

Individualism Is the New Collectivism

Standing at the Spanish Steps in Rome, surrounded by the grandeur of history and the ever-present symbols of modern luxury—Dior, Balenciaga, Montcler—one is struck by the juxtaposition of past and present, of timeless culture and fleeting consumerism. In a place that has long inspired artists, philosophers, and thinkers, I couldn't help but reflect on the notion of individualism and what it means today, particularly in the context of our consumer-driven society.

The Illusion of Choice in Consumerism

As I gazed at the advertisements around me, I thought about the opportunities we have in today's world. The ability to buy whatever we want, to become whoever we want through the power of commerce, to augment our identities with jewels, rings, and designer brands.

But is this **true individualism**? I don't think so. In fact, I believe that the more we indulge in fashion and material possessions, the further we move away from real individualism. Instead, we become **slaves to the brands**, to the glossy images fed to us by celebrities and the media.

Personally, I'd rather live a frugal life, focused on experiences rather than possessions. Fashion and possessions don't interest me.

What interests me is the freedom to make that choice—the ability to define myself by what I reject rather than what I consume. In America, and much of the world today, we have this ultimate freedom—the freedom to choose, to live the **American Dream**, as they say. But what does that dream look like? Is it the pursuit of wealth and possessions, or something deeper?

True Individualism: Defined by What You Reject

In my view, **true individualism** is not about what you buy; it's about what you choose not to do. It's about rejecting the trends and pressures that society pushes on us. When you buy into the brands, into the designer labels, you're not asserting your individuality—you're **conforming**. You're allowing yourself to be swept up in the collective desire to fit in, to signal status, to be part of the crowd. And this is where individualism gets distorted. The more we consume, the more we become part of the masses, rather than standing apart as individuals.

It's far more interesting to create your own trends, to build something of your own, whether it's clothing, art, or ideas.

As an artist, I don't seek possessions. Once I have my camera and an iPad, I'm fine. There's nothing more I need beyond that. For me, the goal is to **live in a state of production, not consumption**. The more we create, the more we photograph, the more we engage with the world, the more we become ourselves.

Creation as the Path to Becoming

Through the medium of **photography**, I've found what I believe is the ultimate state of becoming. To photograph is to engage with the world, to capture moments that reflect not just what we see, but **who we are**. It's in this act of creation that we truly become individuals. We are not defined by the labels we wear or the goods we buy but by the things we make, the ideas we express, the art we produce.

The more we create, and the more that we make and photograph, the more that we live, the more that we are, the more that we can become.

As I stood there at the Spanish Steps, I thought about the choices we make and how they define us. Do you need a Patek Philippe watch? A Rolex? These symbols of wealth, often flaunted by celebrities and rappers, may seem like markers of success, but they are also **chains**. Chains that tie us to a culture of consumption, to the idea that our value is measured by what we own. But in reality, all you really need is meat, coffee, and water. The **essentials of life** are simple, and it's in that simplicity that we find true freedom.

Rejecting Modern Slavery

In today's world, where we have so much choice, **slavery is a choice**. We can choose to be enslaved by the brands, by the propaganda of consumer culture, or we can choose to do our own thing. To define ourselves by what we create rather than what we consume. This, to me, is the essence of **individualism**—the freedom to reject the noise of society and to live according to our own values.

Avoid the propaganda, and instead, embrace the freedom to create, to define yourself not by what you own, but by what you do.

Embracing Freedom Through Creation

So, as I reflect on individualism here in Rome, I encourage you to think about what it means to be truly free. True freedom comes from rejecting societal pressures and embracing a life of creation. It is in **doing, not buying**, that we shape who we are. The power lies in choosing simplicity, in living a life focused on what truly matters—our ability to create, to experience, and to be individuals, free from the chains of consumerism.