

Street Photography 101

Let's take it back to the basics. Today I would like to share with you some thoughts I have about street photography that I have learned from a decade of practice.

The Camera is a Passport

Your camera is the excuse to see the world. Think of your camera as the key that will unlock the many doors, stories, and places that you will find along your way through life. When you head out with your camera, remain in a curious and childlike state. Treat your daily commute as a simple way to see if anything is going on in your town. You are just wondering what is out there, what is happening, remaining detached from the outcome, like a tourist in your hometown.

Be a Tourist

A tourist is always excited and curious. I know that when I travel to a new place, I wake up with my eyes wide open before the sunrise, eager to explore. A wise approach to daily street photography practice is to pretend as though you are a tourist, despite walking through familiar territory. Slow down more, appreciate the details, read the signs, visit the parks, and live each day like it's your first day exploring with a camera.

No Preconceived Notions

When practicing street photography, it is very important to hold no preconceived notions. What this means is, you do not make any effort to research locations, weather patterns, landmarks, events, and merely go with the flow. Allow your intuition to guide you through life and embrace the unknown with open arms.

The World is a Canvas

The beauty of street photography lies in the fact that the world is our canvas. The street becomes a stage where the actors, or strangers, dance upon the concrete. As the photographer, or the director of the drama, we articulate the spontaneous chaos that converges on a street corner. These candid and multifaceted complexities of everyday life become our subject that we use to tell the story of the street.

Mind, Body, and Soul Photography

Practicing street photography requires the photographer to be grounded in the now. When I am on the street, I enter a zen, meditative state of recognizing both the patterns in nature and human behavior. I make sure to stay fasted without food in my stomach, so that when I am making photographs, I remain laser focused with a clear connection between my mind and my body. I believe this helps me tap into my god-like intuition, or my gut. The photographs not only are a depiction of the life in front of me, but they turn inwards as a reflection of my soul.

Hand-Eye Coordination

The camera is an extension of your eye and body. I believe you must have strong hand eye coordination to practice street photography as it requires you to be swift, while observing, and raising the camera to press the shutter. I practice my hand-eye coordination skills with a Japanese Kendama skill toy. I believe the Kendama enhances my camera operation skills as I use my camera on a wrist strap. Most of the time while I am photographing, I am not even looking at the LCD screen, and merely making snapshots through my intuition. My compositions are loose, yet connected to my vision as I have a strong hand-eye coordination.

The Name of the Game is in the Mundane

Street photography requires you to embrace the seemingly banal, boring, or the mundane. As photographers, we thrive amongst the small details and moments in life that otherwise go unnoticed. When you recognize the beauty in the mundane, you will become empowered to walk the same lane every single day, and still be able to find something to uplift in a photograph.

Sharp Visual Acuity

Strong photographers have sharp visual acuity. When we're on the street, we must make sure to observe the world in front of us with laser focus. This means that we are always observing the details, fleeting moments, and everything in between. Our clear vision, pattern recognition, and laser focus is what determines the output of our photographs.

Pattern Recognition

One of the most critical attributes that a street photographer should possess is pattern recognition. Recognize the patterns in both nature and human behavior. Watch the feet of people as they dance upon the street. Observe the light and the way that it casts upon the sidewalk at certain times of the day. Look ahead of you and anticipate moments as they come your way. Become in tune with the rhythm and the beat of the street.

Repetition and Practice

Walk the street on repeat. The more I walk every single day, the more in tune I become with the street itself. By practicing daily, it gives me more opportunities to play and to experiment. When I'm on the street, I make sure to follow a similar route because this increases the chances of me finding something. When I follow the same route for an extended period of time, whether it be one week, one month, or even one year, I learn the nuances of each corner at every time of the day and can anticipate the various patterns that occur.

Composition is Intuition

Compositions are made best when followed through with your intuition. If you overthink a composition, line things up perfectly, and do too much planning, the composition will become too contrived and boring. The looser you are with your composition, the more intriguing it becomes. Even in some of my strongest compositions, where things line up with ease, I am merely responding to the life in front of me through my gut instinct. Less thinking, more shooting.

An Instant Sketch of Life

A photograph is an instant sketch of life. Making pictures is the quickest way to make something from nothing. We draw upon life through the medium, depicting what we observe in a fraction of a second. Don't treat each picture like it's some sort of grand masterpiece, but use your photography as a form of practice. Each day you are chipping away at life and making sketches out of it.

Imperfection is Perfection

Nothing is perfect. You're not perfect, your photographs aren't perfect, and life surely is not perfect. Embrace imperfection on the street. I believe when you put too much thought into the process of making a photograph, they almost become too perfect. Allow your frames to tilt, subjects, to overlap, and break the conventional rules people often follow. Imperfection is perfection.

Uplift the Discarded

Nothing last forever. Embrace the impermanent nature of life and photograph things that are left behind. Observe the trash, textures on the walls, wrinkles on faces, and the fleeting moments. Everything is temporary, and I believe that highlighting the transient nature of life can unlock creative potential for your street photography.

Personal Diary

Treat your photography as a personal diary. It's a way to remember the day, and take notes along the way. Photograph your family, friends, make self portraits, and uplift your personal life. You don't have to seek any extravagant subject matter, locations, or themes to photograph. Make a body of work from your hometown, your backyard, and champion the mundane nature of your everyday life.

Universal Language

Like dance and music, photography is a universal language that transcends language and cultural differences. A photograph has the power to cross borders and touch the souls of people throughout the entire world. The stories displayed in a photograph can be understood in a multitude of ways, depending on the perspective of the viewer. I also believe in the gift of photography. When I travel to a new place, I always make sure to bring an Instax camera with me, and gift prints to strangers that I meet along the way. If I am unable to communicate with people, linguistically, I can always use my superpower, photography.

Champion Humanity

I believe we should make photographs that uplift humanity. Look at people on the street as champions or heroes. When you photograph life, hold it up high and elevate the experience of what it means to be human.

Detach from the Outcome

Embrace the autotelic approach to making photographs. Autotelic derives from the Greek words, "auto" meaning self, and "telos" meaning goal. Make pictures because the process genuinely fulfills you with joy. Imagine if nobody sees your work, would you still photograph? When you let go of the outcome, you're free to

experiment and open up your creative potential. Treat every photograph as a stream of becoming and always recognize that it's onto the next one. Liberate yourself from any external validation and just have fun!

Greatness Requires Time

Great photography requires lots of time. As long as you are consistently making pictures, consider yourself productive. I believe it is important to set realistic expectations for yourself. With street photography, you typically come home with one keeper photo per month or maybe even only one per year. This is completely normal. It's easy to get discouraged while practicing street photography because the results take a lot of time spent out in the real world. Perhaps over the course of 5 to 10 years you will have something. Just keep shooting!

Be Limitless and Courageous

Street photography requires an adventurous and courageous type of person to find success in their practice. Consider the street as an arena, and that when you enter the street, you are opening yourself up to the infinite possibilities that can come your way. You must go head first without any fear. If you see something, make the picture. Don't worry about the repercussions until you make it. Allow confrontation to teach you how to behave on the street. Body language is critical, so carry yourself with confidence. Keep your head up, shoulders, back, and chest open at all times.

The Frontlines of Life

I believe strong photography has nothing to do with photography as a medium. Do you throw yourself onto the frontlines of life? How courageous and curious are you with a camera in hand? Do you wake up each morning with your eyes wide open, wondering what's out there? A great photographer is always in the open world, producing more pictures. Fuel your curiosity through the power of photography and put yourself out there onto the frontlines of life.

Forever an Amateur

Forget everything you think you know and never stop learning on the street. Stay curious like it's always your first day outside with the camera. Return to the amateur spirit every single day and feed your childlike curiosity.

The Art of Street Photography

Street photography is not a genre of photography. It's a philosophy, an ethos, a way of seeing seeing and doing things. What makes street photography so captivating is its ability to articulate the unknown. You are not only a bystander, but an active participant in life itself, making sense of the chaos. The essence of street photography lies in capturing the multifaceted complexities of every day life.

Give Life Meaning

Photography is a method of affirming life itself. It has given me a way to view the world and to appreciate the mundane nature of life. It's a reminder that even in the repetition of daily life, there's beauty and meaning to be found.

Lust for Life

I believe that your photographs are a reflection of your lust for life. My desire to experience more and reach ever greater heights in this human experience is fueled through the medium of photography. The creation of photographs has become my greatest superpower. It allows me to view everything from a fresh pair of eyes every single day, and never stop lusting for more and moving onwards towards the sky!

Painting with Light

What is photography but merely painting with light? Use the power of the sun to your advantage when photographing. Wake up early for sunrise and catch the golden hour during sunset. Observe the looming shadows that are scattered upon the walls and the street. Follow the light, and you will discover beauty.

Curiosity is the Goal

The ultimate goal of a street photographer is to simply remain curious. By making new pictures each day, we create our own world. To be inside is where souls go to die, but when you are outside, photographing, you exist outside the passage of time. Wield the camera as a sword, strike through the heart of chaos, reveal the soul of the street, and create visual order and harmony through the spontaneity of everyday life. Before you head out with your camera, ask yourself this one simple question: *What will reality manifest to be in a photograph?*

Dante Sisofo

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