

Photographer Barbara Vaughn inspired by water

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Excerpted: San Francisco photographer Barbara Vaughn had spent decades doing black-and-white portraiture and figurative work. But in 2007, vacationing with her husband on the Greek island of Paros, Vaughn became transfixed by colorful and abstract reflections on water.

"I'd always had a desire to create abstract images, and to get away from the representational world I'd occupied for 20-plus years," said Vaughn, whose photography has been published in books and featured in a range of publications from *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* to *Time*.

Over the years, Vaughn had wondered: "How can I create something that looks like a painting?"

She found her answer after spending more than five years photographing reflections on water.

The tools of her trade were a Nikon D7000 camera with a long lens, and patience. She needed not only the right reflection but also the right light and wind. A lack of wind creates too much of a mirror, with no distortion. An abundance of wind stirs too much motion. She found that "things were more visually intense early and late in the day."

"When I started this, I spent a long time staring at water and waiting for it to move." She was routinely approached by strangers wanting to know what it was she found so interesting.

"I'd say, 'Look at the beautiful reflection. Do you see the colors?' "

She continued, "The human eye doesn't see what you see in this photograph. Our eyes are not capable of freeze-framing that. But cameras can." Surveying the vibrant, large-scale photos, with voluptuous and looping shapes and undulating patterns, Vaughn pointed out where the sun was hitting the bow of a boat, where the shadows of a mast were cast, the form of weathered gray shingles, a license plate from a boat, and little wires from a boat's halyards.

"The lens compresses space a bit," she said. "The color is creating the content."

Vaughn and her husband, Telly Hoimes, live in San Francisco's Sea Cliff neighborhood, but spend a part of their year in Hoimes' native Greece.

"This absolutely would not have happened had it not been for my husband," Vaughn said. "The water and light in Greece created a visual field that I hadn't seen before in the more familiar waters of the U.S. All of this, though, is inspired by my love of abstraction."