

Abstraction as a Solution in Street Photography

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

This morning, I wanted to talk about **abstraction in street photography** — why I've been gravitating toward it, and how I use it in my everyday photographic life.

I live in Philadelphia. It's my hometown. And it's not New York City. There isn't constant chaos, spectacle, or nonstop energy on every corner. It's a fairly **mundane city** in many ways — and I don't say that as a complaint. I actually love walking here. But a few years ago, I realized something:

Abstraction became a solution to a problem.

That problem was simple:

How do you keep photographing when your environment feels familiar, quiet, ordinary?

Finding Something From Nothing

About three years ago, when I shifted into a new black-and-white process, abstraction became a way for me to **embrace the mundane** instead of fighting it.

It allowed me to find something from nothing.

To make pictures wherever I am.

To keep pushing myself forward instead of waiting for something “interesting” to happen.

When I photograph architecture, surfaces, or everyday scenes, I'm no longer trying to describe reality as fact. I'm paying attention to **light and shadow**, and how they interact inside the frame. That interaction creates drama, mystery, and mood — something I couldn't achieve in the same way with my old approach.

Crushing Shadows, Exposing for Light

One of the simplest techniques I use is **exposing for the highlights and crushing the shadows**.

I shoot with the Ricoh GR III and GR IIIx, with contrast pushed to the absolute max. My camera is set to **highlight-weighted metering**, which lets me prioritize what matters in the frame and let everything else fall away.

Sometimes the way light hits a building, a surface, or a window is enough to abstract a scene entirely.

Rational Foundations, Irrational Play

I have a strong foundation in photography. I understand form, light, timing, positioning, and structure. I know how to make a photograph that's readable and accessible.

But now, I'm trying to walk a fine line between:

- **Rational structure**
- **Irrational instinct**

I want the formal clarity of traditional photography, blended with the playfulness and surprise of abstraction. I photograph quickly, intuitively, and from instinct — letting things happen instead of forcing them.

That's where the images start to surprise me.

Seeing Beyond the Veil

Because I bake high-contrast black and white into the camera, I'm often looking at life through the LCD screen as if I'm seeing **beyond the veil**.

What I get back isn't always what I saw in reality — it's often what I *didn't* see.

That's the abstraction.

That's the mystery.

And that mystery keeps me curious.

Light as the Primary Subject

These days, I'm mostly looking for light:

- How it hits surfaces
- How it isolates people
- How it interacts with architecture

In places like the City Hall tunnels in Philadelphia, I'll "fish" at a scene — waiting for people to enter a pool of light, crushing the background, and placing subjects in an ambiguous space.

I photograph sculptures, textures, fences, reflections, shadows — anything that allows me to transform the ordinary into something unfamiliar.

Elevating the Mundane

A simple building becomes mysterious when framed through shadow.

A fence becomes a compositional tool.

A bench becomes a stage for drama.

By abstracting reality, I give myself something to chew on — something to play with — something that fuels me to go back out and keep making photographs.

Even watching sunrise light reflect off the Logan Square fountain can become an act of exploration.

Curiosity Is the Goal

At the end of the day, abstraction isn't about being clever or obscure.

It's about **fueling curiosity**.

Photography, for me, isn't about describing life exactly as it is — it's about exploring what it *could be*. When you look closely enough, the mundane stops being mundane. Life starts to feel like a dream.

Abstraction helps me keep photographing wherever I am, no matter how ordinary the environment seems.

And that surprise — that moment when the photograph gives me something I didn't expect — is what pulls me back out the door every time.

Just some candid thoughts on abstraction in street photography.

Thanks for watching.
I'll see you in the next one.

Peace.