

## Wayne Levin

b.1945, Los Angeles, California, lives in  
Honolulu, O'ahu  
exhibited in *Biennial I*

left to right

*Snow Geese Flying Towards Mountain,  
Lower Kamath Basin, California, 2011*

*Snow Geese Over Farm, Berns, Oregon, 2011*

*Snow Geese and Hill, 2011*

archival pigment prints

In the past ten years, I have been obsessed with photographing large schools of fish, in particular Akule, as part of my ongoing black and white underwater work. I was very interested in how these huge schools behave like a single being. I was constantly wondering whether I was photographing one entity, with the individual fish being like cells in this larger being, or a group of individuals that were able to interact with such unity that they gave the appearance of a much larger animal. After publishing this work in a book "Akule" I decided to go from photographing schools to photographing flocks. Last spring I went to Southern Oregon, and Northern California to photograph migrating Geese. These are some images of what I hope will be an ongoing project.

## WAYNE LEVIN

*Born 1945 in Los Angeles, California  
Lives in Honaunau, Hawaii*

Wayne Levin was introduced to photography as a child when he received a Kodak Brownie camera as a gift from his parents. Levin recalls his enthusiasm for going to Long Beach harbor and taking pictures of the large, sleek sailing yachts, in part as a substitute for his desire to have a boat of his own and be involved with the sea. After high school Levin pursued his interest in photography by attending Brooks Institute, a school in Santa Barbara teaching commercial photography, but, ironically, the rigid, stifling atmosphere there, which didn't allow much freedom for creativity, caused him to abandon the medium and a potential career. A few years later when he joined the U.S. Navy, Levin took up photography again as a means to document his travels. Upon being discharged from the service in 1968, Levin settled in Hawaii, where his family had relocated the previous year.

Levin soon became more involved in a serious way with photography and had his first exhibition in 1972 in Honolulu. He was also one of the founding members of the Image Foundation, an organization which sponsors education and exhibition opportunities in photography. However, in 1977, feeling the need for change and wanting to pursue formal training in photography again, Levin left for the mainland and enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute, from which he received a bachelor of fine arts degree in 1979. Levin subsequently attended Pratt Institute in New York, graduating with a master of fine arts degree in 1982.

At the end of 1982 Levin returned to Hawaii, obtaining a teaching position at the University of Hawaii-Manoa. As a present to himself, Levin purchased an underwater camera and from 1983 to the middle of 1984 worked

on a series of underwater images of surfers, snorkelers and swimmers which brought him his first widespread recognition and a 1984 National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists Fellowship. At first Levin experimented with color but found the results unsatisfactory and switched to black and white, which had the effect of transforming and abstracting the subjects enough to remove the resulting images from the traditional context of underwater photography. The striking images in this body of work revealed a world and viewpoint which most are unaccustomed to seeing. In contrast to our customary visual familiarity with images of surfers bobbing around in the surf, only the parts of them above the surface visible, Levin provided access to the murky, haunting beauty of the world below the surface. In these images, rolling surf becomes clouds and the water appears to be sky, so surfers seem to be floating in the air rather than the sea. Suddenly we become conscious of the underside of the water as a surface or dividing line itself. In some images it is ambiguous as to which part is above water and which below.

Despite his excitement over this new body of work, which he later titled *Through a Liquid Mirror*, invoking Lewis Carroll's story of Alice, a young girl who is able to pass through a mirror into a world others never see, Levin set it aside to pursue another project from 1984 to 1987. During this time he photographed intensively at Kalaupapa on Molokai, feeling it was important to document the leprosy settlement and its remaining residents before this part of history disappears. From 1987 to 1989 Levin again left Hawaii to do a residency sponsored by the Ohio Arts Council at the Dayton Art Institute. He returned to Hawaii once more in 1989 when his book *Kalaupapa: A Portrait* was published.

In 1990 Levin married and moved to the Kona area of the island of Hawaii. Settled once again within proximity to the ocean, Levin resumed his underwater photography, at first with shots of surf breaking near shore and views of reefs. Soon he began venturing farther out and taking photographs of dolphins, whales and rays that impress with their unexpected sense of scale, ethereal lighting and elegant compositions. This body of work became the second installment of the ongoing exploration *Through a Liquid Mirror*.

Shortly after the birth of his daughter Elise in 1991, Levin commenced the body of work shown in this exhibition, *Through a Liquid Mirror III*. In this group of images, Levin documents Elise from about three or four months old to her present age of just over two years. The series consists of two kinds of pictures. In some Levin identifies Elise with the character of Alice in Carroll's story; he records her discovery of and reaction to the world on the other side of the surface of the water. As Elise grows older and her confidence grows, the pictures show her physical relationship with the underwater realm. In other images Levin is interested in how his daughter's form appears in relation to the water as he explores the reflection and refraction of light and the potential for the under-surface of the water to distort and abstract forms. This body of work marks a significant turn for Levin. By aiming the camera and not looking through it, Levin has positioned himself on the edge of being free of the usual control and opened himself to the unexpected, territory in which chance and good fortune combined with skill and daring can lead in ever more interesting directions.