

## **Art and Meaning**

### **The Power of Photography**

The greatest gift of my life is the camera, or photography. The camera, for me, becomes a passport, a key, or a sword.

The camera allows me to strike through the heart of chaos, revealing the soul of the street, creating visual order and harmony from the spontaneity of everyday life. The camera is a passport that allows me to explore openly, honestly, without preconceived notions of what I will find. For when you set your body in motion, you will be surprised, as there is always something out there when you open your eyes, ears, and feel with your heart. For your heart, courage guides you to press the shutter. And when you unlock each door, using the camera as a key to unlock the multifaceted complexities of life, through new moments, experiences, and meeting people, you fill yourself—soul, body, and mind—with memories.

### **Water is Magnetic**

Every morning, when I wake up, I set my body out into the world, before the sunrise, to the Schuylkill River Trail. I visit this location subconsciously, as there's something in the water that simply draws me in. Perhaps there are echoes of moments, memories of past history, thinking about George Washington and his soldiers, the great men and women who charted these similar paths centuries ago. I remember when I was a young boy, exploring in the woods along the same river, just five miles away from where I walk each morning. I would build forts with sticks, sharpen spears, and build bridges with stones. I would chart my own paths, climb trees, swing from vines, and explore caves that I would find along my way.

There's something about the water, nature, and the way that it calls you in. Perhaps the memories that I have from childhood flow through me with this lust for life and make it so I experience the same walk each day, no matter how mundane, with this feeling of abundance.

## What is Abundance?

I believe abundance is the feeling that you get when you embrace simple pleasures to their fullest potential. For me, this feeling is found in nature. I feel abundant when I surround myself with trees, the breeze, and listen to the birds sing. I feel abundant when I look out towards the horizon, and the sunlight casts its light across the river.

Abundance is recognizing that freedom is a mindset. Perhaps to be free is like being a bird, soaring high in the sky in flight, without clipped wings. Where the birds wake up each morning and sing, dance, and glide through the sky. Maybe we should be like birds too and seek to fly. However, when my body is inside, I feel as though my soul slowly dies. When I'm outside, camera in hand, I exist outside the passage of time. Embracing the moment, the details flow through me with this feeling of abundance.

Maybe slavery is of the mind—finding yourself petty, annoyed, and unhappy with your everyday life and experiences. Whether you're working a job that you do not enjoy or forcing social interactions through attending meetings, Zoom calls, phone calls, emails, and texting people that you do not truly wish to do.

**A slave is someone who complains. A free man, like a child, sings and dances with a warrior spirit.**

## Happiness is a Byproduct of Power

Think of the movie *A Bug's Life*. This was one of the first movies I remember watching as a kid. The main story revolves around Flik, an innovator, an inventor, somebody who is tinkering and trying to speed up the process of harvesting food for the ant colony. The queen of the colony, however, did not find Flik's innovations to be helpful and thought that he was just getting in the way. Flik's journey is followed throughout this story, and he is the first bug to leave the ant colony and explore the nearby cities in search of warrior bugs. He was looking for warriors to fight against the grasshoppers, who had control over the colony. The grasshoppers simply use military force, their physical power, to keep the colony in order, as they harvest the food and provide it for the grasshoppers. However, at the end of the

story, Flick returns to the colony with his warrior bugs, defeating the grasshoppers, and maintaining sovereignty, independence, and liberty for his colony. Once the colony gained power, they flourished and were happy.

Perhaps in modern cities, we too seek this self-governance, sovereignty, and freedom in life. I believe you become free and achieve happiness as a byproduct of power. Power, to me, is physical. Power is strength. Power can also be wealth or capital. Capital provides time. Money is a vehicle to buy more time. The more time that you have doing what you love, the happier you will be. With more power comes more happiness.

However, I don't believe money actually buys happiness. **You couldn't give me \$1,000,000 per year to sit on my butt inside the Comcast tower working for a media corporation. I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't take the job. I don't need it.** I will not succumb to the basic, the boring, and use my time here on this earth doing things that I despise because I know that when I am inside, this is the ultimate denial of life.

### **Assume Comments are Bots**

If you ever look on social media sites, post to them, and consume their media, I'm sure you've scrolled through comment sections once before in your life. I think, in the wake of artificial intelligence, and the more advanced technology becomes, we should remain skeptical about these spaces. **I say, assume that every comment is a bot.** Trust physical, flesh, and experiences that you have through real life or physical life.

Think of Reddit users, with anonymous usernames, making judgments from the comfort of their keyboards. Maybe these Reddit users are the new cockroaches that kind of lurk around in the basement, the dungeons, the shadows, in the dark. **They are merely bots and should be left alone, ignored, as they decay.** This is why I'm a big proponent of carrying a sketchbook with your photographs everywhere you go. When I meet new people, I simply hand them my book, as they flip through my photographs throughout my travels. They always find great joy looking at it this way, and so do I. I like to look at them, looking at my photos with their eyes, smiling, and

asking questions about it in person. **It's much more fulfilling to impact the life of one other person through your art than 1 million people on a screen.** It's quite similar to money; it's just numbers on a screen.

## **Surround Yourself with Beauty**

Every morning, I'm surrounding myself with beauty. I enjoy visiting the elevated view behind the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a beautiful work of architecture, filled with wonderful art, looking out towards the natural landscape. This beautiful space reminds me of Rome.

When I visited Rome last summer, I surrounded myself with the beautiful artwork of Caravaggio, the sculptures of Achilles, Hercules, and other ancient Greek heroes, in Florence. I visited the house of Dante and found myself immersed in the architecture, beauty, and detail of the Catholic churches throughout the streets of Rome. Rome to me feels like my second home. This is why I always return to this view, as it reminds me of this place. This place is so special and beautiful to me, behind the museum of art, as it allows me to fuel my curiosity, surrounded by beauty.

Perhaps the ultimate and apex beauty is found within the Catholic Church or the cathedrals. **Just look at the wonderful biblical stories depicted upon the paintings. Look at the beautiful architecture, the columns, and the structure itself.** When you sit in the center of the Catholic Church, look at the paintings of the angels and God above, you firm your faith through the beauty of art. I believe that art shapes our culture. When I consider the music, the Gregorian chants, the organ, the paintings, sculptures, and architecture that the Catholic Church provides, it elevates the human to the highest height. **The apex of beauty.**

## **I Have Nothing to Prove**

Life is not zero-sum. We can all win and thrive together. **What does it mean to win?**

I believe that success is merely being curious. Success is making sure that you remain curious and courageous each and every day, following your intuition, and embracing the spirit of play. By not taking life so seriously, you enter the ultimate flow state of appreciating the mundane. For the mundane becomes extraordinary, and this is where you find yourself with abundance. It's recognizing that everyone can have the ability to get theirs. Everyone has the ability to make their greatest art, to achieve the capital they deserve, to acquire the time that they need.

I believe that we can go through life as a prison or a playground. I choose paradise. Perhaps others will choose to live within a prison, a box, or hell, for the rest of their lives. For they set themselves up in this position through a mindset of a lemming, simply following the crowd, the masses, going into the slaughterhouse willingly. When you realize that this world, earth, your city, your town, village, is the ultimate paradise, you win.

**Paradise isn't over the rainbow, it's in the storm that occurs before the rainbow appears.** It's embracing danger, chaos, and openly accepting pain and suffering. Paradise is finding yourself enjoying the process, detached from any outcomes. **Paradise is here, right now.** Maybe school merely sets people up to remain in school forever. You look around in modern cities and you see these grown people wearing backpacks, walking into the office with their sketchers on, like they're going for their first day of school. We've become really good at doing labor and tasks, making diagrams, and graphics, analyzing data, like a class project that's never ended. Maybe people enjoy school, but I never did. I always thought school was like a prison, and I needed to be free, outside, giving my life a deeper meaning. I know that there's something greater to strive for than these petty material things, whether cars, clothes, and money. I know that there is something greater to aspire for in this life that has nothing to do with the way that others view you, but it is merely within an attitude. **That attitude is gratitude. When you're grateful for the small things, you will forever sing.**

The greatest thing about photography is that in the last decade, it feels like I've lived a lifetime of 100 years. **I have too many stories, memories, and experiences stored within my mind, my body, and my soul.** These experiences that you have through the medium of photography will fuel you with an endless lust for life and abundance. Hold onto this gift, this superpower, and uplift the human experience to

new heights. **Give life meaning through the creation of sublime art. Go beyond beauty, transcend societal norms, and create a new world in a fraction of a second.**