

Portofolio
Portfolio

Water's Edge

When the weather gets warm,
the impulse transcends all cultural differences.

Photographs by Massimo Vitali



RUBENSPLEIN BEACH, Knokke-Heist, Belgium, Aug. 15, 2002.











HAAD RIN BEACH, Koh Phangan, Thailand, Nov. 19-20, 2002.







PRAIA DO FORTE, CABO FRIO, Brazil, Jan. 27, 2003.



About the Photographs

'Water's Edge'

Massimo Vitali was already acclaimed as a news photographer when he decided, around 1994, that it was time to start working on his own projects. So he bought a few large-format cameras and headed for the beach. "It's the easiest place to study people," he explains.

"Everyone is facing the same direction. They're static. They are semi-nude. And people on the beach are just there to enjoy themselves.

They're not putting up any defenses." The ways people interact on the beach, he realized, reflect larger social dynamics, from an increased interest in leisure culture to the ever-accelerating cycle of fashion trends. He was also struck by the varied uses that people in different countries have for a similar geographical feature. In Belgium, for example, "people wait for months before the sun comes out, and then as soon as it does — boom, everyone's on the beach," whereas in Thailand and Miami, the attraction has less to do with the weather than

with the social climate. "The beach is a place where you can actually see how people behave," he says, "and how our society is manifesting itself."

Vitali has spent much of the past nine years photographing beaches, producing both individual pictures and composite images (seen on Pages 38-39 or in the pictures of Knokke-Heist, shown below in full). He uses a huge, wooden Deardorff camera that makes 8-inch-by-10-inch negatives and mounts it on a 20-foot tripod. The size and height of the camera allow him to capture countless figures in intricate detail. But the cumbersome apparatus offers other advantages as well. "For photographers from the century before last, it was such a big deal to take a picture that when you saw one, you wanted to take some time to study it. Now there are so many images that are consumed in seconds. I thought, If the picture is difficult to make, then people will take time to look at it."



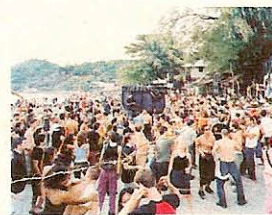
Cabo Frio used to be a sleepy fishing village where wealthy residents of Rio de Janeiro went to rough it for a weekend. But today it is popular with families from all the neighboring areas — as well as with thousands of vendors hawking everything from woven clothing to roasted marshmallows.



More than 1,000 artists from around the world are represented at Art Basel Miami Beach, an outgrowth of the annual art fair in Basel, Switzerland — but that was only part of the attraction for the 30,000 collectors, dealers, gallerists and others who attended this year. The three-day event also features numerous parties and lots of face time by the pools of elegant South Beach hotels.



Above: Knokke-Heist, on the northeast coast of Belgium, is the country's most exclusive beach area. In town, the residents of stately villas play golf and attend cultural exhibitions; on the beach, sun-starved teenagers wedge in among vacationing families and drink *bière blanche* while squinting against the strong North Sea wind.



Once a month, the island of Koh Phangan gives a party to celebrate the full moon. The event, which starts at dusk and runs well into the next day, fueled by Thai whiskey, Ecstasy and heavy music — attracts as many as 10,000 people from Australia, Japan, France, Spain and elsewhere.

The Praia do Forte in Cabo Frio, with vendors making their way up the long, curved beach and big modern hotels forming a sea wall behind it.

