

HOW WE SEE IS HOW WE LIVE

I hope that you will not assume that what I share with you here has any real significance of being more than what it is. I would not wish to give you the impression that I somehow know more than I do. The truth is that I only have these few moments to share these thoughts before you move on to something else. So I hope you will allow me a little more of your time in suggesting how your imagery, and the form it takes, might embrace a greater option for you to express it.

Now since I know very little of what could make your images better, I can only offer you what I use to approach my own. You see, I believe that there is a plane of focus that each of us exists upon. Sometimes it is not easy to see. It can be as sharp as a blade, slicing through such things as fear and denial, severing and revealing various forms of meaning and purpose. Yet all things sharp are not meant to be in focus. Clarity is a choice. That which blurs perception often permits us to see more clearly those details that exist on the edge of memory, where focus is not determined by precision but by the perceptions they create. There amidst these levels of exposure, a visual spectrum of understanding exists based upon the understanding the artist has of themselves.

You may be wondering what I am trying to say. Well, let's look at this way. Maybe you are in a class, your eyes are still bright with the potential you have found through the lens. You are looking at web sites in search of someone who speaks your language. Someone who has created something that touches you deeply, something that is close to what you own. This is a great and significant act you are creating and you should not take it for granted. Your inquisitiveness is of vital importance, it is helping you to build your own unique understanding. It is what will lead you to what you are meant to discover and allow you the possibility of seeing what only you may create. For this, your truth is essential. Not the one you were taught, or the one you borrowed out of fear, but the one that speaks directly to who you are. By the way, this is not an easy thing to do. Just remember not to confuse yourself with others, not to make art that looks like art. What you already possess is far more important than that.

You see, we take much of this for granted and over time many become skeptical of their seeing process and grow weary. When this happens some begin to compare their creativity to those around them, they obsess over the business that surrounds the art. They wonder why certain works are published, why others are solely exhibited, why everyone seems to be copying everyone else. In time, some begin to doubt the significance of their own work. They become disillusioned and often bitter. Soon they do far less of what they once loved most. This is hard to avoid for some but not for all, and this should not deter you or allow you to make excuses. Any image is just another form of the that person, and since there is no one else like you, how will we know what you have to teach us if you have nothing more to learn?

All I can say is that I believe you have the potential to understand this. You have the chance to be aware of the complexities that often allow us to believe in our own limitations. Your camera is uniquely poised to help you with this, but it will all depend in how you hold it and I cannot tell you how to do this, but I will share with you what holding it close has meant to me.

It has explained to me in detail that we reflect ourselves in everything. That life lives us and we live our perceptions of it. That who we are and what we are is reflected in every shape that defines our significance. It is not just in what we see, but in how we see anything that creates meaning and depth. It has taught me to be courageous, something not always stressed in schools. To believe in what is uniquely mine, and how crucial it is to add myself to whatever I come into contact with for learning to take place. It has kindly taken my hand, steered me into mysteries, and has patiently taught me that meaning has its own place in each of us. These lessons have taught me not to relinquish myself to anything, but to believe in eyes like yours. Eyes capable of seeing themselves so that others may do the same. This is all I really care about, all that really matters to me.

So I will offer you these suggestions, not for the purpose of achieving an objective, but by contributing something that may help you understand your interest in seeing, and what is necessary to respect its uniqueness.

DEPTH & DISTANCE

What ultimately matters is the distance that separates you from yourself, from the things you wish to see, and from the description of your ideas. It sounds naive, but distance creates dismissal. Over time it amasses a tremendous amount of strength that provides common excuses for making one less aware. It restricts intimacy, safeguards the vulnerable, and ultimately denies what is desired most by others, depth. In so many ways it often assumes untested assumptions, keeping one removed from emotion and purpose. Before you know it, it creates a safe and predictable distance from anything, from subject and meaning, from depth and flexibility. Here is where distance denies freedom, where walls are conceived to separate you from people or experience, and ultimately from what you may learn from any of them. Any wall, no matter how strong it may be, denies access to either side.

- SUGGESTION -

Try measuring the distances you keep. See if there is some correlation between why they exist, and what they have prevented from happening. There is no mystery that does not require a part of you to unfold. For this, change is necessary in choosing ones direction, and choice can only be embraced by observing the enduring elements of experience. So, test the currents of experience that flow in and around you. If you do, you will find that any of them will lead you to what is most important for you to exist. It is difficult to embrace anything if everything is kept at a distance.

P A T I E N C E

There is nothing worse than thinking that you are not suppose to be where you are. It creates a certain anxiety, a sense of hopelessness, that you are not getting what you were meant to have, or missing out on what others find so easy to achieve. For some, it forces us to copy the well worn path of acceptability. Because of this, many of us became impatient from the lack of patience shown us by others. We speed up our existence so as not to be left behind, never seeing what was significant about being where we were. And what was once a personal sense of time becomes a converted sense of acceptance, that time should be the same for us all. From this our life forms an illusion in how we assume outcomes and demand achievements. Believe me, you are not alone in this. It has never really been a topic of study for most, or an element of technique.

Patience is a gift you must allow yourself.

- SUGGESTION -

Know that patience does not demand product, but process. It permits reflection upon those surfaces that require your understanding to refine their meaning. It forms upon the edges that others miss. It allows time to sustain oneself beyond learned limitations, and clearly defines the knowledge necessary to see. In this, patience allows you to learn from anything and everyone. And as in anything, do not assume that it will give you any more than what you are willing to give.

K N O W L E D G E

Here is where we fail most, by not recognizing the rudimentary brilliance we all possess. Your knowledge, regardless of intelligence, is an essential element of discovery. It has a truth that is not defined by what is right or wrong, but by what is felt and acknowledged in feeling and seeing. To devalue ones knowledge eliminates the necessary component in understanding how and why we approach anything. Its existence depends on adding to it, in nurturing its ability of exposing itself to its self, and in the possibilities of sharing that with others. It is one unit amongst many that when used sets life into motion, allows things to happen and permits ownership of a world that cannot function without you.

- SUGGESTION -

Try not to limit yourself to what is comfortable and easy. Knowledge cannot afford a mind that is not pliable enough to understand change. Change allows permission, and your knowledge will have greater access to your world if you give it the room it needs to grow and the respect it deserves when it stands before the unknown. The first time you do not see the importance of its value will be the beginning of seeing less. If you value your knowledge and its importance to your vision you will not deny others theirs.

L I S T E N I N G

I do not believe we listen very well and since listening is such a vital part of seeing, we often do not consider it as a descriptive tool. Why? For a lot of reasons. Most of them circulate around believing that absolutes exist. But if you are careful, you can hear the sounds of things less audible. It comes off the surface of experience, it echoes off faces, booms off structures, and resonates from vast distances of belief. If one listens carefully, you can hear it shout in what we create and how it whispers and pleads in the details of expression. Here, there is room for taking in more of what's beyond the visible spectrum. With it you will hear voices that many more will deny, you will define meaning, sense inspiration and see that ultimately limitations do not exist. If you listen carefully enough you will be able to interpret these voices. You will speak upon their behalf of secrets and sorrows, of loss and value. Those voices that have often stood in the shadows may now have a chance to step into a brighter light. If you permit this for yourself, you will allow it for the rest of us as well.

- SUGGESTION -

Try slowing down, try to be still. See why you often lose yourself when you become frustrated or disinterested in what is in and around you. Be careful, because it is usually then when you listen less to what you think is most important. Here you begin to sense little of what you had in mind and what you had hoped to see. Soon you begin to find less of a reason to carry your camera or to be caught up in the flow of inspiration. Art is not easy and creation is harder still. Listening requires a tremendous amount of commitment, and it takes great care and patience to listen well. So what should you be listening for? The voice of reason, the sound of your own unique self, those details that locate your position and the arc of its movement. To do this is to simply become familiar with the sound of your own thoughts.

F E A R

Fear does not always lead to failure, if you are careful. At times it may be the best resource for understanding why it exists. Really. Fear reveals assumptions. It defines how we compare, believe, and see ourselves in relationship to others. It is a choice in how much we are willing to accept our thoughts about its nature. You see, most of us were introduced to fear because we learned failing first. For many, we would define our self worth in front of those who would praise or dismiss us. We would weigh their judgment of our abilities and then process our own, thinking only as far as we were allowed. Soon we began to misinterpret our strengths, outthink our sensitivity, and undervalue the worth of our thoughts. Fear's job has always been to separate you from yourself. Your job is to bring together those things that should have never been separated from you.

- SUGGESTION -

Try not to be afraid of fear. Rather, be more afraid of not knowing why it exists, and how it affects you. Use it as it has always used you, by not respecting how it held its sense of your form, by understanding its shape, and how it was created. It can be made into a useful tool if you are willing to understand what it has been trying to teach you. And what might that be? That it has always been a product of your mind, a doorway that must be passed through in order to go further. Here is where your form comes into play. Where it is possible to envision such things that have stood in your way. From this, there is no lack of subject matter, no limit to the images

that might free you from its presence. But just know this, that fearless images make others fearful. Most will not wish to follow you into a deeper darkness than their own. They will see it as threatening, a reminder of issues they have put off themselves. Do not assume who may follow you, rather see your chance to lead yourself where only you may go. It is not the audience, but your attention that will take you further.

FLEXIBILITY

Without a doubt, the majority of us usually need a measure of certainty to do just about anything.

We expect a level of achievement that assumes success when we take a class, pay for a workshop, or participate in a portfolio review. We want to hear what we are doing right, be certain that it is leading somewhere, and be seen as an equal to others. So I will say this at the risk of alienating you now, I believe our preoccupation with certainty makes us inflexible. Hmm, yes. I am sorry if I have offended you, but there are very few things that are certain about anything including art, and I find that what usually gets in the way is our certainties about it. In doing so we limit our attention to whom and where we believe answers should exist. We rely on others accounts of achievement and notoriety to pave a path of certainty for ourselves, never taking into account that the best answers are to the best questions you are able to ask yourself.

- SUGGESTION -

There is nothing more rigid than a mind inflexible to change. Rules of certainty find comfort in themselves, but when freedom is allowed in places once cordoned off from expression, the perfectionist stumbles, the formula fails, and old structures shift. There amongst a more pliable sense of wonder, an adjustable response is created that does not answer to theory but practice in initiating a new response to old understandings. For this, perfection is not the answer that certainty proposes, but rather flexibility creates the catalyst necessary to let things happen so that other things may begin.

LANGUAGE

This is a hard one, because much of our visual language is fashioned after others. It was assembled by teacher and friend alike, by what we believe in and what we hate. So much of it was created by how we thought we should see and in turn, how we would then be seen. A visible language often manifests misunderstandings for the simple reason that it is indiscernible to those who cannot read it. Why is that? Well let me ask you, do you remember at any one point in school when you were tested on personal courage? You see a visual language depends on how courageous you are to make what is unseen visible. This is not easy as it means taking a chance on the way you visually pronounce yourself and how you create that perceptible threshold for others to see you. I believe it is one of the most difficult things to learn and the greatest solitary act to perform.

- SUGGESTION -

Do not wait to see what you need to do this. You already have everything necessary to make it happen. Merely unpack those things that belong to you, those memories you've carried for so long. Practice pronouncing them visually. Optically announce their relationship to you, where they fit in your personal cosmology, your sense of wonder. If you practice this to any degree, you will sense a shift in value in what you will visually have to say.

T R U T H

No one can lead you to this. If you believe they can, you will more than likely discover their truth rather than your own. Your truth is so much more crucial to understand and that it is why it is so difficult to approach at times. Yet in it lies those clues that make up the way you see, the way you hold what is essential, the fragile and the rough, and the complexities of how you weave your understanding into them. These are what make up an artist's voice and how their origins can be traced to every detail that formed them. Here lies are tangled in truth, weaknesses are imagined as strengths, and opposites attract with such force that they spin off and reform your reality. The question is this reality and how it may be of use to you in understanding it. This takes practice to become familiarized with in how your truth responds when it is questioned. For some it quickly runs and hides, makes excuses or changes shape. It is often threatened when approached, not for what it holds, but by not being consulted about its state of being. Like any of us, we know less of what little we use.

- SUGGESTION -

So here is where you can approach an old issue. If not, you will risk the same corners you normally find yourself in when asking difficult questions that provide more doubt than answers. It all has to do with something that many of us have a hard time with, and that is being honest.

Really, honesty. If ever I see students suffer the most it is often in what they become when trying to achieve what others demand of them. They live other peoples lives, believe in others beliefs, and eventually convince themselves that someone else knows what is best for them. Honesty is an invitation to do something different. It proposes that you have a conversation with yourself. It helps you with answers that we often keep hidden. It allows you to asses the size and shape of fear, permits you to measure your distance from where you are and where you want to be. If you are honest you will see how it carefully holds your knowledge, and affords you the flexibility to speak your own language. Your truth lies in this honesty and in how it permits you to be kind enough to yourself in listening to what you actually sound like. The only thing truth really needs to be honest is patience. Do this and you will have more of it to work with.

B E L I E F

In the end, belief is only as strong as the believer. It can only function when there is enough of it to create more. It can only breathe in what your presence allows. Belief is that lone and fragile filament that illuminates everything else. Without it there is little that can be done to motivate or inspire, little to be seen of energy or purpose. It is the one true thing we overlook most that restricts sight all together. But with it, belief sustains us. It makes our solitude not a curse but an ally in understanding the spaces we occupy. It adds to voice and patience, refines our focus and creates a depth of field like no other. Belief in itself is a belief in self, and in the wonder that still exists around us. It happens if you have not lost yours, if you have not let it get mangled in the elements of doubt. To approach it you will have to be aware of what it requires of you to sustain its presence. Do not take yourself for granted. Do this to anything, and that thing dies. Do it to belief, and you lose a part of yourself that is never easy to recover.

- SUGGESTION -

All I can say is to see more where there is little, and be more where there is less. Belief is essential for belief to occur and you are far more capable of knowing more than what I have written here.

I thank you for your patience in reading these suggestions. What is really important is not knowing everything, but in knowing those things that can contribute to knowing more.

A S S I G N M E N T

Now some of you may be thinking, ok all this may sound good but how do I actually put it into practice. Ultimately this is a part of a process that is best discovered over time, but here is a suggestion that you may wish to consider.

WHAT YOU FEEL MOST STRONGLY ABOUT

Let's start here. You can either find an image you discovered somewhere or you can go out and photograph something that personally represents this. It can be of anything, but it will mean more if you really think about it for awhile. Now place this image into Photoshop. This will be your background layer and we will build on it from here.

HOW ONE SEES ONESELF

Ok, next find an image that best defines how you interpret yourself. It can be of anything. Really, but be honest. Find something that reflects your perception, your states of being, or that part of yourself that is seldom seen by you or others. Place this as layer one directly over the other.

PROCESS

Now what I would like you to do is to take your opacity tool and slowly fade your image upon the other. Be patient, go slow, and you will see something emerge that the world has yet to understand. It is this that holds the greatest interpretive power you can own. It is proof that there is still

much more for you to see.

We can talk about this if you feel it is something you may want to share . . .

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