Flux Archive 022 — Does a Photograph Need Meaning?

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

Welcome to the Flux Archive Session Number 22, where we look at some of the photographs I've made along my black-and-white photography journey.

Today, we're looking at photographs made from December 2024 to January 2025.

We're going to be taking a deep dive into two months of photography and discuss my thought on a photograph needing meaning.

Does a photograph need meaning?

Does a photograph need to tell a story?

What is the goal?

Why do we photograph?

These are questions I ask myself as I look at this image I made of this man at work putting a clock back up on the wall.

Photography Puts Me in the Present Moment

One of the reasons why I engage with photography is because it puts me in this meditative state of simply being.

Through the act of walking, wandering, and photographing, I exist outside the passage of time.

We have a past.

We have a future.

But these things aren't of my concern.

> ***When I'm in the present moment photographing, I find that to be the ultimate gift in life—the present.***

While I'm photographing, I'm not worried about whether the photograph has any meaning.

I'm not worried about what a viewer is going to think about my images.

I'm not worried about making a project or a theme or giving something that tells some sort of narrative.

I'm just living my life and allowing the medium to guide me in a way that orients me towards the present moment.

I'm noticing.

I'm feeling.

I'm receptive to everything.

Photography Beyond Photography

I use photography as a way for me to engage with life and to feel deeply about the day and my everyday mundane experiences.

I don't believe a photograph needs meaning.

I completely disregard the outcome of my photography.

> ***I'm simply using photography beyond photography.***

I'm using photography as a way for me to engage with humanity and to feel deeply about life.

There is no tried-and-true way to approach the medium.

There is no outcome or goal that you need to seek.

There is nobody, no gallery, and no person you need to please.

Ultimately, I think these photographs give *me* meaning.

Making these photographs provides me meaning.

Photography Is Personal and Selfish

Photography, for me, is a subjective, personal, selfish experience.

And I think that's okay.

I think it's okay to treat photography that way.

I think it's okay to use photography as a way to bring you closer to a place where you find meaning.

Photograph the things and places and have the experiences that bring you joy.

I follow my bliss.

I follow my joy.

And I allow that to reflect in my photographs.

I don't need any story.

I don’t need any meaning to my imagery because I don’t practice photography to achieve that goal.

I don’t practice photography for anybody but myself.

I practice photography because I believe that it allows me to understand who I am in this world, why I wake up in the morning, and what I’m curious about.

Once again, it’s an extremely subjective experience.

Does a Photograph Need a Story?

I don’t think about the photograph as a story or a narrative or something that needs to have impact or some sort of underlying message or meaning.

Sure, those things can emerge naturally.

There’s this photograph of a man putting his hand upon another man’s back and raising him up.

He goes to the train station and gives this homeless man, who is down and out, his cell phone to call somebody at home to send him $100 and help him.

That’s the story behind this photograph.

This man approached another man who was clearly unwell, put his hand on his back, said a prayer, raised him up, brought him to the train station, and helped him call somebody to give him money so that he could get back home.

But did I need to share that for this photograph to have meaning?

Did I need to tell you the backstory?

Did this photograph need a caption?

I don’t think so.

I don’t think that’s the point.

At least that’s not why I photograph.

Photography as Self-Discovery

That radical detachment from the photograph having meaning or having an impact on somebody else allows me to figure out who I am.

That’s really why I engage with this medium.

Photography really is an act of self-discovery.

As you chip away at your practice and photograph certain things, you start to get a deeper sense of your place in the world.

I think photography is a powerful tool for that.

These photographs are a reflection of me.

A reflection of how I experience things.

A reflection of the places that I go to that bring me joy.

A reflection of the things that I love and care about.

Do Things Because They Bring You Joy

Penn’s Landing is a place in my city that I love.

I visit it every single day.

I went there even on a snowy day along the river.

This is typically a place for the summertime, and you can see I'm walking on this cloudy, snowy day with these storm clouds in the distance.

But I care about this space.

This space brings me joy.

I'm not there to look for a photograph.

I simply walk there because I enjoy walking there.

> ***I think that's meaningful enough—to do something for the sake of it because it brings you joy and fulfillment in life.***

Don't worry about pleasing somebody else with your photography.

Don't worry about the outcome of the imagery.

Don't worry about the impact it's going to make.

Just go out there, explore, and seize the day.

I think that ultimately what you have to say will arise naturally through the imagery.

You don't have to force this thing.

The Camera Is an Excuse to Engage With Life

Photography provides me meaning.

It gives me a reason to talk to my bus driver.

When you have a camera, it becomes this excuse for you to engage with people.

Here we have Dee.

He was the best bus driver in the city.

He would ride the 38 bus and bring me to work each day.

Every morning, simply talking to him brought me meaning.

It brought me joy.

Does the photograph need to be meaningful for you?

No.

It's meaningful to me.

That's what I'm trying to get at.

I'm photographing selfishly, for myself.

If somebody enjoys the imagery, that's cool.

But it's not the point.

I Am the Viewer

The point isn't for me to make something that tells a story for you to read and find meaning within.

If you find meaning within this work and it resonates with you personally, that's great.

But it's not my goal.

I'm not thinking about who's on the other side of my images.

I'm making images to please myself and to discover who I am.

I'm making photographs to ask questions about life.

I'm the viewer on the other side.

I'm photographing for myself.

I'm thinking about myself coming home and looking at my photographs.

I'm not thinking about a viewer.

That's simply my personal philosophy.

Does a Photograph Need Meaning?

Does a photograph need meaning?

Does a photograph need a story?

I'm so radically detached from the imagery that I simply use photography as a way for me to engage with reality.

For me to just be present.

That's the ultimate reason why I photograph.

And that's the thought of the day.

If you want to make your own Flux Issue, visit the link in the description.

You can upload 36 photographs to the Flux Generator, create your own PDF, print it out at home, or even submit it directly to me, where I'll print out the work and review it through a video commentary on this YouTube channel.

I’m looking forward to seeing what you submit.

Otherwise, if you’d like to join the Flux Discord server community, click the Join button on the YouTube channel and you’ll receive a link to that community.

With that being said, thanks for watching.

I’ll see you soon.

Peace.