

# MAG

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Elemental Photography  
By Monika Burman

Distilling our environment invariably leads us back the same 4 elements: earth, air, fire, and water. In his new series, "Inox Elements", Nicolas Ruel presents a collection of photographs expressing these elements in the graceful sweep of Indian silk, the vast azure of the Maldives, the sunburned heat of the desert, and the abundant detail of mineral textures.

Referencing the very genesis of photography and the daguerreotype, Ruel prints his photographs on sheets of stainless steel ("inox" in French), a painstaking process that has taken much time to perfect. The steel material gives his work a brilliant dimensionality, a transformative light that breaks across the facade leading the eye in all directions. The steel is a living surface carrying the image like a tattoo, imparting its depth and lustre, while gaining colour and character.

The Air images were shot in India and Nepal, capturing both the energy and calm of the unseen atmosphere. In images of folding, draping silk saris (Indian dresses), air seems to move in a frenzied counterpoint to the rhythmic dance of the women. With colours bleeding from one to the next, hit with streaks of gold and shimmer, the images evoke the electric scent of incense and spice in the air. Ruel's images from Nepal present diffuse colours and serene white, capturing the slow-motion parade of monks and worshippers. Their deliberate steps are a blurred wash through the air and these quiet contemplative moments are captured.

The Earth images were also shot in India and Nepal. These images are a microscopic investigation into nature's wealth of texture, with close-ups of rocks, stones, and minerals that seem like aerial landscapes of interconnected waterways, or the dense tangle of sinew and muscle. This grouping also includes close-ups of eroded and corroded surfaces, so rich with the detail of chemically induced colour and timeworn deterioration, that they could be mistaken for paintings.

The Fire grouping takes us to the desert, where images of dunes bring the red-orange-yellow glow of the sun. There are sharp ridges, smooth undulations, crawling patterns made by wind and the dense dark of shadow that define the scenery. It's a place where the scale is vast and the sand is as infinite as the sky.

In the Water grouping we find the similarly vast and infinite sea. These images were shot aerially over the Maldives islands in the Indian Ocean. The distance from the camera in the sky and the sea below allows for myriad shades of blue to appear. Reefs, lagoons and sandbars that drop off into the ultramarine of the ocean create an irregular spotted pattern through many of the images. In other images, a closer view of the sea frothing against the reef and rolling up to the white sand shore of a remote island look like amoebas under the microscope ("Cyclopes"), or the edge of the earth ("Orbit").

Ruel's exotic images tour through the classic concept of the four elements that make up our physical surroundings. Each grouping of photographs is as distinct as each of earth, air, fire and water, while remaining interconnected by the human experience of them all.

Inox Elements by Nicolas Ruel  
April 26 – May 20, 2007, Thompson Landry Gallery, [www.thompsonlandry.com](http://www.thompsonlandry.com)  
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We thank MAG's media partner. Tune in to toronto [living] for additional coverage of this exhibition and watch the video segment streaming at [www.massartguide.com](http://www.massartguide.com).



