

Flux Archive 018 — Your Instinct Creates Your Style

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

Welcome to Flux Archive Session Number 18, where we look at some of the photographs that I made along my black-and-white photography journey.

Today we're looking at photographs I made from April to June of 2024.

We're going to go through the work and discuss some thoughts about photography.

Today's thought is about **instinct and why I believe your instinct is ultimately what creates your style.**

Style Is Not an Aesthetic Decision

I want to share my thoughts on style because I don't believe that style is necessarily an aesthetic decision of whether or not you're photographing in black and white or color, or using this lens or that lens.

I believe that our style arises through instinct.

I've personally gotten to this point where I no longer think and I only photograph from my pure instinct.

Essentially, it's come to me through giving myself creative constraints.

You can go out there and photograph with a particular focal length. You can photograph with color or black and white, try these things, dabble with these things, and try to find your style.

But if you don't commit to the constraint for an extended period of time, it's going to be impossible for you to truly and authentically cultivate your instinct.

Instinct occurs where thinking dies.

It's where you're simply moving your body and responding quickly.

The photographs you make from that state, I believe, reflect your most authentic internal state.

Remove the Decisions

Firstly, using the compact Ricoh GR with a 28mm focal length built into the camera eliminates so many decisions already.

Which camera?

Which lens?

For the past four years now, I've committed to shooting with the Ricoh GR, shooting with the focal length glued to the camera, and photographing with automatic mode, whether P mode or AV mode.

I basically have complete automatic controls on my camera.

When it comes to post-processing, everything is done in camera.

I shoot with the small JPEG file with the high-contrast black-and-white settings cranked to the max.

I don't do any tweaking in Lightroom.

I don't do any tweaking of the files.

Everything is done straight out of camera.

From the ground up, we've got automatic mode, post-processing baked into my JPEG file, and a camera setup that is consistent.

I'm using the same focal length.

Cultivating Instinct

Now that I'm locked in technically and I've given myself this box to work in creatively, I can cultivate my instinct.

I'm no longer fumbling with my camera.

I'm no longer thinking about camera settings.

I'm no longer thinking about whether or not this should be a color scene or a black-and-white scene.

I'm not thinking about whether I should do any post-processing.

I'm really not thinking about anything at all.

I'm in the flow state.

Because I'm using that same focal length, I know where to step and move my body in relationship to a scene to photograph something.

When I look at a scene, I don't necessarily need to line the composition up by bringing the camera to my eye.

I can simply move my body and photograph a scene and know how things will align naturally because I'm in tune with my equipment.

When your equipment truly becomes an extension of your body, an extension of your eye, you can start to cultivate your instinct.

Style Takes Time

Your style isn't something that you can flip a switch on overnight by shooting in color or black and white.

It's not something that arrives simply by adopting creative constraints and decisions.

It only arises with time.

You need to be consistent.

You need repetition.

You need to pretty much go out there and shoot every single day.

Over time, with consistency compounding and your instinct developing, you can go back through the photographs and discover your voice.

You can discover what you have to say.

But it's only possible through a stretch of time spent cultivating your instincts.

You Cannot Force Your Style

This is the most practical way that I can share with you how to arrive at instinct.

It's essentially a way for you to cultivate your style by removing all decision-making and focusing on the embodied experience of responding intuitively to the moments in front of you.

You can then much more authentically express yourself through the medium.

You can't force your style.

You can't force it by creating a post-processing style.

You can't force it by making a compositional decision.

You can't force it by doing some technique or trick.

I believe you can only cultivate your authentic expression through removing all decisions and responding to instinct.

That's my radical thought about style.

Style is born through consistency and instinct over a stretch of time.

Discover Who You Are Internally

I've found myself practicing this way for nearly four years straight now.

I feel like my instincts are dialed in.

I know what triggers me.

I know what I'm looking for.

By responding to instinct and no longer hesitating or thinking, I know that I'm doing everything in my power to authentically express myself.

I also haven't been consuming anything in terms of inspiration with my photography.

As you can see here, I have a slug on my hand. I've just been spending time alone in the park.

In another frame, my foot is planted in the grass.

I'm finding myself surrounded by nature these days.

I don't even look at photo books or study anything.

I'm mostly just reading ancient philosophy.

I'm walking through the parks endlessly, and I'm spending a lot of time alone so that I can discover who I am internally.

When you know who you are internally, what you photograph and what reflects back externally in the imagery is your authentic expression.

Stop Consuming and Comparing

Remove yourself from the constant state of consumption and comparison.

Stop constantly looking at photography online or in photo books, trying to study history, or trying to contrive some sort of narrative, project, or theme.

Start photographing from your instinct.

Give yourself that creative constraint.

I think it will become inevitable that you'll find what you have to say and find that authentic way of photographing.

I really do believe that you can't force it.

It can only be delivered to you.

And it will deliver itself to you over time.

That's the purest way that I can conceive of finding your style.

Creative constraints + instinct + time = your style.

What Photographing From Instinct Looks Like

It's crazy.

It's wild.

When I photograph on the streets now, I'll literally shift my camera into macro mode to photograph a hand.

I'm on the street, holding this Ricoh up high above this guy's head. I shift into macro mode by clicking up on the D-pad, put the camera extremely close, and photograph the details of his fingers.

With another moment, I was speaking to another photographer on the street.

As I was speaking, I heard this boy crying.

I literally just quickly dropped the camera to the side of my leg and photographed without even looking through the viewfinder or looking at the screen.

It's a complete hip shot.

When you're in tune with your equipment, when you remove all thinking and decision-making, you can quickly grab the camera, put it in macro mode, put it above your head, and click the shutter.

Or if you hear a boy crying, you can take your camera, throw it to your side, photograph from the hip, and have the composition align.

That's what it looks like to photograph from instinct.

Instinct Occurs Where Thinking Dies

It looks like walking down the sidewalk and suddenly hearing a woman screaming as she exits a doorway coming from the subway.

You shift your body.

You move.

You click the shutter.

You're not thinking.

You're simply responding instinctively.

That's where I believe your style is born. It's born from instinct.

It's not something you can contrive.

It's not something you can force.

Creative Constraints + Instinct + Time

That's the major thought of the day.

Here we have the contact sheet of the frames that I made and the manifest document.

I didn't really talk too much about the work today. I just wanted to discuss some philosophy around style.

One of my favorite frames from the book is this tiny hand of the child going to high-five that big guy's hand during the grease pole celebration at the South Philadelphia 9th Street Festival.

It's one of the craziest festivals that we have in the city and probably one of the best days to photograph in the streets.

Here we have this incredible moment of the hands touching.

There's some good work in here.

There's a photograph I made of my friend in the Art Museum.

Some clouds here, which are just beautiful, that I enjoyed.

And then we have this photograph I made of a fly with macro mode.

That's pretty much it for today's thoughts.

If you want to create your own Flux Issue, visit the description for the Flux Generator.

Upload 36 pictures. You can download and print out your own PDF or submit it directly to me.

If I enjoy the work, I'll add it to the Flux catalog, print out the work, and review it in a video here on my YouTube channel.

Feel free to submit your Flux Issues to me. I'd love to see the work that you make, talk about the work, and share it here on my YouTube channel.

Otherwise, if you want to join the Flux Discord server community, click the Join button on the YouTube channel to gain access to the server.

If you're in the Flux Discord server, feel free to leave suggestions of topics or anything you want me to discuss, and I'll be happy to share those ideas with you.

With that being said, that's pretty much all I have to say.

See you soon.

Peace.