2011

For Family

Travis Kent
All Best

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It sounded like a shot. The sound seemed to me to come from a building on the right above my shoulder. A moment passed, and then two more shots rang out in rapid succession.

Over the car radio system, I heard "Let's get out of here!" and our Secret Service man, Rufus Youngblood, vaulted over the front seat on top of Lyndon, threw him to the floor, and said, "Get down."

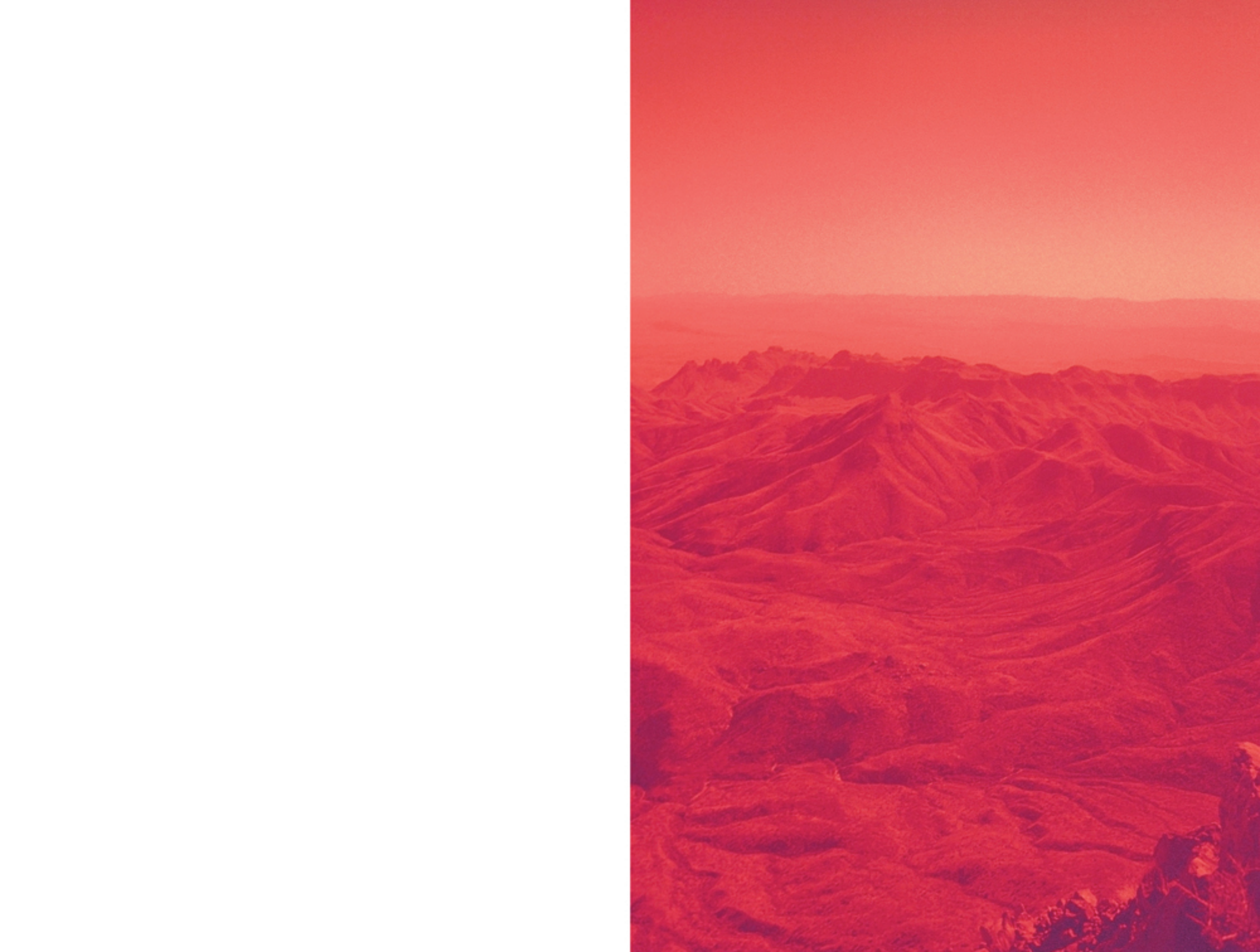








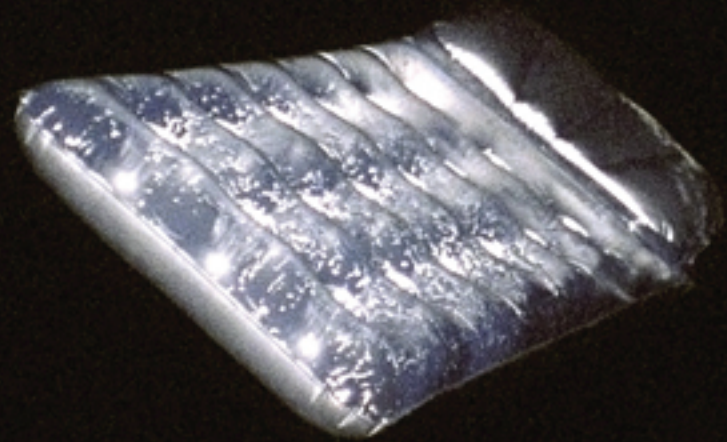








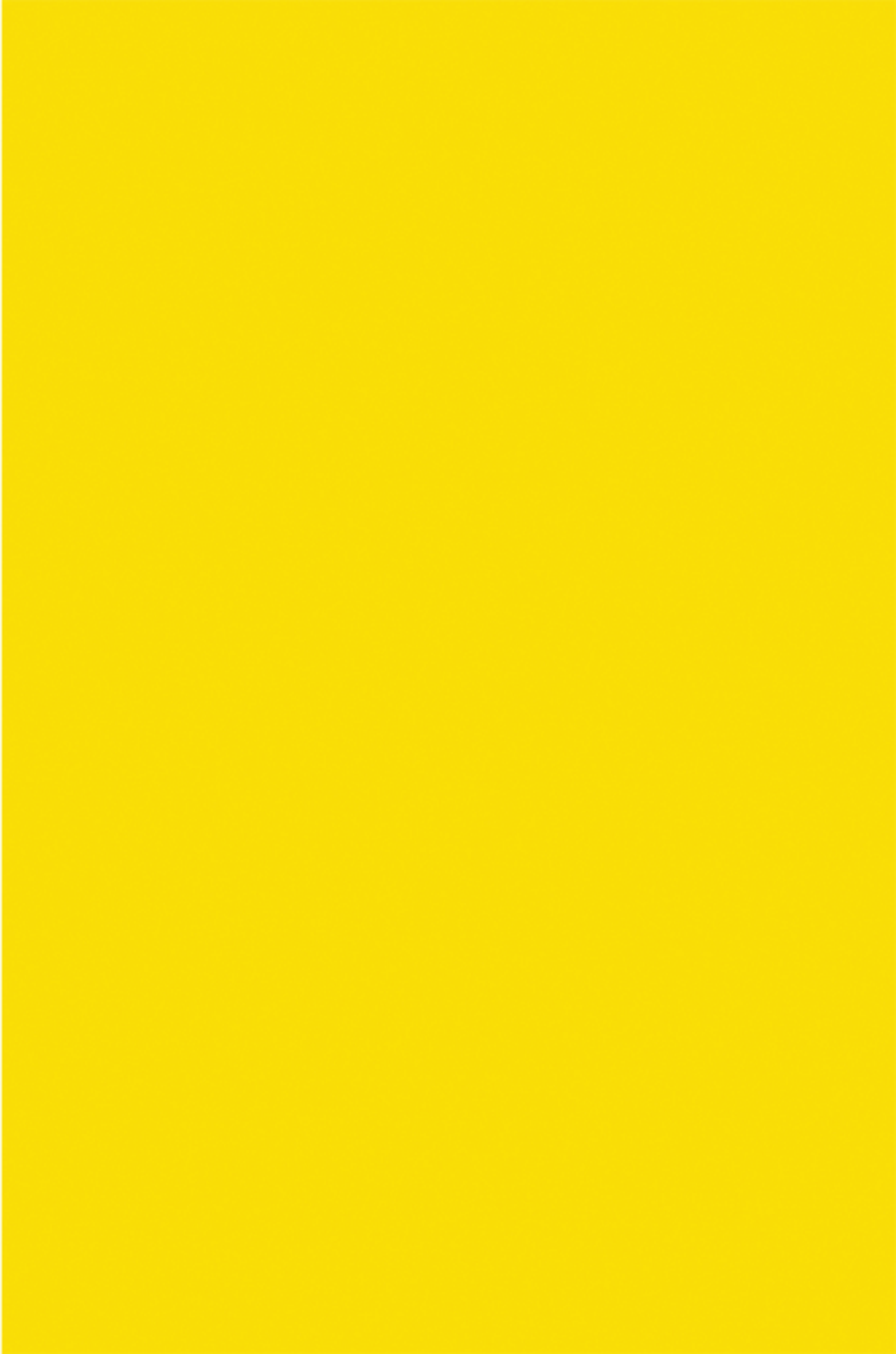












Travis Kent's photographs function just as personal photographs do for many of us; he uses them to catalog his life. He acknowledges this tendency most explicitly when labels appear in shots of landmarks or shop displays, or when his flash is visible reflecting off the surface of a didactic image or text. His images become inventory: landscapes, tableaux, flora, family, friends, events mournful and silly, objects majestic and mundane, some of them blurry or unfocused, most of them flawlessly posed or composed. When we as viewers look at them in the aggregate, the selection of photographs in *All Best* manifests an experience that all of us have likely known in our own lives: seeing superficial repetitions, we make connections between things—memories, events, feelings—that in actuality have no corollary.

A white cat appears on a ledge next to a gigantic spherical topiary. In a different photograph, a white cat sits on top of a car covered by a tarp. The car shape is inert, a dead thing, like the dead body in a casket in another photograph. A funereal image reappears as men in dark suits behind a hearse obscure the view of a coffin being loaded into the back. Only the backs of the men are visible. There are many people whose backs face the camera—a woman in a dress holding flowers, a boy in swimming shorts, both framed by darkness. Non-human bodies also appear against a backdrop of night sky—fireworks, and an inflatable float like a spaceship receding into the black. I feel as if I am reliving my own memories, though this is not my life. With a self-conscious twinge of melodrama, I feel the finality of my own mortality, like a body dropping to the ground with a thud. The objects in the darkness hover, as I seem to hover above a mountain range washed in magenta, or the tops of a mass of monochrome gray clouds. My point of view feels unresolved in these photographs; where do I stand in relation to these objects? My stability as a viewer becomes questionable.

The emotional and visual associations the photographs trigger are possible because Kent places his all of his subjects on a single

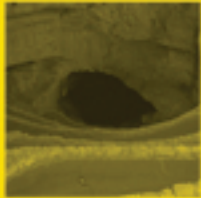
stylistic register, imbuing them with an equal capacity for signification. He composes his shots quickly, often with a point-and-shoot camera and with a harsh flash at night or with diffuse natural lighting. As a result of this approach, many objects cast stark shadows, while longer shots flatten against the horizon. Similarly, a patch of grass clippings conveys the same grandeur as the Grand Canyon, because the image of the grass contains immaculate and vertiginous detail, whereas the visual impact of the Grand Canyon, automatically breathtaking even in a snapshot, is slightly muted; its vastness becomes uniform when printed on such a small scale. Frank in their display, Kent's photographs comprise a taxonomy of experience, not expressive representations of the experiences.

Understanding the intent or feelings of an artist at the moment he presses the shutter is not necessary when viewing the resultant photographs, but since Kent's are obviously autobiographical, his insistence on maintaining emotional distance is unexpected. For each mournful image, there is an ironic or dry one that denies a viewer's empathic connection with the photographer. The wintry image of a girl, utterly sad and sitting on a bed next to a fluorescent light mounted on a wall, is difficult to read as a scene of desolation when paired, even obliquely, with a photo of a variety of fluorescent tubes showcased in a shop display. The repetition usurps an interpretation of the former image as strictly emotive. In this way, Kent's selection of photographs is a visual analogue of "All best," the saccharine yet potentially unsentimental closing of a letter. Kent's last solo show carried a similar clichéd moniker, *Hope You're Well*, and it is telling that the newer title signals a subtle shift in his practice, from engagement with an imagined spectator to the more ambiguous *All Best*. His arrangement of photographs contains a complicated and multifarious range of narratives, much like the world outside of photographs, where objects often contain multiple meanings, and hardly ever stand essentially for one idea or feeling.

-Chelsea Weathers



SOFA
Austin, TX



Carlsbad Caverns
Carlsbad, NM



LBJ Library
Austin, TX



Large Rock
Duncans Cove, CA



Hamilton Pool
Dripping Springs, TX



Hamilton Pool
Dripping Springs, TX



Family Portrait
Southampton, NY



LBJ Library
Austin, TX



Long Island Sound
Riverhead, NY



Hancock Park
Los Angeles, CA



Big Bend
Alpine, TX



Bagley Avenue
Los Angeles, CA



Landon Lane
Austin, TX



Funeral Home
Southampton, NY



Funeral Home
Southampton, NY



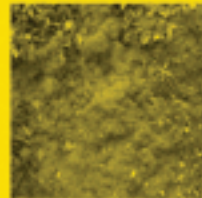
13th Street
Austin, TX



Quarry Lake
Austin, TX



Quarry Lake
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Grass Clippings
Riverhead, NY



13th Street
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Home Depot
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A L L B E S T

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