

# HOW MUCH IS ONE MILLION STEPS?<sup>1</sup>

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SARAH MOSCA'S *UNTITLED WALKS* ARE  
PAINTERLY ABSTRACTIONS THAT DOCUMENT  
TREKS THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE

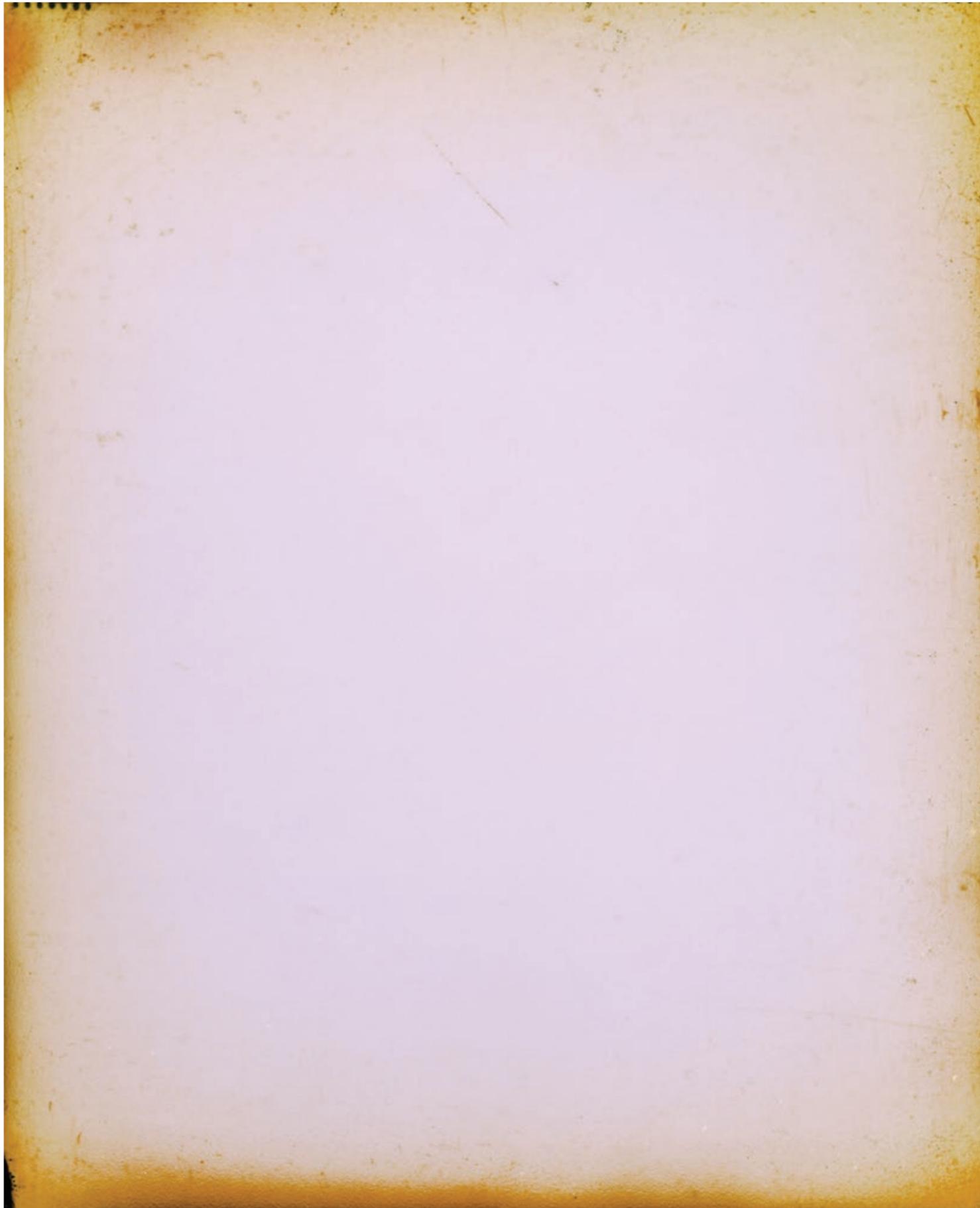
To think about walking as a gesture, and not merely as a means of getting from one place to another, encourages a certain slowness to overtake the body. This is not precisely the 'opposite of speed'<sup>2</sup> but rather an awareness of step followed by step, and of surroundings falling away to the distance. Walking for the sake of walking. Sarah Mosca's series *Untitled Walks* engages with this notion and presents it in a way that is part photographic, part performance. The seven<sup>3</sup> resulting photographs emphasise the removal of oneself from societal bounds, the clarification of thoughts and ideas, and the ceasing of attachment to identity in consideration that perhaps 'truth itself wanders through the forests.'<sup>4</sup>

Walking has long been an important practice of artists, thinkers, and writers, as it allows for total immersion in the outdoors. 'I wish to speak a word for nature', begins Henry David Thoreau in his 1862 essay *Walking*, 'for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society.' Walking up to four hours each day he would follow the land and rivers southwest, keeping to their curves, and saunter through fields and trees in the afternoon sun. Though we are now more confined to dedicated paths as a result of private land ownership, to walk amongst nature encourages the aforementioned slowness and the appreciation of solitude: 'We walked in so pure and bright a light, gilding the withered grass and leaves, so softly and serenely bright, I thought I had never bathed in such a golden flood, without a ripple or a murmur to it.'<sup>5</sup> Given that it is not an uncommon present-day reality for a smart phone to feature as an extension of one's limb, valuing slowness and solitude is now more important than ever.

**Essay** by Christine McFetridge  
**Works** by Sarah Mosca

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Werner Herzog's account of walking as a gesture of healing is of particular interest to Mosca's *Untitled Walks*. In the winter of 1974, the German filmmaker began a three-week journey unaccompanied on foot from Munich to Paris upon receiving news that his dear friend and mentor Lotte Eisner was ill. Believing powerfully that his walk would have a healing effect on his friend, he set out and 'walked, walked, walked, walked.'<sup>6</sup> This simple gesture translated as an offering of respite. Influenced by Herzog's trip, *Untitled Walks* came about as an intuitive response to a 'longing to connect with the landscape.'<sup>7</sup> Mosca's walks began as a form of distraction, but developed into a performance of a 'personal and psychological journey about solitude and absence.'<sup>8</sup>

The photographs that comprise *Untitled Walks* resemble painterly abstractions, absent of pictorial form. Ultimately 'photographic failures'<sup>9</sup> the printed images are rendered in otherworldly tones of pink and yellow, emphasising the physical articulation of Mosca's undertaking in walking Italy's mountainous regions at the end of summer. She prepared for each of her seven walks by attaching an individual sheet of 4 x 5" large-format colour film over her heart. Throughout the course of her journeys the film recorded impressions of the environment, and also the affects of Mosca's own breath, sweat, and body temperature. The walks were of varying lengths between two and six hours and different routes were selected, invariably impacting the extent to which the film was marked. Despite the figurative absence, there is still the implicit presence of Mosca as she herself relates to the physicality of making each work. The images remain untitled with the exception of an action noted in parenthesis, confirming the importance of the gesture itself.

Walking amongst the natural landscape, as Thoreau observed, enables the experience of our wildest humanity. Italy's Abruzzo region, where Mosca conducted her walks, is significantly personal. The landscape had observed the birth of her father, and she herself had visited previously at different stages throughout her life. Since, a significant earthquake that destroyed the L'Aquila town centre has altered the area. The erasure of the town resonates through the images of *Untitled Walks* and their aim 'to talk about memory, or the fracturing of memory, like glimpses of what is there and what has passed.'<sup>10</sup> This fracturing also informs the idea of the loss of identity for the duration of a walk, as there is freedom in 'not being anyone'<sup>11</sup>. The walker is left to attend to his or her own thoughts and ideas. Formless gestures of absence and presence substantiating the view 'a slow approach to landscapes [...] gradually renders them familiar.'<sup>12</sup>

There is a peaceful rhythm attached to walking. Breathing is regulated, and the mind distracted. The body is connected to the earth and landscape that surrounds it. Emily Brontë would only *walk where my own nature would be leading: / It vexes me to choose another guide...*<sup>13</sup> and when the 'present moment is fraught with tangled woods'<sup>14</sup> there is indeed much comfort to be found in self-reliance and the repeated, steady movement afforded by walking. Footsteps made to measure the beating of the heart.





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<sup>1</sup> Herzog, Werner. *Of Walking in Ice*. Translated by Martje Herzog and Alan Greenberg. New York: Tantam Press, 1980, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Gros, Frédéric. *A Philosophy of Walking*. Translated by John Howe. London: Verso, 2014, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Seven walks were conducted, however only five of the resulting photographs were exhibited as a part of *Useless Gestures*, Galerie Pompom, Sydney, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Herzog, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Thoreau, Henry David. *Walking*. June 1, 1862. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/06/walking/304674/>.

<sup>6</sup> Herzog, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Fasher, Kim. Kim Fasher in conversation with artist Sarah Mosca. [http://tryhardmagazine.com/interview\\_sarah\\_mosca\\_kim\\_fasher](http://tryhardmagazine.com/interview_sarah_mosca_kim_fasher).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Gros, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Brontë, Emily. 'Stanzas.' In *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, edited by Arthur Thomas Quilter-Couch. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1922.

<sup>14</sup> Kerouac, Jack. *Big Sur*. New York: Penguin, 1992, p. 38.

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