

Why the Snapshot Is the Purest Form of Street Photography

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

My morning started here with a beautiful walk in Fairmount Park. I have the Ricoh GR IIIx with the Ricoh GF2 flash — snapshotting my way through the morning. Wow. Look at the beautiful clouds in the sky.

Today's thought is about the snapshot as the purest expression that I can possibly cultivate as an artist.

There is something liberating about going through life, living your everyday life, and simply bringing your camera for the ride. I keep my Ricoh in the front pocket right here. And when I have something in front of me that intrigues me, I simply take it out of my pocket, click the button, and then in an instant, I can click the shutter and make a picture.

It's such a fast workflow where I simply photograph wherever I might be, whatever I may be doing. And I think that act of not controlling anything and simply going with the flow of your everyday life, and photographing things, becomes such an authentic expression.

It's like I'm not trying — I'm just being.

When I raise the camera and photograph, I'm simply seeing what I have in front of me and putting four corners around it. And then over time, compounding. I think this is how you arrive at your personal style.

With style in photography, I think we get caught up with these notions of color versus black and white, certain focal lengths, or technical decisions. But actually, I believe that style derives from the subconscious mind through going out there without any preconceived notions of what you will find.

Snapshotting your way through life will then give you that personal style. But it comes through time spent in the world — chipping away at life — making more photographs.

The goal is to simply be out in the world, in the flow state of production, wherever you may be. And that's why I find the snapshot to be so liberating, because it's something that I can approach every single day with zero excuses.

This is why the Ricoh GR is the best camera for street photography — simply due to its compact nature and the fact that it fits in my pocket. Because when I raise the camera to my eye and click the shutter of whatever it is that I find, this is the purest expression. I can't really contrive anything. I'm simply walking through the world and photographing.

That's the beauty of street photography: the world becomes the canvas.

There's really nothing that you need to go out there and try to do other than live your life, enjoy the view, and simply photograph the things that you see.

It's really important for us, as photographers, to cultivate curiosity. Because with curiosity, we walk more, we see more, we photograph more. And then over time, through photographing more, we arrive at that personal style.

You don't have to sit around and think of a theme or project, a zine or a book, or have any attachment to outcomes of things that you're trying to photograph and put together in a show.

If you're going through the world and you're thinking in your head, "Oh, this is going to be a great picture for a spread in a book," then the photographs are going to be boring. The book is going to be uninteresting.

I think that when you're trying to say something, ultimately it becomes a cookie-cutter boring way of making anything — genuinely.

The act of clicking the shutter is where the photograph is born. The act of editing and cultivating your style through putting together your pictures in a book or a zine or a gallery or a show — it's something secondary to me as the photographer

operating the camera.

I'm much more interested in the bodily experience of exploring — enjoying the sights, the sounds, the smells of the street — and allowing that to carry me through my life. Simply being in this flow state where I'm so immersed in the act of making photographs that I have zero attachments to whatever they mean or whatever they could possibly manifest to be.

I find that to be such a beautiful way to live life.

Because we all will and must die.

So I allow myself to treat photography as a way to affirm my life — almost like a lifeline. By letting go and photographing this way, I immerse myself in the moment much more deeply.

This is the ultimate gift in life: immersing yourself deeply in the bodily human experience of being in the present moment.

As you sort of wither and die away each and every day, we have this finite timeline. I remind myself: I'm not going to take these photographs with me. I'm not going to take any of this stuff with me in this material plane, in this material world.

So I find that by simply photographing and leaving my trace — immersing myself in this park, wherever it may be — whether it's light or whether it's dark — I see with clarity. I feel deeply.

And the sensation of bliss arises through recognizing this finite nature of our lives, and detaching from the idea that what you're doing has any meaning.

Because that's where meaning is actually found.

It's through not seeking, and simply being.

That's why I find the snapshot to be the purest, authentic expression: because when you actually have no attachments — not only to the photographs, but to this material world — not in a nihilistic, negative way, but in a loftier, optimistic way —

you can embrace the spirit of play.

Let the chips fall as they may.

Whatever arises in my photographs is ultimately what I had to say during my time here on this earth.

I'm not too concerned with whether somebody sees them, or whether it has an impact on somebody. But I know that as I lived my life, I was there in that moment — expressing myself authentically, expressing myself openly — not trying to contrive anything.

Not being this performative artist who's seeking fame or glory.

Not seeking to make something that somebody else will appreciate.

What if our goal was to go forward and make photographs that other people won't like?

It's an interesting thought experiment. We're always seeking to appease somebody or something. We're always seeking some sort of outcome — some sort of validation.

But when you remove that from the equation and you simply embrace the bodily sensation of walking, seeing, observing — treating photography as life affirmation — through the snapshot approach, you can find your authentic expression.

My problem with contemporary photography is the performative act of the photographer — the attachment to your photographs, the grandiosity of being a photographer, putting on your “visual storyteller” cap and going out there to make some impact.

I find it kind of laughable. Embarrassing. Cringy.

This approach of trying to say something — trying to engage with this quote-unquote “notion of community” — trying to become an authority on some niche theme — and then you have to read this paragraph about some convoluted story the

artist is trying to tell.

You can almost smell the inauthenticity of art.

When I go to the galleries in New York City and I look at the photographs produced by Magnum photographers these days, I'm completely baffled that this is the work they're producing.

It requires you to read an essay about some identity crisis the photographer is embarking on, or some problem with a part of the world. You have to dig deep into the theme beyond just the image.

To me, it's completely inauthentic.

So going forward, my solution to this problem of contemporary photography is to liberate yourself freely — to snapshot openly — and to treat yourself like a vessel for the medium.

You're not trying to say anything.

You're simply living your everyday life, bringing your camera for the ride, and photographing whatever you find without trying to contrive.

Letting go of all the unlimited choices: moving left, moving right, going here, going there, photographing this, shooting that, coming up with checklists and themes and books and galleries and ideas.

And simply being.

I treat photography as a way of being, and I treat myself as a simple vessel for the medium.

That's my thought.

That's my two cents on style, contemporary photography, and authenticity through the snapshot.