

Striving for Excellence in Photography

What's poppin, people? It's Dante.

Getting my morning started here in the Centennial Arboretum. Got a fresh haircut, feeling good.

So much better to just *get a haircut* and have the sides shaved off, kind of. I never get haircuts because I'm lazy. It's like every six weeks or something. I gotta go every month or something. Maybe. Anyways—

The Morning Mindset

Usually in the morning, I'm thinking about how to approach photography—how to approach photography with **philosophy**, and how to think about *why* we're doing this.

This morning I had this thought:

The spirit of excellence.

What does that mean in the realm of photography?

The Autotelic Approach

To become the best photographer you can possibly be, I think you gotta *immerse yourself* in the process of making photographs.

“The purpose is within the process itself.”

The process I embrace is autotelic:

- *Autos* = self
- *Telos* = purpose or goal

So the act of making pictures *is the goal*.

If you just enjoy making pictures, then making pictures is enough. That's the reason. That's the drive.

If you keep showing up and doing the thing for its own sake, you'll get better over time.

That's how excellence compounds.

Why Goals Can Be a Trap

I think we get really caught up in this idea of setting goals in photography. To me, it's kind of blasphemy.

“The goal is to remain in a curious state of being.”

If you're curious about life itself, and you're photographing whatever pulls your curiosity, then you're completing the goal *within* the act. That's it.

When you constrain yourself to a specific project, subject, or location—it can stunt growth. Instead, unlock infinite creative potential by staying open.

Photograph Everything

By photographing multiple things in multiple ways:

- Landscapes
- People
- Details
- Macro photos
- Clouds

You're not limiting yourself.

You're building a *complete* body of work.

“Striving for excellence means not being confined to one way of doing things.”

You become more well-rounded.

You evolve.

Become the Vessel

Nowadays I've been photographing macro details—botanicals, flowers, getting close to stuff.

I'm not going into the park looking for those things, it's just where my curiosity is pulling me.

Whether it's inanimate objects, a human face, or a landscape—what matters is *how you see it*. Can you articulate it? Can you breathe life into it?

“It should be like breathing—photography.”

To me, that's what striving for excellence looks like:

Being able to interpret anything you encounter through the frame.

Forget Style—Be the Medium

We limit ourselves trying to cultivate a *style* or a *signature voice*.

We want people to say: “*Oh, that’s a photo by so-and-so.*” And that’s fine.

But I think there’s something deeper—

“Striving for excellence is about having no style.”

It’s about being **photography itself**.

A vessel. A conduit. Just there, present, interpreting the world in images.

Doesn’t matter who took the photo.

Doesn’t matter if it was me, or Sally, or whoever.

Fall in Love With Life Itself

Through this approach—this striving—you begin to let go of:

- Validation
- Recognition
- Awards
- Legacy

“You simply fall in love with life itself.”

The exuberance for life bleeds into your images.

And that’s the work. That’s the art.

You’re not here to build a legacy. You’re not here for people to remember your name.

You’re here to *be*—to create—because it brings you joy.

The Vision of Excellence

To me, this is what it means to be an artist:

- To do it for the love.
- To remain in a flow state for a lifetime.
- To not care whether or not the work is recognized.
- To *be the vessel* for the medium.

“We’re just here, interpreting the world in images.”

That’s what I was thinking about this morning, at least.
So yeah.