

Thriving in the Mundane

As a street photographer, I absolutely thrive in the mundane. I can walk the same lane every single day, embracing the mundane, but still find infinite ways to create something from nothing. This to me is the superpower of being a photographer. It's the ability that the camera provides you, the excuse, the key that unlocks the door to possibility, the sword that strikes through the heart of chaos, putting order to the world that is our canvas. Now these thoughts may sound lofty and grandiose and ridiculous, but actually, it's quite profound in the most mundane and simple way.

Return to the Garden

So I returned to the garden, a life of simplicity, spending my days in the park, tending the land as a horticulturalist. I voluntarily decided to opt out of this game that we call modern living. I live a simple life, pulling weeds, trimming trees, planting things, lugging logs, chopping, lifting, digging, crawling in the dirt, because I absolutely find zero meaning in the menial tasks and labor involved in modern productivity. However, by returning to simplicity, to the most fundamental way of life, tending the garden, living the most monotonous and mundane repetitive loop of showing up, watering plants, doing this, doing that—literally I'm doing the same thing every single day—but I absolutely thrive in the mundane!

When I think about Adam and Eve in the garden, God gave us this beautiful place to play, to run around, to eat, sleep under trees, and he just gave us one thing to do: tend the land and live in Paradise. That's how I feel every day. I'm just tending the land and living in paradise. But paradise isn't some place that is all that interesting. It's pure bliss. You hear birds chirping, butterflies flying, insects crawling on your skin sometimes, you might get bitten, you might cut yourself, you might bleed, but there's something about the simplicity and the boredom of being in paradise that provides me with the opportunity to have creative breakthroughs.

How Boredom Leads to Creativity

So in this boredom of being in paradise, there are possibilities to have creative breakthroughs. I'll go on the same mundane walk around in a loop, read a book, maybe lay under a tree, which may seem like I'm deep in thought, but I'm actually trying to do the opposite. By returning to the garden and living a monotonous lifestyle, I'm purposely trying to embrace boredom, to empty my mind, and to become a child again. I'm purposely trying to shut my brain off. I'm trying to return to being a child so that I can have more creative thoughts and ideas that I can utilize in my photography and creative practices.

I seriously think we think too much, and when I'm walking around, it may seem like I'm deep in thought but it's really the opposite. I'm actually trying not to try. Another way to put it is: I'm trying my best to keep myself focused on the moment so profoundly that all of my thoughts shut off and I'm in a complete flow state throughout the entirety of my day.

When I'm pruning plants repetitively and I'm looking at these little brown tips on the leaves, and I have to trim like 1000 of them, I'm completely laser focused, not thinking at all. But through the non-thinking, through the simply being part, when you enter the flow state, you have these Eureka moments.

Photography Flow State

So one thing I've been thinking about is how to not think, hahahah. For instance, when I'm gardening, I'm not thinking. I'm looking at blades of grass wiggling, listening to the sounds of birds, water flowing from the creek, and I'm empty.

Similarly, when I'm photographing and moving through the world slowly, being very observant of every little detail—from the buildings to the people to the streets to the textures—I'm completely at peace amongst the chaos. But it's the chaos that I thrive in. It's embracing the boredom of a walk and finding novelty and intricate details in the mundane world around me.

There's such a profound experience of clicking the shutter that I can't really describe with words. When you click the shutter, it's like having that little Eureka moment, and it perpetually keeps you in this flow state of non-action. Like yes, I'm moving and I'm walking, but I really am putting zero effort into anything that I'm creating right now. I'm simply a vessel. I'm just there and prepared with my camera, and I press the shutter when life flows towards me.

When I'm walking extremely slowly, I'm existing outside the passage of time, and the moments that come to me—fleeting, a fraction of a second away—are just an instinct away from making or breaking a frame. That moment when I click the shutter is such a profound feeling because I'm so immersed in the moment, to the point where I'm not thinking at all, and it feels like a transcendental experience.

It may sound kind of crazy to say on paper right now, but realistically this is, to me, the most beautiful way to be. It's literally returning to the Garden of Eden, where you're just a vessel for God again and there's no pressure. There's no society, there's nothing bogging you down. It's just you and the world and the canvas in front of you, and you can create. But it only happens in a flow state, where you stop thinking and you just move from your gut, from your instincts, your intuition, your Thumos!