

## **I just want to be left alone!**

Street photography is a solo journey. When I am alone, in the zone, I feel as though nothing can break my spirit and my lust for life. The camera is my passport, my key, that unlocks the doors to the multifaceted complexities of life itself. The seemingly mundane experiences I have along my everyday life become something worth championing, uplifting to a transcendental height through the creation of new work every day. I just want to be a big kid, with my camera, embracing the spirit of play.

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## **Rainbow over Philadelphia**

The other day, I had the most incredible experience walking along the streets of Philadelphia with my friend. It was around 6 PM, and the light was divine. It was the golden hour, and it was raining ever so slightly, almost as if the raindrops were merely snowflakes falling on a snowy day, so light, airy, and you could hardly even feel the rain touch your skin. As we walked towards the river, we looked back and saw the most incredible rainbow I've ever seen in my life, cast across the sky. The way the light was hitting the buildings and surfaces all around us, from the streets to the walls, provided everything it touched with a glow that made everything pop out, almost dream-like, with a cinematic movie quality to it. This was the first time I photographed a rainbow since adopting my new process in black-and-white, and upon reviewing the image I made of the rainbow, it almost looks otherworldly, like a planet is emerging behind the skyline, as black and white naturally abstracts reality.

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## **Articulate the unknown**

A good photograph articulates the unknown. It puts order to the chaos. A good photograph is like a thought that is expressed clearly and distinctly. As street photographers, we should simply walk through life, camera in hand, with the great

attempt of making sense of things that are thrown our way. Simply photograph life as it is, but try to the best of your ability to make it visually coherent through your intuition. Photography is like a visual puzzle, and you must solve these puzzles that are thrown your way, quickly, intuitively, from your gut. The speed at which you make your photographs, through movement and repetition, will provide you with an aesthetic that shows life as it is, candidly and spontaneously.

### **The spontaneous now**

When walking, I enter a Zen zone. I almost forget that I *exist*, and I simply *am*. I think this is the best place to be in terms of mindset or approach when going through life. Forget about the past, the future, or even shut down all thoughts while walking, and just empty your mind. Street photography becomes this meditative practice for me, moving my legs, and recognizing the patterns in both nature and human behavior. A lot of the time, you'll be walking along the sidewalk, and never see anything interesting until that random, spontaneous moment occurs within the now, a fleeting moment. Yesterday, there was a breakdance competition outside of City Hall. As I roamed around Chestnut Street, a local freestyle artist was rapping on the corner. Breakdancers were practicing on the sidewalk, before the competition, on the sidelines, on a regular street corner, to a local hip-hop artist. This was such a random moment, that occurs every once in a while. The point is to simply be prepared, to be open, and always have a camera ready to go when the moment strikes. This is what I find happens most times: you walk the streets endlessly, you hardly see anything, but every once in a while, after a few hours or so, something falls right in your lap. **You just have to go slow, and let life flow towards you.** There's no need to be on the hunt or in a rush, we have a lifetime, and exist outside the passage of time, practicing street photography in the spontaneous now.

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### **Open world explorer**

The other day, when coming home from work, I was taking the bus, and an old man stumbled into my arms. I held him up until he arrived at his stop, complimented his beautiful outfit, and told him to have a great day. I helped him off the bus and went along the rest of my day, hitting the streets to practice street photography. I sometimes like to enter the Reading Terminal Market and photograph the chaos of the lunch rush or people shopping. As soon as I opened the door to the Reading Terminal, this man was standing there at the entrance. I jokingly told the man,

*“Hey, I was your savior for the day! Remember me?”*

He took a moment to recall who I was, as I was no longer wearing my sun hat, but we both broke out into laughter and greeted each other warmly. He told me about wanting to open up a food truck to sell soul food. He had such an incredible outfit on that I decided to do something I usually don't do, which is make a street portrait of the man. I asked him if I could, and he was very open to it. It's moments like these, where things simply align, from the bus to the interactions on the streets, that fuel me with joy during my everyday life. It reminds me to photograph to simply remember, and to cherish the memories and experiences along the way. I think it's important to remain open as a street photographer, to interact with other people, and not just be shy or a fly on the wall. The best way to live life is on the front lines of life.

### **Free roam in real life**

The greatest video games are ones that allow you to free roam and explore open worlds without borders. Minecraft is the obvious example I have, as the world is endless, and is infinitely novel. When I arrive at the back of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the morning, standing on top of the cliff, gazing out towards the horizon, I remind myself how open this world is. How far can your body take you? How much beauty can you see within this lifetime? The goal of my life is to continuously move my two legs, to explore, and to conquer the world through the medium of photography. Even if I simply live within this perimeter, of Philadelphia, a single city, and never go beyond, I know that I can see so much, just in my backyard, within a lifetime.

## Travel VS Vacation

I think there's a difference between traveling and vacation, and what this means to me. Throughout my journey, I spent my time traveling, with a backpack, volunteering, working on farms, projects, hitchhiking, staying on floors, learning about religions, and different cultures. However, vacation is typically done at a beach, somewhere on a resort, where you can perhaps kick back, drink margaritas, take cool pictures for Instagram, buy knickknacks, come home and tell people how amazing it was. I find that traveling should be used for exploration, creation, and learning. Traveling for the sake of vacation or leisure doesn't make much sense to me, as I feel as though this mindset or feeling of vacation can occur within your backyard.

How can you design your life where it feels like a vacation every single day? **What if vacation was simply a mindset, a way that you viewed everyday life?**

*The word vacation comes from the Latin word **vacatio**, which means "freedom" or "exemption" from something, particularly work or duty. **Vacatio** is derived from **vacare**, meaning "to be empty, free, or at leisure."*

If you study the word, vacation, deriving from freedom, particularly from work or duty, it puts things into perspective for me. Most people look at what they do on a daily basis as work. For me, this idea of work doesn't really make sense, and I find the notion of "play" to be a much more virtuous word to use. **I think work is a slave mentality.**

Work is *negotium*, tending to public affairs or business, but *otium* becomes leisure, of both intellectual, creative, and physical pursuits. I choose *otium*. I think when you're full of vitality, it's impossible to feel like anything is work. **When you're full of vitality, the traditional notion of "work" becomes play or leisure.**

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## **Memento Mori**

There's this scene from *Fight Club*, where Tyler Durden points a gun to the head of a man who works in a gas station. He asks him what his dream in life was, who he wanted to be? He threatened this man with a gun to his head, and told him that he must quit his job at the gas station, and go pursue his dreams, what he originally wanted to be or become.

*If you had a gun to your head, what would you do with your life next? What decision would you make?*

I have no regrets for all of my traveling. I followed my intuition and knew exactly what I wanted to do in life. I've always been an explorer since the earliest years in my life as a kid, playing in the woods, biking on trails endlessly. I think that *memento mori* is all about recognizing mortality and sets things into perspective. I think it's important not to get caught up in trivial or minute things; they don't really matter in the grand scheme of it all. Similarly to the notion of trivial matters, perhaps it is most wise for us to contemplate how we want to live the rest of our lives, and have no regrets.

*If we are to do the same thing for the rest of our lives, would you thrive, or would your soul slowly die?*

**Let's make sure we thrive, and never do things simply to survive.**

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## **Losing faith**

I attended a Catholic school from pre-K to grade 8. I have nothing but fond memories of these experiences of learning about the life of Jesus, going to church, playing in the grass, going on field trips, and staying with the same classmates for about 10 years of life. You go from class to class, grade level to grade level, advancing in years, but stay with the same people for the entirety of your time in school. I'm really grateful for this because I still hold onto my earliest friends from pre-K. Actually, my closest friend is somebody who shares early memories with me,

simply reaching for blocks to play with during recess when we were around four years old. The other day, as we were walking around, we were recalling this time when the iPod Touch came out, and people started to watch YouTube videos, around when we were 12 years old. We both discussed how somehow we stumbled across this strange claymation, a video that showed Satan, in some weird cartoon of the adventures of Mark Twain. We both discussed how after seeing this, we lost our faith in God, and somehow became atheist, or agnostic towards our faith. It was quite a bizarre video, really disturbing at the time, and I believe it is a great example of how media can influence the youth or lead them astray. When the iPod came out, it was like opening Pandora's box into the unknown, into the real world. I feel like as Generation Z, we were early test dummies for all of this technology. Now, when we look back at it, we just laugh about the memory.

Actually, as we walked and saw the rainbow, we reminded ourselves of how the rainbow is a symbol of the covenant between God and man, or God and Noah. This memory has me thinking more critically about media and the impact it will have on our lives in modernity.

### **Followers?**

When a social media user gathers followers, or an audience, does the social media user then become like a prophet? Why is it that we seek followers? I think of Jesus and his followers, or 12 disciples, or even King Leonidas and his 300 Spartans, as the ultimate leaders. Now, in the social media landscape, you can have millions of followers and become an influencer or a "guru." However, the big question is, would you rather have millions of Persian slaves or 300 Spartan elites? Or even 12 loyal disciples?

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### **I exist outside the passage of time**

To exist - to step out, emerge, come into being.

*Ex - out of*

*Sistere - stare - to stand*

Personally, I only feel alive while standing. The other day, I sat in a vehicle for maybe 30 minutes, driving to a birthday party to see family. Sitting in the car, I instantly began to yawn, my muscles relaxed, and I no longer felt good, generally. However, when I'm standing upright, muscles contracting, metabolism firing, body moving, I feel most alive. When my body is moving, I feel most real, most present, outside the passage of time.

### **What is your essence?**

I remember a famous quote from Garry Winogrand, where he says that practicing street photography becomes the closest thing to not existing.

*Esse - to be*

One thing he said that I find quite profound is:

*"I photograph to find out what something will look like photographed. I have nothing to say in any photograph. It's the photograph that has something to say. It's not about what the world looks like, but what the world doesn't look like. You can't trust your eyes."*

When I'm looking at a person, place, or thing, it exists, it is real, in the physical world. However, when I photograph something, it becomes something else. Maybe when you're photographing, moving your body, you've returned to the essence of what it means to be human, which is to stand upright, to move your physical body. This act of movement is my essence, what my purpose is. However, when I photograph something, I'm not depicting reality simply for what it is, or bringing it into existence, but rather, the photographs I make become a reflection of who I am, or my essence.

Perhaps when I photograph, I'm not just making photographs of the world's existence, but how I relate to it. **A photograph is my essence in motion.**