

## **Man vs. Nature**

I was born and raised in Philadelphia, just outside of Center City in the Roxborough and Andorra neighborhoods. It wasn't until I was in college that my family moved to Center City. I've been living in Center City for many years now, which is the reason why I became so interested in street photography in the first place. I think the city is a great place to live because you are surrounded by society, other people, faces, places, and things to do. However, I find that living in a city can become a bit challenging or too constricting on your personal freedoms. When I wake up in the morning, I am surrounded by tall skyscrapers, cars, traffic signals, crosswalks, paved roads, and lots of modern stuff such as technology, news headlines on billboards, and mostly just human-made things. I believe that because there are fewer natural things, it goes against how I believe humans are naturally designed to thrive.

## **Natural World**

I go for a walk along the Schuylkill River Trail every single morning to start my day. I find that this is the best place to be first thing in the morning because when I head out my door, I feel confined to some sort of rat maze. However, the open spaces that the trail provides allow my thoughts to become clearer, I feel better, more powerful, happier, and just overall believe that starting the day away from the hustle and bustle of a city is the best way to live. By visiting an elevated space such as the cliffs and pavilions behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art, it allows me to look out towards the horizon, nature, the river, waterfalls, trees, and green spaces. When I look out towards these beautiful natural things, I feel extremely grateful and powerful. It feels as if I can go beyond the horizon, conquer anything, and reach my fullest potential and thrive creatively. I highly suggest if you are a local here in Philadelphia to check out this spot behind the museum and just give it a look.

Also, if you keep walking towards Boathouse Row and Kelly Drive, if you cross the street, there is a Lemon Hill Trailhead. There, you can walk on a dirt path, surrounded by trees, that reminds me of the Wissahickon. It's just a stone's throw

away from Center City, and I'm surprised I hadn't walked here before. I now incorporate it into my daily walks and find it to be the perfect getaway from city life. Also, it looks like we're getting a new park at Penn's Landing and some sort of beach or public pool that will open up near 30th St. station. The future looks bright for Philadelphia's natural spaces! Thank God for William Penn and his design of keeping some of these parks and nature amongst the city.

## **Material World**

I find that maybe in a city, the goal is to acquire as much money as possible to then buy material things such as a nice car to drive on the roads. My thought is, your human body, your feet, legs, and physical strength is where the real wealth is. Ultimately, having good health is wealth. I'd much rather walk around the city than be stuck in traffic in some loser car. Maybe people who buy really expensive and fancy cars are just insecure and need some possession to mask this feeling. I'd say, it probably takes more courage to drive a simple, beat-up car because you recognize that these material things and possessions actually don't matter whatsoever. They are merely a functional tool for you to get from point A to point B. The greatest thing about Philadelphia is the fact that you can walk everywhere. Yes, we have a public transportation system with SEPTA, subways, buses, and even the 30th Street Station with our Amtrak trains, but walking is supreme.

*When you move your body along, the day feels long.*

When you are still, time flies by. Anytime I'm in a vehicle, I can feel my body start to shut down, I yawn, become tired, and irritated. Even if I'm sitting down inside, at a computer, looking at a TV, I feel my body shut down and my power slowly depletes. This is why I'm such a big advocate for walking, being outside, and generally living a physical life. I believe the ultimate antidote to this modern world is to be physical.

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## Seek Power

I believe it's the duty of every man to be strong. I know that when I overcome a little bit of friction, tension, or difficulty, such as lifting the weight of my body up above a pull-up bar, I experience a blissful sensation. With a little bit of pain, you feel a sense of gain and strength that becomes pure power and happiness. Seeking power and physical strength is the ultimate joy in life. This feeling of power through overcoming physical challenges is ultimately what makes me happiest in life.

Real, raw power, is physical strength within your body. Fake, superfluous power is money, fame, and influence.

Consider the scene from Aladdin where he discovers the magic lantern. When he enters the Cave of Wonders, he can choose to either acquire material wealth by taking the treasures, gold, and diamonds, and be trapped in the cave forever, or he can choose to take the magic lantern and acquire ultimate knowledge and power, the genie in the bottle. Perhaps, like Aladdin, we should also seek knowledge and power over material things and modern notions of success or wealth.

*Perhaps power and strength is happiness?*

In terms of photography, we must remember its physical nature. The stronger you become, the more you can walk, the more photographs you'll make.

My theory is that the stronger you become, the stronger your artwork or photographs will be. We should remember that first and foremost, photography is a physical pleasure, and requires you to be active and physical in the open world. The stronger I become, the longer I can walk, and in turn, the more photographs I can create.

In this modern world, we have machines that can overpower humans, paved roads, and an abundance of material things, yet there are not many realms for men to exert physical power. Perhaps we can conquer within the realm of art and street photography by becoming stronger physically and making stronger artwork.

## **National Pride**

When I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Zambia, Africa, I realized why the structure of their society thrived. There was a hierarchy between God, tribe, and land. Or, God, family, and land. In the village, everyone had a role to play. Women came home in the morning with babies on their backs and firewood on their heads. Men built homes and churches. Boys made bricks with sand and mud. Girls swept the floors and prepared the food for the day. The structure and roles that everyone played in the village made sense to me.

My thoughts about Christianity are that it's beneficial for promoting and building families. Monogamy is good and has worked for a very long time. Now, I see trends towards polygamy and other new-age ideas. In the village, families were extremely large, with most couples having around ten children each. When you consider these rural villages and places in Africa, you might think of them as impoverished or poor because they do not have all the modern amenities and luxurious items that we have in the West. My belief is that real wealth is family. It's the abundance of family members, people united under one god, one nation, thriving together.

## **Identity**

When I look around this modern world, it's hard to find a male role model worth aspiring to be like. However, I am reminded of my time in Catholic school from pre-K to grade 8, where I learned all about the teachings and life of Jesus. I believe that most of his virtues of love and peace are wise to adopt; however, I'm reminded of the story of him cleansing the temple with a whip in Jerusalem. I appreciate this dichotomy between peace and chaos because it shows that Jesus was not only a peacemaker, but also not afraid to use aggression. Let's be more like Jesus, a peaceful rebel.

I'm grateful for my childhood and the experiences that taught me to love and take pride in my nation. Every morning before class began, we collectively said the Pledge of Allegiance:

*"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."*

When I consider identity, it makes more sense to simply identify with your nation instead of race. Race becomes something that merely divides people with silly terms such as "black" or "white," but I see the people of the USA as the American Race, the American people, united under one nation.

In America, there are trends towards individualism, but these notions often become misconstrued by following trends, purchasing things, indulging in consumerism, and embracing the latest fashion. The more you participate in these trends, the less of an individual you become. Individualism almost transforms into a form of collectivism. Maybe what you don't do, don't say, and don't consume is more important to consider. My belief is that what you don't do is who you truly are.

Perhaps photography is the ultimate way to express yourself and to become an individual. I think about framing and how what you decide to exclude from the frame is more important than what you include. The photographs become an extension of my identity, or a reflection of my soul as I affirm life with each new photograph I make. Maybe going forward we can strive to become authentic individuals through creating more than we consume.

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## **Be a Child**

During recess, we would play in the grass in the open space outside of school. I remember in kindergarten we would play this game where the girls collected rocks and hid them in the corner, but all the boys ran around and made strategies to acquire the rocks and take them from the girls. Maybe at the end of the day, finding a wife and making a family is merely a prize for men that defeat the boss battle, get the diamond, and save the princess like in Super Mario Bros. The great thing about many RPG video games like Cyberpunk is that you can choose the way you would like to play, and create your own ending to the story through the decisions that you

make along the journey. Everyone doesn't have to play the video game the same way, and we have the freedom to choose our outcomes by the decisions that we make.

When I was a kid I spent so much time in the woods, building forts with sticks, bridges with stones, and exploring the unknown. Maybe as artists, we must return to this childlike state, tinkering with the world around us, and creating something from nothing. By returning to day one each day and forgetting everything you think you know, you fuel your lust for life through endless curiosity.

## **Embrace Change**

Every day is new when you set your body in motion without preconceived notions. You can walk the same mundane lane every single day, but still find something new to uplift in a photograph. When I consider photography, it is merely painting with light. The way that light etches details around objects, giving shape and form to people, faces, and places, the nuances and gradual change of light over time, is something that we embrace as photographers. This means you can never make the same photograph twice. Instead of going out there on the hunt for the next best picture, I know that my next picture is my best picture. I know this because, like water, ever-flowing, photography is merely a journey, a stream of becoming. It's a process of embracing chaos, change, and the flows of everyday life.

I believe art is the answer to life's big question, "Why?" When I consider art, and specifically photography, it's the most life-affirming practice that gives my life a deeper meaning. I believe the greatest aspect of photography is its accessibility. Everyone has a smartphone, and a camera in their pocket these days. I find that everyone is looking for some way to meditate, or disconnect from this modern world, especially with the advent of social media and technology. My thought is, everyone and anyone can become a street photographer, by simply making pictures of your everyday life. Just treat photography like a personal diary.

Street photography is this Zen-like meditative practice that allows me to exist fully in the moment. It's unlike any other practice of making art that is out there because of its physical nature. By moving my body through the world, photographing, I exist outside the passage of time. We have a past, and a future, but with the camera in

hand, none of this matters. You completely immerse yourself in life, becoming closer and closer to what it means to be human. My ultimate goal as an artist is to produce more than I consume, and to uplift the human experience to heights that have never been reached or seen before. The beauty of street photography is that we can achieve this, while in a state of bliss, as we simply exist and go about our everyday lives. Find beauty in the mundane, and create your own game to play. There are no rules, guidelines, or definitions that encompass what street photography is. Just go out there like a child and embrace the spirit of play.

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### **Why Live Forever?**

Something that inspires me to go out there and create every day is my inevitable fate, death. Why would one seek to live forever? Our fate of death is what makes life, and the fleeting moments so beautiful. I personally like treating each day as a mini lifetime. Every morning is a mini birth, and each night before I sleep is a mini death. By embracing this mindset, I only focus on things that truly matter to me, and give all of my attention towards the production of art, time with family, and becoming stronger. By shaping my view of life this way, I become insanely grateful for simple things such as the sun, grass-fed beef, and my camera.

**Maybe I can't live forever, but at least I can make photographs.**