

The world is a beautiful place

If today was your last day on this earth, where would you start your day?

Personally, I start my day off, surrounded by beauty, along the Schuylkill river, in nature, and find myself on a hike, towards the cliffside, the hill, the mountain top, at an elevated vantage point, looking out at the horizon. When I look out at the horizon, I am reminded that this world is open, and endless to explore. While we have the capability of launching ourselves into space, with the advent of modern technology, discovering the galaxy, and exploring unknown territory, in the universe, I believe that where we are right here, right now, is worth elevating to a new height.

Memento Mori

Remember that you must die.

When I wake up in the morning, I treat it like a mini birth. When I go to sleep at night, it is a mini death. When I go to bed, lay my head on the pillow, I expect that I will not wake up tomorrow. When I wake up in the morning, I am filled with gratitude, for simply being alive. I have the opportunity to give life another go, to propel myself outside of my window, my door, finding inspiration in the mundane, and the simple things, such as sunlight, water, and walking.

I believe that we can experience life, in a state of abundance, through recognizing the infinite potential, that you, the individual, can achieve, in a single day, or a lifetime.

It's wise to consider the day, as an entire lifetime.

If today was your last, would you spend it squandered, indoors, comfortable, simply kicking back, with your shoes off, chilling at the TV or the computer? Probably not...

If this was my last day, I would embrace the spirit of play, living fearlessly, courageously, and embracing danger and chaos openly.

Heaven on Earth

In most religions, there are notions of Heaven and Hell. Hell is somewhere that nobody would ever desire to be.

My thought is, humans create hell for themselves on earth, through distracting themselves with gossip, news, media, negativity, and fear.

*Ogni giorno è una battaglia per la tua mente. **Every day is a battle for your mind.***

What is the slave mind?

In this modern world, the slave is a consumer. The slave believes that each day you are here to simply survive, and not thrive. *Don't you hear that often?* Sometimes when I ask somebody how their day is or how they're doing this morning, they often say, "it's just another day, just living my life, just surviving." To be honest, I believe that these people are in hell and the hell is in their mind. Maybe some people will be stuck there, always simply *just getting by*.

Think of Saint Jerome, hunched over, by his book, inside, with his body in decay, depicted in the painting by Caravaggio. *Why is he here, depicted this way?* He is seeking that afterlife, that next life, or paradise. We must go beyond this yearning of an afterlife and become the next warrior monks, the new man, the creator of paradise, here on earth.

When I was in Florence, I remember viewing the sculpture that depicts the death of Achilles. Achilles, carried in the arms of Ajax, so gracefully, almost beautifully, a beautiful death. The strength, courage, and fearlessness that Achilles must've had, is inspiring. When you see his physical body, the grand physique of the demigod, the hero, Achilles, as a sculpture, it gives the person viewing this work, the permission, to go beyond the self.

I seek to thrive, and go beyond this basic slave mind.

We can create heaven or paradise, here on earth. We create paradise through the actions that we make, the things that we choose to do, and more importantly what we choose not to do, ultimately determines our experience and every day life. I choose to surround myself with beauty, through simple acts of kindness, gratitude, and overcoming obstacles, through weightlifting, long hikes, climbing mountains, exploring, and making art.

By making art, we create paradise, we create the world that we would like to live in. When you photograph, don't think of what life is, but depict what life could be or what it should be.

Finding paradise is very simple. Paradise is within. However, I believe that Christianity, with its concept of original sin, keeps people in a perpetual state of feeling less than, perpetually needing to repent and seek forgiveness for their supposed inherent evil. This fosters a sense of shame in individuals. In contrast, I seek to glorify myself, to deify myself, and to transform into something beyond the ordinary, creating a paradise here on earth through my own inner strength and divine potential.

Why I'm so intrepid

I've always been a fearless, courageous, and adventurous person. I remember when I was a little boy, first learning to skateboard, at around 4 or 5 years old. My brother and I learned to skateboard at FDR skate park, a DIY park built by skateboarders. This is one of the most legendary skate parks of all time, with ramps more dangerous than any skate park in the United States of America. We would throw ourselves downhill, launch ourselves off of ramps, fall down, get back up, and go at it again. I even remember, when we were little, we would throw ourselves down the stairwell, in our house, by rolling down on our backs, and smashing into the walls. I've always been reckless, dangerous, and adventurous, since the first time I learned to ride a bike, launching myself off of dirt hills, ramps, throwing myself down sets of stairs on my skateboard, and even exploring in the woods. I remember sharpening spears, building tipis, and forts, and attempting to hunt deer, as a child, playfully, obviously, as a sharpened stick would never penetrate the deer

itself. But I was always out there, hunting, discovering caves, building bridges with stones, and exploring here, in my backyard at the Wissahickon, along the Schuylkill River.

The Art of Exploration

There is an art to exploring, and embracing the adventurous, childlike spirit, through pure curiosity. When I open my eyes in the morning, I'm always eager to go out there, explore, and set my body in motion, without preconceived notions, about anything that I will find. I believe that an open mind, and willingness to learn, by recognizing that I know nothing, that I really am this big child, a blank slate, helps me conquer each day, through exploration.

I treat myself like a tourist in my hometown, here in Philadelphia. I always know there's something new to learn, there's always a new place to turn, as this city is the birthplace of America, with rich history, and historic streets to explore. All you have to do is open up your door, and go out there wanting more.

With an abundant and open mind, you will always be surprised. I find that this mindset, of being a tourist, is what fuels me in my daily life. A tourist always wakes up early in the morning, ready to catch the sunrise, ready to explore, ready to find new things to do. I believe that we must look at life this way, despite being in a mundane place, whether or not you walk the same lane, every single day, there really is always something new that you will find, something new, to do, to see, to learn. When I open my eyes, I just follow the light, and treat each day like it's my last.

I've explored far and wide throughout this world. One of my most significant journeys was taking the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, where I found myself sleeping on the floors of mosques, learning about Islam, and living amongst a Palestinian family. I've also volunteered on a Kibbutz, in Israel, living amongst the Israelis, farming, gardening, and practicing Horticulture. I even photographed on the frontlines of battle between Israel and Palestine. I've lived amongst the Zambian People, in Africa, alongside the Bemba tribe, in a village, where I practice

fish farming. I've been an explorer since I was a young boy, traveling to Rome to connect with family. I've explored the slums of Mumbai, ancient fishing villages, climbed mountains in Mexico City, explored caves in Central America, and explored the tranquil lakes and temples of Hanoi, Vietnam.

I cannot tell you why I've done these things, other than the fact that I am intrepid, bold, daring, and simply curious, like a child. Think of a child, standing on top of a table with a blanket wrapped around their body as a cape, pretending to be Superman, jumping off, landing on their 2 feet, smiling, proud of their accomplishment, whether it's seemingly small or large. This is how we should carry ourselves, with the things that we do and the places we explore, or conquer. Like that big kid, with a cape on, pretending to be Superman. However, we are not pretending anymore, we are transcending, and becoming the Superman, or, the Übermensch.

The Art of Photography

I believe that photography has the potential to become the apex of art. *Why?*

Photography requires your physical body to move through the world, exploring, with courage, at the forefront. A photographer exists on the front lines of life, becoming both physically, and emotionally closer to life itself. The experiences that a photographer has, through walking, observing, and embracing the multifaceted complexities of life, allow photographer to move through strife, upwards, and onwards, on a featherbed, exploring the unknown, articulating it, putting order to the chaos of life.

Forget about the physical photograph as a two dimensional print. A photograph is a reflection of an artist's courage, or heart. A photograph is not constrained by time or space. A photograph exists outside the passage of time.

The Impact of Art

When I consider the Apex of beauty, some of mankind's greatest artistic achievements, while I view photography highly, I must admit, that sculpture and architecture, alongside music, are some of the greatest works that man has ever achieved.

I'm currently standing in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, gazing at these beautiful columns, colors, details, ornaments, sculptures, depictions of Greek gods, stories of mythology, as the building is positioned at a high elevated space, looking out towards a sculpture of George Washington on his horseback, surrounded by animals, and Native Americans, facing the skyline of the city of Philadelphia, as City Hall is illuminated by this beautiful sunrise, this tall, looming column, with William Penn, sitting on top. City Hall, being the largest municipal building in the country, also draped with ornaments, detail, columns, tunnels, sculptures, and beauty that uplift the human spirit to a new height.

When you stand in front of a building like this, listen to live music from the world's largest pipe organ, at the Wanamaker Building, or when you stand in front of a sculpture, you are looking up at it. It is bigger than life itself. It goes beyond gravity, it is something that man has built, and said, *"you know what, we're going beyond. We're going upwards, onwards, and transcending this human experience, by positioning this building here, by putting this sculpture there, and making a statement."*

The hand of William Penn, standing on top of City Hall, is facing towards the the Northeast of Philadelphia, at Penn Treaty Park, where he made a peace agreement, alongside the Lenape tribe, to create the city of Philadelphia, and live alongside the Native people peacefully in harmony. History and rich stories can be found, in sculptures, or the architecture, that transcend time.

When I think about my recent time in Rome, exploring the various churches, looking at the paintings of Caravaggio, this confirms my belief, in God, and transcends this notion, of belief itself, into a knowing. I've seen the tomb where Jesus laid in Jerusalem, I've traveled the road to Jericho, I've visited the Holy Lands, I've been inside of some of the greatest churches, I've viewed pieces of the cross in person, the inscription, nails, and even the thorns, that crown Jesus. When you see things,

empirically, through evidence, and experience, artifacts, which we now look at, as art, takes your belief, your faith, to a new place, to a knowing. Perhaps this is why the church commissioned Caravaggio in the first place, to make his biblical works, to bring life to the stories, that shape our reality.

Create your own story

Create your own story, your own myth, and be your own legend. Think of the story of Achilles and the battle of Troy. Perhaps we too, should live like we are this hero character, Achilles, and move forward in life as an odyssey, or an Iliad. Let's live our lives like it's a real, Greek epic.

This life is too short to live as a slave. Become the master of the universe, and create your own world.

This is where the power of photography lies, in the ability to create something from nothing, or, create your own world. What you choose to exclude from the frame is just as important as what you include. What you exclude, is unimportant, uninteresting, not part of your story. But what you shed light on, what you depict within the frame, is your world, your universe, your creation, your story. **Man is the ultimate creator.**

If life were like Minecraft, how would you spend your time?

Would you sit in a strip mine, mining, grinding away, looking for diamonds? No, for this is boring, tedious, and the life of a slave. I choose to get my wood, craft a sword right away, pick up some stone, get some iron, and head to the ender dragon, as quickly as possible. I'd speed run Minecraft, slaying the boss, and ending the game, looking forward to doing it again, with the lust for battle, similar to that of Achilles.

After that, I'd just head to one of those extreme high mountain biomes, chill at the top, build a cool home, and kick back and relax after the battle is over. But is that the fun part? Is that the part of the game, that's most interesting? Simply enjoying the luxury, pleasure, and abundance, after creating an iron golem farm, grinding XP,

after using redstone to automatically mine ore for you, and do things for you without strife, within the game? No, I would choose to continuously, respawn each morning, going back to the ender dragon, finding new battles to fight, and upwardly, striving for more.

We may have endless beauty in this world, within our natural spaces, and the artwork that we make, but life is better outdoors, in the unknown, slaying zombies in the dungeon, embracing the chaos, and finding beauty, and meaning in it.

Just assume you won't respawn

So let's say life is a video game. Just for fun. Now, when you play call of duty, you always have the opportunity to respawn, and head back out there to the battlefield. But what if we lived our lives, under the assumption, that we will never respawn, that there is no afterlife, that there will be no tomorrow, then what? Well, I choose hardcore mode. I play with that one shot, one kill mentality. Think of David, and the courage he had to fight against Goliath, killing the giant opponent, with with a rock and a slingshot, hitting his head, with precision. He armored himself with God, and moving onto the battlefield with courage at the forefront. A small boy, overcame the obstacle, Goliath, beheading him with his own sword.

When you go through life, this way, with fearlessness, intrepidness, and courage, nothing will stop you. You can go into the unknown, and come out unscathed. But first, you must be a master, not a slave. You must affirm life, and then go beyond it.

Think of Jesus, carrying his cross, and being crucified. In Christianity, we recognize Jesus as the son of God. As we remind ourselves of his sacrifice in the church, when looking at him hanging on the cross, the most excruciating pain, the worst kind of death.

Does any man, have the balls, to pick up the cross?

I don't think so, I don't think anybody will, or has the hutzpah to do so. But why? If the Christian believes so firmly in this afterlife, then shouldn't we eagerly be picking up our crosses, and moving forward to this new paradise?

I believe that there's something in us, that finds comfort in beauty, and God's creations, around natural things, where we can listen to the birds sing, smell the flowers, pick the berries, eat the fruit, and sit back and relax under the sun. Earth, and it's beauty, becomes the ultimate paradise.

Man has a natural fear of death, but maybe we mostly fear the pain associated with it. Perhaps no man will reach the heights that Jesus has, or ever have the same amount of courage as him, but what we can do right now, on this earth, around all of these beautiful things, is choose the dangerous path, and pick up our cross, through acts of courage.