

FRAMES Magazine Interview

A Conversation Between Tomasz (FRAMES Magazine) and Dante Sisofo

*Originally published by **FRAMES Magazine**.*

Watch the full interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wtO5ybdcXA>

Introduction

Tomasz

Hello everyone, it's Tomasz here from FRAMES Magazine. I am back with another conversation. My guest today is Dante Sisofo, a photographer from Philadelphia whose work is built around instinct, repetition, curiosity, and complete immersion in everyday life.

We talk about photographing the same streets again and again, stepping away from likes and outside validation, embracing imperfection, and trying to remain an amateur forever. It's about photography, of course, but even more about why we keep doing it.

I hope very much you will enjoy my conversation with Dante Sisofo.

A Personal Connection

Tomasz

Dante, good morning. I mean, I guess good morning for you — it's afternoon over here in Switzerland. Great to have you here on FRAMES.

Just a couple of words before we start talking. As I told you a couple of minutes ago, I think I discovered your work a couple of years ago, and then somehow you disappeared from my radar. And just recently, a couple of weeks ago, I rediscovered it — through your YouTube channel, through your movies, and of course through your images, which you also present in those videos.

This is a special interview for me, a special conversation, because not only do I absolutely love the work you do and respect it and connect with it, but this is very personal for me. And apologies to all of you watching — this will probably get a little bit personal from time to time today, because I connect with your work on a level where it directly connects with the way I approach photography these days. Not only in terms of street, black and white, spontaneous moments, but somehow the approach to the entire process — the dynamics of what it all actually means for us, what it is for us, how it overlaps or connects with our lives, all together.

Okay, I'll stop rambling for now. You are connecting from Philadelphia, right?

Dante

Correct, correct. Yeah, I'm based here in Philadelphia, born and raised here in the United States. Thank you for having me on, Tomasz. I appreciate it.

Photographing Life

Tomasz

Oh, it's wonderful. I have so many questions — these are my notes, my questions. I was thinking for a couple of days how to even start this interview with you, because I have so many questions. But let me start with a simple question — simple in quotation marks, of course. I can't wait for your answer.

When somebody asks you — let's say they know you're a photographer — but when somebody asks you what it is that you actually photograph, how would you answer this person?

Dante

Well, my main interest in photography has always been humanity, and so I photograph life primarily. But recently, over the past four years photographing in black and white, my interest has been more about my internal, subjective interpretation of the world. So when I'm photographing, I'm looking to create an expressive image and perhaps evoke an emotional feeling through the imagery.

While I'm working in the streets and photographing the external world, my photographs become a reflection of my internal world. So it's more about the feeling that I have on the streets that I'm expressing through images. I'm photographing life, but I'm photographing myself as well.

"I'm photographing life, but I'm photographing myself as well."

Tomasz

It comes across very strongly, and you speak about it quite often in your videos. So when you're out there on the street, walking, observing the surroundings, using your eyes — when this moment comes that you feel you have to press the shutter, is it more about what you see, or is it more about what you feel internally? Where is this overlap? Where is this trigger happening for you?

Dante

So my real underlying interest when I go to photograph something has more to do with the fact that, while I'm looking at life with my eyes, the camera is interpreting reality. A lot of the time, when I go to throw the camera at something and

photograph from my instinct, I'm just curious about how life and light will look photographed through the camera's interpretation of things.

So it's more about me going beyond reality and trying to discover new things within the mundane through the way the camera sees the world. I'm operating the camera, but the camera's interpretation interests me.

Photography as a Physical Experience

Tomasz

Okay, I understand it, and I can relate to it very, very well. It's about the output, about the excitement, about the unknown. Some photographers in the past talked about it — I think it was Dorothea Lange, maybe, who said something like she can't wait to see how it looks in the photograph. But this is the output, right? This is the final image.

But what has to happen to you emotionally — based on visuals, or emotions, or a combination of the two — what has to happen that you decide to press the shutter in that moment?

Dante

It could be the light, it could be a gesture, it could be a texture on the wall. But that primary pull that I feel comes from a state of vitality. There's this feeling I get when I arrive at the flow state, and that flow state occurs when I'm not in my head and I'm not thinking, but there's a physical pull in my body to move toward something to photograph. It's a little bit hard to articulate or share with words, because it's a very physical, somatic experience.

When I shut off my mind and I enter my body on the streets, my body intuitively tells me to photograph things. It's not really a rational decision. I can't really share it with words, but there's this state of being where I become one with the environment, and I photograph from that state.

"When I shut off my mind and I enter my body on the streets, my body intuitively tells me to photograph things."

Tomasz

So it is an emotional sensation. It's a physical feeling.

Dante

It's a physical feeling from the gut, I think. It's something that I feel in my body. It's not necessarily a rational decision from my brain.

Tomasz

Goosebumps, many times.

Dante

Sometimes I feel really overwhelmed when I'm walking the streets, because I'm really in the moment and I'm enjoying the day, the sunlight, the people, the environment. Sometimes it doesn't feel like time exists, and I feel so present. I think that's why I love photography — because it puts me in the moment. That's where I start to photograph from, that state where I'm not in my mind, essentially.

"Sometimes it doesn't feel like time exists, and I feel so present."

Tomasz

So you photograph daily, I imagine? Or you have the camera with you at all times.

Dante

Yeah, the camera is always with me. It's rare—

Walking the Same Streets

Tomasz

Yeah, we'll get to this one. Okay, let me collect my thoughts, because this is so exciting for me — I can relate to so many aspects of your approach. You photograph these days, and have for a while now, with a small Ricoh GR, right? In black and white predominantly, very contrasty images. Do you walk the same streets very often?

Dante

Yeah, I pretty much walk the same routine walk every single day, and I've been doing it for nearly four years straight. I've been purposely walking the very mundane street that I walk every day.

Tomasz

So — you know that many people, many photographers, struggle with the idea of finding anything exciting to photograph in their own area, in their own neighborhood. They just don't see things. What is it for you? What surprises you, or what kind of moments do you find on the same street every day? Is it more details? Is it new people walking by? What happens that you don't get bored?

Dante

I would say that my mindset and my approach to how I physically walk on the street is influencing my ability to photograph the same street every day. For instance, when I'm walking, I'm walking at an extremely slow pace — around 75% slower than everybody around me. So I become hyper-aware of the smallest details, whether it's the shaft of light or the people.

From that slow walk, I start to see more, and then I ultimately photograph more. I realized that through walking the same street every day, everything is changing around me. New bus stops are being built, new buildings are popping up, the people are always in flux and changing. And every single day I return to the streets as a new person.

I think the mindset shift — where I'm recognizing the infinite possibility in the mundane — is what's getting me there. And I find it's arriving from this state of flux and change that exists all around me.

"Every single day I return to the streets as a new person."

Shoot First, Ask Questions Later

Tomasz

And the moment when you notice something — correct me if I'm wrong — while still looking just with your eyes, I could imagine you just go for it. You loosely frame it, you just react, camera toward the direction. You don't hesitate, right? You take the image.

Dante

Yeah, I pretty much just shoot first and ask questions later. A lot of the time it's a physical act, where I just move the camera in the direction. Because I use the same focal length every day, I know where to stand, and I know how to frame things without looking through the viewfinder a lot of the time.

Tomasz

Exactly. This is a very interesting moment to mention something. You'll be familiar with a photographer from Japan, Shin Noguchi.

Dante

Yes.

Tomasz

There was a very interesting interview with him — I guess they organize awards, and he is the juror there, on the competition. He mentioned that for him, shooting without looking through the viewfinder is almost a no-go. But his reasoning was interesting. He mentioned that he doesn't want to hide the fact that he's a photographer from the people around him. So the act of actually looking through the viewfinder, and presenting himself as a photographer to the people around him, is an important part.

Dante

Mhm.

Tomasz

But then I immediately thought about it: if you do use the viewfinder, most probably your framing, your composing of the image, automatically becomes more conscious, more exact. I can imagine, with you, with your Ricoh GR, that framing and exact composition — taking care of what's at the edge of the frame — is not of utmost importance, right? Am I right?

Dante

Yeah, I would say I still have an understanding of the formalities of composition, and synthesizing with the content and the emotional quality, but I'm really less interested in presenting the perfect image. I've been leaning more toward the imperfect frame, as that's how we experience life. I find it reflects the raw, authentic, spontaneous nature of what it's like to be on the street. So my approach is to photograph quickly and intuitively, with speed, and move on to the next one. That way I can evoke that raw, spontaneous feeling in the imagery.

"I've been leaning more toward the imperfect frame, as that's how we experience life."

Tomasz

And — we already talked about it before recording — connecting the dots, there is automatically this sort of connection which I drew between your kind of work and Daido Moriyama from Japan. He happens to be another Japanese photographer walking the streets of Tokyo to this day, also maybe with a Ricoh GR occasionally.

Dante

Mhm.

Tomasz

Completely spontaneous, and never looking at the viewfinder, at the LCD screen — knowing his camera in and out. There are a couple of videos of him walking; you can see his technique, his approach, basically noticing something within a millisecond, just pointing the camera in that direction, pressing the shutter. But how does it work for you? I can also imagine you shoot a lot. We can see it on your website — you have the Flux, Philadelphia, Philly in Flux, right? The project.

400,000 Frames

Dante

Yeah, that's a new project that I'm working on, where I'm systematically archiving street by street — every street in my city. My Flux Archive is a collection of the work I've been making in black and white over the past four years, and I've reached nearly 400,000 frames throughout the past four years clicking the shutter.

Tomasz

Okay, so it's thousands of frames — probably more, thousands of them. And now, do you at all engage in a process of selection and editing?

Editing and Selection

Dante

Lately I've been selecting photos and putting them together in my own personal zines. I created a system for my output in photography where I'm creating 36-picture zines with my own black-and-white monochrome printer and cheap copy paper. I've been stapling them and printing them and storing them in manila folders that I actually have with me, and I've been viewing the work chronologically as a solution to the way that I experience my photography.

I've been printing the work and collecting the work, and every single day when I come home from photographing, I import the photographs right away, I make instant selections, I back them up, and I move on. Eventually, at the end of the year, I'll go through and cull through those images. But I'm always on top of going through it.

Tomasz

Okay. And the ones you don't select — are they going immediately? You're deleting them?

Dante

I back them up. I have them on an external hard drive. Mostly, on my Flux Archive, I have maybe 10,000 images that I've pulled down to some degree. I think that for me, it's less about creating the perfect curated body of work, but more about the endless stream of imagery. So it's not necessarily about me making my next best picture, or looking for that picture, but just continuously making pictures.

"It's less about creating the perfect curated body of work, but more about the endless stream of imagery."

Tomasz

So what is, for you — when compared with each other — the importance of a single image and a big body of work, or maybe an ongoing process? Does the single image still matter a lot, and if yes, in what way?

Dante

I think that in my previous way of working — traveling the world, working within the documentary approach and hunting for single images — I hit this point in my process where I realized that this pursuit leads to a bit of burnout. It's very difficult to achieve that kind of output. I've been photographing for a little over a decade now, and I realized over that journey that to get those single images, it requires a lot of time spent doing the thing.

So I've detached myself from the single image as a way for me to continue photographing with longevity. The importance of the single image is there, but my relationship to it has changed. They're far and few between. I know they will come, but I'm not necessarily attached to that. I'm more interested in the stream of images, and how I can essentially change each day and make something new.

Tomasz

Okay. But still — what happens in the evening? You say you come back in the evening, downloading those images, making your selection, which means you are evaluating each individual frame in some way, right?

Dante

Yeah, I'm looking through my images every day, and I'm picking the ones that stand out to me immediately. I look at my photos as small thumbnails — typically like what you see on my wall behind me — but I make the selections very quickly. I'm not thinking about it too much. I try to just make those selections quickly, to the pile.

Tomasz

It's incredible. Right now you're like a carbon copy of how I work. It's just crazy. It's basically scary — also high-contrast black and white, and everything. So what does it have to be in this single frame that you keep? After you go through, what is it that makes you decide to keep one?

Dante

I think lately my photography has been about simplification. I'm looking to remove more from the frame and then reveal the essence of it — whether it's the formalities of the composition, the shape, the gesture, or the emotion on the face. The images that I typically select stand out to me as a small thumbnail that I can easily read and that has some sort of visual impact. So I'm more about removing more from the frame and simplifying things. That's usually what I'm drawn to these days — simplification and the removal of clutter.

"I'm looking to remove more from the frame and then reveal the essence of it."

Tomasz

So are the thumbnails really small on the screen?

Dante

Yeah, I use an iPad Pro with a 3x3 grid when I go through my images, and then I print them small here on my wall, and I have thumbnails all over the floor here.

Leaving Instagram

Tomasz

Switching gears a little bit. You used to have an Instagram account. You don't have it anymore, right?

Dante

Yeah, deleted it a couple of years ago. Or — yeah, a couple of years ago, I guess.

Tomasz

What I find also very interesting — because that's how I rediscovered you, actually, through YouTube — as far as, correct me if I'm wrong, you have the comments section on YouTube switched off.

Dante

I do, yeah.

Tomasz

How important is the feedback loop for you, if at all? You still present your images to the world — they're on YouTube, they're on your website, for those who know it. I hope after the interview more people will know about the website. But what about the feedback flow? What's the importance of the reactions of whoever is looking at your photographs?

Dante

I purposely disabled comments and likes from my YouTube channel, and have gone off the grid of Instagram, because I found that when I have feedback — whether it was good or bad — it really does influence me. When I see imagery and I'm constantly bombarded with these things, it distracts me from my own way of photographing. So I purposely decided to stop consuming contemporary photography, and to simply stop engaging with the feedback loop.

That act alone has completely transformed my relationship to the medium and to life itself. I'm really grateful to have removed myself from feedback, because it's allowed me to experiment without the distraction and noise of what my peers think about what I'm doing. It's a very radical, personal decision for me to do this, and I'm honestly really grateful for doing it, because it's allowed me to transform and evolve. And I've been doing it publicly, I guess you could say.

"That act alone has completely transformed my relationship to the medium and to life itself."

Tomasz

This is very interesting. On one hand, you are detaching yourself, or switching off the possibilities of receiving feedback from people, but you are still putting the work out there into the public. I mean, you could be just keeping it all on your hard drive, or printing it and keeping it in your drawers. How is it for us artists? Why do you think you still present them, even if you don't necessarily know who reacts, and how, to your photographs — but you still put them out, right?

Dante

I mostly publish my photographs themselves on a website page, but YouTube for me has been more of a medium of note-taking, where I typically record my thoughts candidly and share them online. It simply became a place for me to host all of this video content and all of my thoughts and ideas.

The way that I approach photography is as a personal visual diary, and the way I approach sharing things is in a similar vein — I'm sharing my diary thoughts publicly, and if somebody's interested, they can tune in. Typically I'm more interested in engaging with one individual who understands what I'm doing than a million people who are just liking the work. So I'm trying to share that raw thought behind my process on YouTube. It's become more of a personal, selfish way of me sharing, so that I can discover my own voice, basically.

"Typically I'm more interested in engaging with one individual who understands what I'm doing than a million people who are just liking the work."

Tomasz

I was about to say — I found you and I wanted to connect. So I can imagine that occasionally there's an individual, a photographer, who really resonates, and you probably just get a message from them, and then you connect, right? It's actually a

perfect way of filtering all of that stream of social media comments and likes down to the most valuable connections, right?

I respect you very much for making those radical decisions. It's not easy for everyone. For most of us it's not easy. We strive for those stupid likes, for those good comments. Sure, it helps us grow, it helps us, it maybe boosts the confidence if the feedback is fine. But on the other hand, like you say, I can also understand that all this influence of social media, and seeing all of those different kinds of works, can distract us from doing what we actually want to do. But — you said you don't consume any other photography work at all these days? Or do you still look at books and other work?

Dante

I have a collection of photo books at home, but in terms of contemporary photography, and just consuming things online generally, I've neglected it and have been mostly just producing ruthlessly. My current book that I go back to is one I found in an old bookshop in Old City, Philadelphia. It's *The World of Atget*, curated by Berenice Abbott. I'm very much inspired by Eugène Atget's systematic approach to documenting the streets of Paris. That imagery has been sitting with me over the past four years of my black-and-white journey, and has been my direct source of inspiration photographically.

"In terms of contemporary photography, and just consuming things online generally, I've neglected it and have been mostly just producing ruthlessly."

Philly in Flux

Tomasz

So, back to your Philly in Flux project. You shoot hundreds of thousands of images. Now imagine this project will go on for decades. Let's say for decades — do you have any hope? Is it more that in those couple of decades those photographs will

say more — if somebody discovers them, maybe you publish them in some way — will they say more about Philadelphia, or will they say more about yourself?

Dante

Well, I think there's going to be a sense of both. My personal interpretation of Philadelphia is obviously going to be on display. But lately, the way I'm documenting things along these particular streets for this Philly in Flux project is less about me inserting myself in the photograph, and almost more about me trying to remove myself from the photograph, so that the image I make is almost a matter of fact.

I'm timestamping my photographs with captions that showcase the time and the date that the photograph was made. So I'm adopting the approach of simply documenting life as it is, while simultaneously having my own aesthetic sensitivities that will obviously arise with my decisions about how I compose things through my eyes. I would hope that the work resonates beyond just Dante observing life — more about the essence of what Philadelphia is. That's my thought on that.

Tomasz

But it's still very much your Philadelphia, right? Because these are still those images — very often very rough images, details, not necessarily street scenes, like "this is the corner of this and that avenue." It's something very personal still, right?

Dante

Absolutely, yeah.

High-Contrast Black & White

Tomasz

Okay. Just briefly — we don't usually talk here on FRAMES about cameras and lenses and gear, but—

Dante

Yeah, it's okay.

Tomasz

The funny thing is, I just told you I shoot myself very often with the Fujifilm X70.

Dante

Mhm.

Tomasz

I also own the Ricoh GR, which — after seeing your work — I grabbed again, I have to admit, a couple of days ago. I experimented with the black-and-white high-contrast mode. You shoot a lot in this high-contrast mode. You also shoot in JPEGs, and so on — a very streamlined, simple process. Why? What about the visual language, and the choice of this very high-contrast black and white? Does it resonate with some idea of yours, of how to portray life and the city? Was it a very conscious choice?

Dante

Honestly, originally it became a very technical decision. The amount of photographs that I shoot just stacking up — having this backlog on hard drives, and the processing times — became really cumbersome for me. So choosing the compact camera was a very conscious decision, as I can slip it in my pocket and always have it with me. And shooting with small JPEGs and high contrast just simplifies things even further, where what you see is what you get. I don't process my photos.

But the interesting fact is that what I get back in the photograph, a lot of the time, is what I didn't see. So the use of high-contrast black-and-white photography allows this unrepeatable process for me, where the simple change of light can create a

completely different image of the same exact scene, or the same exact thing. Pushing the contrast to the extremes unlocks this ability for me to photograph endlessly. It's a very personal, technical decision, while simultaneously aligning with my philosophy around photography and my embrace of that immediate instinct and imperfection.

"What I get back in the photograph, a lot of the time, is what I didn't see."

Becoming an Amateur Forever

Tomasz

I just had this thought — it's super fascinating that, like you say, in a way there's a part of surprise when you look at the final image and maybe discover things you didn't see. At the same time, we often say that we, as photographers, are trying to somehow project our vision, our way of looking — the things we notice, and only we notice — onto our images. I feel like you are surfing in between those two approaches. Is it, in the end, your signature image and style? You see something, you want to photograph it, but then maybe in the image there's also something else which you didn't see. Where is the conscious decision about taking this frame?

Dante

Right. Once again, it's an instinct. It's a physical, embodied experience, and I think you can only know it if you experience it. I have a strong understanding of the visual language of photography through my studies, and through my experience traveling and making my own strong, composed frames. I did that for around seven years. So the past four years is me breaking everything that I think I know about photography, so that I can endlessly, continuously become curious and discover new things. The goal for me is to return to day one and never master photography. I want to be an amateur forever, essentially, and just always learn.

"The goal for me is to return to day one and never master photography. I want to be an amateur forever."

Tomasz

So was it a moment when you switched gears completely? You just felt like you'd had enough, and you were kind of stuck — was it a dead-end moment for you, and you had to crush it all and start new?

Dante

Yeah, it became a little bit strange for me. I was walking around Hanoi, Vietnam, and I had the camera on my neck, and I was going to these bustling markets, looking for these interesting scenes and trying to photograph something that I hadn't before. But I realized I'm continually photographing what I already have before. I wanted to break through and create something new. So I decided to radically reapproach things from the ground up and return to a simplified process, essentially.

Photography Without Validation

Tomasz

I love it. I love this story — this whole circle. I have a couple of images of yours. I did my best to choose four from, you know, x-thousands of them. But before we jump into the images, just one very last question, because I just watched the video you posted — I think half an hour ago — from one of your books, where you played with the idea of completely detaching yourself from your output. You even asked the rhetorical question: how would it be if we were photographing but not even looking at our final images ever? What were your thoughts there? This is pretty extreme, right?

Dante

Yeah, it's really an existential question around our mortality, almost — the fact that we're all going to die. And when I think about that — unless something changes, right? [laughs] — but when I think about that, it radically frees me from this need to

please and validate myself through other people looking at or appreciating my work. It really puts me into this place where I'm only making work because I like making work.

It's less to do with the outcome and more to do with the experience of me just being in the moment, meeting new people, exploring new places. And you know what? If you were to never see the photographs — would you continue photographing? Or is the output, and the attachment, and the trophy that you bring home, the goal? I think it's just an interesting question to pose to the photography community, as we are constantly seeking validation, submitting our work to contests and having them judged by others. To turn inward and fulfill yourself personally — at least for me — has been extremely fulfilling, and I just like sharing that with others. For me, the meaning is found within the process.

"I'm only making work because I like making work. For me, the meaning is found within the process."

Tomasz

In such cases — I can imagine, because I can see people watching the videos. There are a couple of them at least sitting there and just dreaming about dropping a comment, but you don't let them even comment. It's such a thought-provoking question, and you post many of them in your videos. But I can understand — maybe those discussions would take another hundreds of hours of your life.

Dante

Yeah. [laughs]

Four Photographs

Tomasz

Let's look at a couple of images — just four. And by the way, I'm very sorry — I'm one of those who really appreciate and respect your work. [laughs] So let's look at just — I selected four of them. Spontaneous reactions, exactly like with the scenes you photograph. Now you just spontaneously look at your own images. Whatever pops into your mind, into your head, just share a couple of thoughts with us. Maybe you'll remember the situations. Okay, let's start with this one.

Dante

Yeah, this photograph I made on Walnut Street here in Philadelphia. I was walking down the street and I noticed this man's tattoo on his arm, and I engaged the subject and photographed his tattoo. He basically showed me his tattoo and I photographed it. The photograph that I made at that moment actually was made from that instinctual state, but I was also engaged with the humanity — I was at the scene, I engaged this person openly, and as he lifted his shirt I made the frame. Yeah, it was a very raw and gritty surprise to see the actual tattoo that's revealed, that we all are familiar with.

Tomasz

And how often does it come to actually — considering your way of photographing on the streets these days, the technique and everything — how often does it come to some kind of interaction with the people you photograph, or who happen to be in your images?

Dante

It really depends. I would say maybe once in a blue moon, though. It's not all the time that I'm engaging. But when I see a subject that is interesting and has some sort of character to them — whether it's tattoos or something — I'll provoke the subject, I'll maybe make a picture, and then eventually have them sort of comfortable at the scene, and continue photographing.

Human First, Photographer Second

Tomasz

Would you ever, these days, tell them what to do?

Dante

Not directing the subject. But I would say the interactions that I have have been something I learned throughout my journey photographing. I feel like my approach is more about being a human first and a photographer second. So I'm able to go from making candid, sneaky pictures that are off the cuff, to then engaging with people, embedding myself in scenes, and photographing. That comes through my experience traveling the world and engaging with people. So I go back and forth.

"My approach is more about being a human first and a photographer second."

Tomasz

So this was one of those moments. Okay, let's look at the next one.

Dante

This photograph was made at Penn's Landing in Philadelphia. It's one of my favorite locations. I was looking at the river, at these birds in flight. When I made the frame, I was obviously interested in the pattern of the birds, and I had this angle from a top-down perspective. And the way I kind of made this surreal image was through underexposing the frame with my high-contrast approach.

I absolutely love to observe the patterns of people — the motion of the feet, the gestures — but also nature and light and birds in flight. So I'm very much drawn to these specific spaces in my city, especially by the riverside. I gravitate here naturally, and this is just one of the photos I made while I was walking.

Tomasz

So when you noticed this scene — like you said, you underexposed it a lot — is it like a decision you almost instinctively feel happening? Okay, I have to underexpose, and you just know your camera very well, you underexpose. Is it a very quick process?

Dante

It's extremely quick. I basically only use one setting on my camera, which is the exposure compensation dial. So when I see something, I know: okay, underexpose, or even overexpose. I have this intuitive way of exposing with just a quick adjustment of my finger. This was one of those moments where I knew that I could crush the background and expose for the highlights. That's one of my techniques through my images to simplify things, which I'm looking to achieve.

Tomasz

Yeah. Do you ever print your images big?

Dante

Yeah, I have some images I've blown up pretty big — 17x22. I've got a Canon Pro-1000 at home, and surprisingly, the small JPEG file, which is around 4 megabytes, grit and gray and everything — they look beautiful. But I do prefer my work printed on just cheap copy paper, actually, with a monochrome laserjet.

Tomasz

Yeah, this would be a nice bigger print. I think it's special.

Dante

Yeah, absolutely.

Tomasz

Friends, or whatever, and — yeah. Okay, next one. I love this one, absolutely.

Dante

Thank you. Yeah, this was an image I made in Costa Rica. I was on vacation with my brother, and the dog swooped by, and it was one of those instinctual moments. I didn't look through the viewfinder. I saw the dog, I made the picture, and I moved on. I believe it was photographed with the Ricoh GR IIIX, which is a 40mm. I made the picture from that instinct. I saw the dog move, I didn't think, and I made the frame. That's a lot of the time how it works for me. I see the movement, I see the shape, I see the gesture, I click the button — and the surprise is what I'm interested in.

"I see the movement, I see the shape, I see the gesture, I click the button — and the surprise is what I'm interested in."

Tomasz

Absolutely love it. And this one, by coincidence, or whatever it might be, it has some kind of tribute to Moriyama and his dog, right?

Dante

It does. Yeah.

Tomasz

Yeah, wonderful. I love every single image. Now, I was surprised myself, and I discovered — I didn't know about it until a couple of hours ago — that you also used to shoot in color.

Dante

Absolutely. Yeah. So I photographed in color for many years. The foundation of my photography is color, strong light, working with people in the documentary approach. This photograph was made in Baltimore. I made this picture in 2016, and this is one of the first pictures that really started it all for me.

I approached this scene at this basketball court in West Baltimore, and I'll never forget — it was the first time that I decided, well, maybe I should go and ask for permission. Maybe I can work this scene here. I noticed the beautiful golden light, the shadow play. I was shooting with the Ricoh GR II at the time, with just point-and-shoot mode. And as the scene unfolded, I made this image. From there, I continued on down that practice of photographing with color and light and humanity, and traveling. This is basically a foundational picture for me.

Tomasz

Okay. I mean, this is photography at its best. For me, it's — you must also be familiar with the work of Alex Webb. This could be his shot. It's just great.

Still Photography and Video

Tomasz

No, Dante, as I said at the beginning, we are now at — what is it? — yeah, 40 minutes. We could be talking for hours. I hope we meet one day and go shooting together, or something like this. Unless you detach yourself completely from everything. I hope not. I hope the camera will be accompanying you for decades.

Do you ever think in 10 — how should I put it? Do you have new ideas popping up in your head still? Like, okay, now you are in this phase, you enjoy what you're doing — I feel it, it comes through your images — but, speaking to a creative like yourself, a creative person, I can imagine there is much going on in there. So, opening up for different approaches, different projects, experimenting with something completely different — what do you do with those ideas? Do you write them down? What's going on? Because I can imagine there's much going on in your head when it comes to creativity.

Dante

Yeah, I'll write them down. A lot of the time I make a YouTube video and I share my ideas publicly, and I hope that they can inspire somebody, or even join me. Actually, I recently have been experimenting with video on the street. I recently just displayed some video work in a gallery here in Philly — a CRT television installation, with some old handycam footage that I made on the street. So I've been experimenting with using a video camera and documenting the moments that I typically would with still imagery, but now with moving imagery. That's been something that I've been working on for the past few months, pushing myself to make some street video work here in Philadelphia.

Tomasz

Do you feel, in those moments — because I also know, I know everything you're talking about, it's so funny — with your video experiments, do you feel sometimes that you are kind of betraying your still photography in those moments? Or do you feel they compete with each other, or somehow complement each other, in this creative, big overall sense?

Dante

Yeah, I think it's going to complement my work. I think it is complementing my work. I've accumulated so much imagery over the past four years with my black-and-white photography that I've reached this point where I want to play more, experiment more. A lot of the time when I'm walking now, I have my handycam and I've got my Ricoh, and I look at life completely differently. When I see these moments occurring across the street, I can zoom in with a 20x optical zoom and document these intimate moments that I honestly otherwise wouldn't be able to grab with my camera. So it's a very freeing and inspiring experience for me, because it's unlocking new ways of me thinking and viewing the world. I'm grateful that I picked up this new approach.

Tomasz

And those two parts — video, still — do you really genuinely feel they kind of influence, inspire each other?

Dante

I think so. I think lately, since adopting video in my process, it's been influencing my photography. The images that I've created from instinct and working on the streets with the compact camera were a creative breakthrough for me originally — I started doing things in a very radically new way. And I think to continue having this perpetual evolution as a photographer, I need something new. So the video camera has been that thing for me. I believe that as I dabble back and forth between these two mediums, it's going to allow that evolution to occur naturally. That's what I'm seeking — something new that can then influence my still imagery.

"I look at life completely differently... it's unlocking new ways of me thinking and viewing the world."

Teaching Photography

Tomasz

It sounds very exciting. Last thing — I noticed a couple of your videos, or many of them, are kind of what you call lessons, where you share your philosophy, your approach, and you even talk about gear, settings, and so on. Do you teach in person?

Dante

I'm open to it. I haven't actually launched an official in-person workshop experience, but I'd really love to teach others my practice and help others with their photography. I started a small online workshop experience where I've been teaching people photography, and specifically zine making, online. So that's one thing I started doing. If people want to get in contact or reach me, they can join my YouTube channel, or actually use my Flux Zine generator on my website, and they'll receive the link to join my own private community. So I've been engaging with people there, and I'm very open to that.

Tomasz

Hey, this is your main work — it's great to hear. Stay in touch; maybe we come up with some ideas. We have a big community of people hungry for this kind of content, and I think you can just deliver so much inspiration and ideas — and not even speaking about all the technical skill set in your hands.

Closing Thoughts

Tomasz

So, Dante, thank you so much. Fascinating. I'm so happy we finally connected, and I can't wait to see where all those creative experiments take you next. We will be following your work. We'll definitely stay in touch, and yeah — all the best with your next walk, video, or photography work, whatever it might be. Thank you so much for today.

Dante

Yeah, thank you, Tomasz. Thank you for having me.