

How I Find Photos on the Street (Without Looking for Anything)

Yo, what's poppin' people? It's Dante.

Today I'm going to be sharing some tips on what I look for when walking the street.

Recently, I've been on a sort of monastic journey documenting every street in Philadelphia. So far I've walked 73 miles, spent 37 hours on foot, and photographed 11 different streets.

Yesterday I walked Chestnut Street.

We'll look at some examples from June 10th, but more importantly, I want to share how I'm thinking when I'm out there.

Because when you're on the street, it can become overwhelming.

Sometimes there's nothing going on.

Other times there's too much going on.

And strangely, both extremes can cause you to freeze.

The ultimate duty of the photographer, I find, is to discover new ways to articulate the mundane every single day.

The goal is entering the flow state.

The Power of a Constraint

Yesterday I walked for 2 hours and 47 minutes.

I covered around 6 miles and made 174 frames that you're seeing on screen.

By the end of the day, I actually wound up making somewhere between 900 and 1,000 photographs.

And honestly, the reason I'm able to produce that much work is simple.

I'm walking with a clear objective.

I have a starting point.

I have an ending point.

And I have a mission:

Photograph one street.

That simple constraint creates a heightened state of awareness.

Every doorway.

Every building.

Every texture.

Every sign.

Every little detail becomes material.

And because I know I have to come home and create a zine from the work, there's a deadline attached to the walk.

I know I need at least 36 photographs for that day's publication.

That output requirement forces me to stop hesitating and start photographing.

It's not productivity for productivity's sake.

It's production with purpose.

Building an Archive of the City

Right now I'm interested in building an archive of Philadelphia.

That means separating my artistic ambitions from my documentary ambitions.

I'm not chasing poetry.

I'm not chasing "great photographs."

I'm trying to create material that describes what life looked like in a specific place at a specific moment.

Each photograph is captioned with:

- The date
- The time
- The location

You can literally open Google Maps and visit the exact place where the photograph was made.

A window might be broken today.

Five years from now it could be repaired.

The photograph becomes evidence.

A timestamp.

A record.

That's what interests me.

Photographing Time

I'm not looking for anything extravagant.

I'm not looking for spectacle.

I'm using photography as a way to freeze time and space.

I'm interested in:

- Doorways
- Churches
- Decaying buildings
- Shattered windows
- Fading signs
- Infrastructure
- Typography
- Textures
- Patterns

The photographs are often banal.

They're mundane.

And that's exactly the point.

The goal isn't to impress a viewer.

The goal is to respond to what is in front of me.

To preserve it.

To document it.

Beauty in Decay

A lot of what I'm photographing is disappearing.

Old businesses.

Faded signs.

Broken windows.

Buildings in decline.

Sometimes it's sad.

Sometimes it's beautiful.

Usually it's both.

I photographed ivy overtaking an alleyway yesterday.

That was one of my favorite photographs from the walk.

Not because it's extraordinary.

Because it speaks to change.

Everything is in flux.

Everything is fading.

Everything is becoming something else.

That's what I'm photographing now.

Change itself.

Photograph What You Love

Don't worry about making photographs that please other people.

Photography is a selfish act.

You do it because you enjoy doing it.

I photograph signs because I love signs.

I photograph typography because I'm curious about typography.

I photograph infrastructure because I'm fascinated by how cities function.

You don't need to look at the same things I do.

You need to discover what pulls your attention.

What triggers your instinct.

What makes you stop.

Then photograph that.

Macro Mode Is Your Friend

One practical tip:

Use macro mode.

Use crop mode.

Experiment with different focal lengths while walking.

A lot of my photographs are made by quickly switching into the Ricoh crop mode, shooting at 50mm, making the frame, and continuing down the street.

These technical tools help me stay in flow.

Instead of overthinking, I react.

See something.

Photograph it.

Keep moving.

The Goal Is Flow

When I'm walking, I'm scanning everything.

Flowers.

Windows.

Buildings.

Textures.

Shadows.

Signs.

Architecture.

Everything.

The challenge becomes:

How much material can I produce on this one street, on this one walk, on this one day?

That's what keeps me engaged.

The goal isn't decisiveness.

The goal isn't perfection.

The goal isn't standing around waiting for a masterpiece.

The goal is movement.

Observation.

Response.

Most of these photographs are made while walking.

I make the frame and move on.

The Compact Camera Advantage

This is why I love compact cameras.

Automatic mode.

Point and shoot.

No friction.

You can spend a few hours walking through your city and come home with an entire archive of space and time.

You can create something.

You can publish something.

You can preserve something.

I'm Not Looking for Anything

People often ask what I'm looking for.

The truth is:

I'm not looking for anything.

I'm not seeking moments.

I'm not hunting scenes.

I'm not waiting for magic.

I'm simply giving myself parameters.

One street.

One walk.

One day.

And those constraints force me into the flow state.

The interesting thing is that after walking 11 streets, I haven't encountered a single classic street photography moment.

None.

No decisive moments.

No dramatic interactions.

Just buildings.

Textures.

Infrastructure.

Signs.

Decay.

Objects.

Nothing.

And yet that's the challenge.

Articulating Nothing

The photographer's job is often to articulate nothing.

To transform the ordinary into something worth looking at.

To make meaning from what appears meaningless.

That's difficult.

But when you commit to a process and give yourself constraints, you start producing work.

You start seeing.

And eventually, you enter the flow state.

The Thought of the Day

Five years from now, wherever you're photographing won't look the same.

Everything is changing.

Everything is disappearing.

Everything is becoming history.

So photograph what's in front of you.

Not because it's extraordinary.

But because it's here.

Right now.

And one day, it won't be.

Peace.