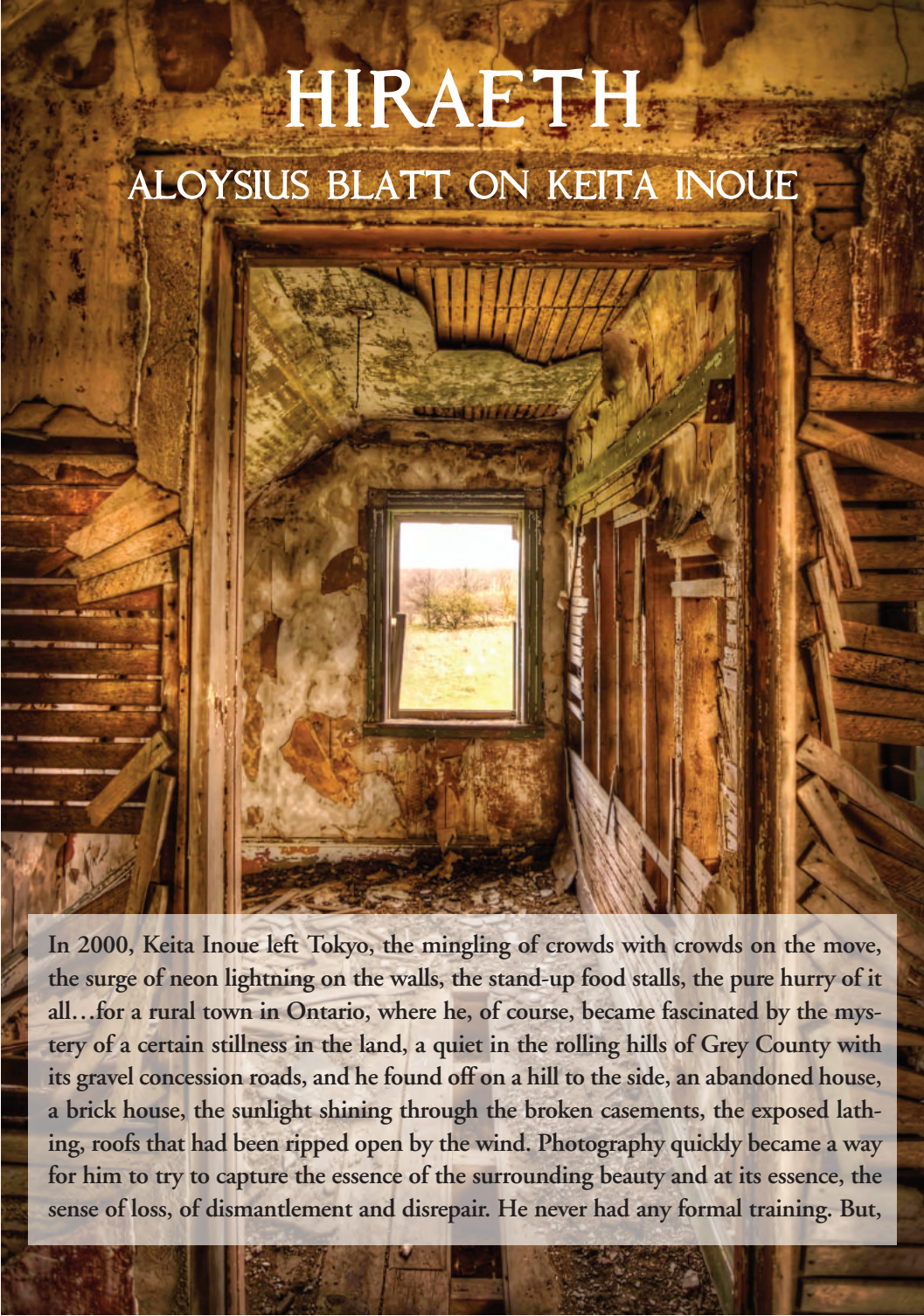


# Word & Art

## HIRAETH

ALOYSIUS BLATT ON KEITA INOUE



In 2000, Keita Inoue left Tokyo, the mingling of crowds with crowds on the move, the surge of neon lightning on the walls, the stand-up food stalls, the pure hurry of it all...for a rural town in Ontario, where he, of course, became fascinated by the mystery of a certain stillness in the land, a quiet in the rolling hills of Grey County with its gravel concession roads, and he found off on a hill to the side, an abandoned house, a brick house, the sunlight shining through the broken casements, the exposed lathing, roofs that had been ripped open by the wind. Photography quickly became a way for him to try to capture the essence of the surrounding beauty and at its essence, the sense of loss, of dismantlement and disrepair. He never had any formal training. But,



driven by curiosity, and by paying acute attention to experience, he developed a style that is his own, he found his own eye for the icons of an emptiness that seemed, upon constant perusal, to litter the landscape. Soon he was photographing his subjects in three exposures, stacking them using HDR software, and then amplifying certain elements in Photoshop, developing his vision as best he could.

His journey had begun with that abandoned farmhouse on one of those rural sideroads, a brick house on a slight rise, a house that had, despite being a tin-roofed shell of itself, not just something of nostalgic beauty, but something that had achieved the serenity that can inhabit ruins. It suggested something universal, perhaps the loss that always follows on the heels of intensity and passion and commitment, something elegiac in a bare-bones reminder of rituals long gone; family meals eaten, loves sought, loves abandoned, dreams removed and transported to somewhere else. Fascinated by such

a house, and others, he travelled, camera in hand, road after road across Grey County (and a few other places, too), seeking to document this abundance of abandonment, the roads themselves testifying to a deep absence; where once there had been a village – Hole-In-The-Wall – there is now nothing, a real hole in the air, and down the road where there was another bustling village, there is not nothing; there is a hydro pylon, energy flowing overhead, from somewhere else to somewhere else. All this serenity is made more present, more moving, more quietly tragic, by the through highways with their litter of fast-food shops and gas pumps (sentinels to a different kind of disappearing energy). The result





of this confrontation with the ephemeral on Inoue: “I always start my photo shoot knowing it may be the last time I will see a place as it is, and so I look to capture the nostalgia for a home to which you cannot return – a longing for a home that is no longer, or perhaps never was.”

In the words of the poet Hayden Carruth:

*How fresh it was then, the world then....  
The lake, pines, red-winged blackbirds raucous  
In the cat tails...man's house,  
Five rooms and jerry-built, hung  
On the bank by the highway, up  
At one corner and down at another,  
With a tin roof, windows off-kilter...and  
He listened to the little song sung by  
the October wind in the eaves  
above his head.*





*The Photographs*

Conduit (Grey County, Ontario), p.85

Red Villa (Ibaraki, Japan), p.86

Sanctuary (Nova Scotia), p.87

Vicissitudes (Grey County), p.88

Mayakan (Kobe, Japan), p.89/top

Dragon's Path (Grey County), p.89/bottom

Your Memories (Grey County), p.90

# MY FIVE

## KEITA INOUE

### CHASING MEMORIES



#### 1. CHILDHOOD

As an only child of artistic and independent parents, I quickly learned how to spend my time playing with the toys I crafted from a very early age. Beginning in the 1960s we lived in a tiny public housing apartment in downtown Tokyo. When I turned six, my parents dedicated one of the three small rooms to be my space. Those ninety-eight square feet became my own playground where I would spend many hours exploring my creativity. Since my mother, Natsuno, worked as a women's hat designer and later became a professional calligrapher, her behavior showed me how to immerse myself in the arts, including drawing, playing an instrument, and learning calligraphy. Developing such hobbies, I began to find more value in applying myself to one thing at a time and sticking with it until I excelled. As a boy, I also enjoyed exploring the neighbourhood with my friends. We would often sneak into long-abandoned buildings, imagining alternative lives, trying to connect with ghosts. My father, Kenji,

loved watching movies and often brought me along with him to see all kinds of movies, old and new, from Hollywood and Asia alike.

#### 2. CAMERA

My parents loved travelling. Whenever they travelled to places like Hokkaido where my mom was from or Gifu where my dad was born, they would take their camera and capture their memories. There were dozens of albums with thousands of photographs. Their love for photography naturally extended to chronicling my life as I grew. There is a colour photo when I was a toddler, my mom crouched in the gravel, behind a toy bus I could ride, posing for photographer me, in my red sweater

and denim overalls, white-socked feet in teddy bear flip-flops. Several years later, when I was nine, I snapped one of my parents in a park, stretched out on a picnic blanket, my mom serious, my dad smiling broadly. Because my dad worked late into the night, whenever he had free time, the three of us always did something fun together. When I was a teenager I became interested in capturing the world around me. One of my mother's best friends, Chizuko Ueno, was a professional portrait photographer. Her work impressed me, though I wish I'd been wise enough to consult with her about lighting and the mechanics of cameras.



My first camera was Konica Revio Z3. Now I use Canon 7D, a well-built, all-round camera which withstands the extremes of Canadian weather, especially in winter.

And, there is a word that's not widely known but aligns perfectly with what I wish to convey through my images: Hiraeth (Welsh pronunciation: hɪrəɪθ, hi:raɪθ])  
(n.) a nostalgia, homesickness, or yearning for a home to which you cannot return; a longing for a home that is no longer or never was.

### 3. MOVING TO CANADA

When I turned 21, I started living on my own in Tokyo and enjoyed the independence and excitement of those years. In my late 20s I met my future wife, a woman from Ontario who was teaching English on contract. My Tokyo lifestyle was becoming increasingly routine and less adventurous, so, at 30, I decided to move to Canada, feeling the need to explore different parts of the world. Life in Canada was such an eye-opener. A lot of things I had learned and practiced day-to-day in Japan, like... seemed so superficial and irrelevant. We found a house we love and settled down in Grey County. I appreciate the quiet beauty of nature and an outdoor lifestyle and both aspects influenced my photography.

#### 4. DEATH OF MY PARENTS

My father died suddenly not long after I moved to Canada and my mother a few years later. Dealing with their deaths from afar has been the most difficult thing I've done. I discovered that in losing the only family who helped me grow, I also lost my sense of belonging to Japan, even though I lived there for 30 years. When my mother died, I sold the apartment. But, before handing over the key, I went through the contents, carefully gathering and sorting their photographs accumulated during their long lives together. This loss of identity in my home country has had a profound impact on how I now explore and capture images of abandoned places. These are the places where I find myself imagining the lives of those who once lived there, but eventually had to leave them all behind both physically and spiritually.



#### 5. ENCOUNTERING THE FIRST ABANDONED HOUSE

The very first abandoned house I spotted was purely by accident while driving in Snowball, Ontario. I did not know why at the time, but I felt the need to stop the car and photograph the derelict farmhouse. The building calmed me and it seemed as though I had been there before in the distant past. Ever since this first encounter, I find myself experiencing the same emotion every time I discover and explore different abandoned places, some places with stronger feelings than the others. Photographing those buildings always seemed to be the right thing to do to record the memories of whoever had once lived there. As an outsider, I always feel connected to them. I hope viewers experience a similar emotional response.

