

Wabi Sabi Street Photography: Creating a New World Through Light

Walking through the cloudy alleyways of Shinjuku with the Ricoh GR III and the Ricoh GF-2, I've been thinking deeply about **wabi sabi**—the beauty of impermanence, imperfection, and the overlooked. Applying this philosophy to photography has opened an entirely new dimension for me. The mundane suddenly becomes fascinating. A cigarette butt, a dripping pipe, a dusty alley wall—these things become worlds when seen through the camera.

Photography, at its root, is *fos* (light) and *grafe* (writing)—**writing with light**. When I boost the contrast to the maximum on the Ricoh and shoot high-contrast black-and-white JPEGs, I'm not documenting life as it objectively is. I'm **etching light into surfaces**, creating instant sketches of life, allowing the camera to reinterpret reality.

I'm no longer photographing *the world*—
I'm photographing **what the world could be**.

Letting Go of Rational Photography

These days, I don't want to think rationally. I want to respond to instinct. Instead of photographing what I know, I'm photographing what I *feel*. High-contrast black and white naturally abstracts reality, turning the ordinary into the extraordinary.

With highlight-weighted metering crushing shadows into pure black, the Ricoh carves reality into shapes and forms. The streets of Shinjuku become a studio. Surfaces turn into canvases. Everything becomes a possibility.

I'm letting go of the idea of photographing "life as fact."
I'm creating a new world.

Flash as Imperfection: Wabi Sabi in Practice

Using the flash in these alleys is a new process for me. Half the time I can't even see what I'm shooting. And that's the point. I'm photographing blindly on purpose—embracing **imperfection**, spontaneity, and the unknown.

This is the spirit of wabi sabi:

- beauty in imperfection
- beauty in transience
- beauty in the overlooked

When I photograph small, mundane things—the sheen of raindrops on metal, the texture of a forgotten umbrella—I'm discovering infinite possibilities. These imperfect subjects become perfect in the photograph.

Photography as a Reflection of the Internal State

When you shoot from the gut rather than the mind, your photographs become mirrors—not of the world, but of your **internal state**.

The goal is to uplift my soul in every photograph.

In the past, I was rooted in documentary thinking. I thought I had to capture life *as it is*. But now, I want to capture life as **emotion, intuition, and childlike curiosity**.

Photography becomes play.

Photography becomes exploration.

Photography becomes gratitude.

By letting go of the burden of outcome, I enter flow—pure autotelic creation. The goal is the act of clicking the shutter itself.

Finding the Extraordinary in the Mundane

There is something special about noticing—really noticing.

The glimmer of light.

The rainwater clinging to a surface.

The pale outline of an umbrella abandoned on the street.

These small things become revelations when photographed. The camera transforms the mundane into the dreamlike. Photography becomes a tool to uplift reality, to create meaning where there seemingly is none.

Life isn't necessarily what it seems.

Through high-contrast black and white, the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

From Atget to the Present: The Flâneur's Spirit

I think back to the book I picked up in a dusty bookstore in Philadelphia: *The World of Photographs of Eugène Atget*, edited by Berenice Abbott. Atget wandered 19th-century Paris as a flâneur—photographing the lampposts, the signs, the architecture, the people, the events.

He photographed his city with curiosity and wonder, using a large-format bellows camera with slow plates and heavy limitations. Yet the limitations made the work powerful. Today, his images feel surreal, timeless, and haunting.

And I often wonder:

What would Atget do with a Ricoh GR and a flash on a rainy Shinjuku night?

Would he still document life as fact?

Or would he push photography into abstraction?

Would he create a new world as I attempt to now?

Once you master positioning your body, understanding light, and clicking the shutter, the next step is transcendence—using photography to **go beyond reality**, not merely record it.

The Future of Street Photography: Internal Worlds

Street photography has a long history of documentation, but going forward, I believe the real frontier lies in the subjective. The internal. The emotional.

The question is:

What does your internal world look like, photographed?

I want to turn inward.

I want to photograph from instinct.

I want to create a world that didn't exist before I arrived.

Photography becomes a dialogue between the external street and the internal soul.

Infinite Possibilities in the Eternal Walk

The power of photography lies in its infinite possibilities. You can create something from nothing. You can walk the same street every day and still find something new to uplift. The mundane becomes a wellspring of novelty.

The question I ask myself every day is:

Can I walk the same mundane lane forever and never run out of things to say?

With curiosity, with wabi sabi, with intuition—
yes.

I'm never bored when I create a new world through the camera. I'm forever grateful with each click of the shutter.

Embrace impermanence.
Embrace curiosity.
Embrace the mundane.

You can photograph everything in your lifetime if you open your eyes to the overlooked. Maybe we need a thousand little robots wandering the streets for us— but for now, one curious human with a Ricoh GR is enough.

Let's create a new world together.