

Reflections on Photography & Art - 8

Exercising your Creativity



by
Alain Briot

This essay is the second of a four parts series
titled as follows:

- 1 - Finding Inspiration
- 2 - Exercising your Creativity
- 3 - Developing your Vision
- 4 - Achieving your Personal Style

Together these four essays are represent, first, an exploration of the too-rarely discussed subject of inspiration and creativity, and second a road map towards the development of a vision and the achievement of a personal style unique to you.

Each essay features a set of
Skill Enhancement Exercises
that allow you to practice and develop your skills on your own

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1 – Introduction

Creativity grows out of two things: curiosity & imagination.
Benny Goodman

You may wonder why an essay on creativity follows an essay in inspiration. After all, is there really a difference between the two? If you ask yourself this question you are not alone because I wondered about this as well while I was working on this series of essays.

In fact I originally titled the essay on Inspiration “Creativity and Inspiration.” However, while I wrote this essay I found it increasingly difficult to write about both inspiration and creativity at the same time. I found that although these two subjects are usually presented together, there are many things that separate them.

First, being creative is not the same as being inspired. On the one hand, one can be inspired and not exercise his or her creativity. On the other hand, one can be creative without being able to find inspiration. The first situation is comparable to staring at a blank canvas. The desire is there but the implementation is lacking. The second situation results in unsatisfying output, in artwork that goes into all sorts of different directions but lacks a specific and unifying source of inspiration.

Second, inspiration by itself does not necessarily result in the creation of new work. Inspiration is a spark that can potentially lead to a creative fire, metaphorically speaking. However, for the fire to be lit one has to nurse the amber generated by creativity until it becomes a raging fire. If not, this amber may die a quick death, carrying with it the hopes of our newborn inspiration.

Third, creativity carries with it certain risks. The most notable is being creative for creativity’s sake, without following a specific inspiration and without catering to the needs of a specific vision.

In other words, those two terms, inspiration and creativity, are not similar. Although they are commonly used interchangeably, they really address two separate parts of the artistic process. It is for this reason that I decided to devote a separate essay to each of them.

2 - The difference between inspiration and creativity

*The aim of creative photography is to make a visual interpretation
of an experience, not just to record an image.*
Monte Nagler

Inspiration is the flame that lights our creative fire. How that flame is born is the purpose of my previous essay *On Finding Inspiration*. What to do once the flame is lit is the purpose of this second essay *Exercising Creativity*.

Inspiration is the motivating factor that makes an artist want to create new work. However, by itself inspiration is just that: a motivating factor, a thought, a desire. It may be a burning desire, but it is not a physical reality.

What makes inspiration a reality, what turns inspiration into a work of art, is creativity. Creativity in this regard is the logical outcome of inspiration. Creativity is what makes inspiration a physical reality. It is therefore through creativity that you will make your inspiration come to life into a work of art.

Creativity may be described as focused freedom. On the one hand you are free to create, on the other hand you are focused upon your work and your vision. It is a mix of two opposite directional forces in a way. In that respect it is a challenging state to find, to experience and to make happen. However, once you are in this state, magical things can take place that would not otherwise happen to you.

3 – Do not delay creativity

How do you find this state? It is hard to say for sure because we are not fully in control of creativity. In fact, we may not be in control at all. What we are in control of is our openness to taking advantage of the inspiration brought by the muses when they visit us, and the creative urge that follows this visit. The sooner we can give way to this creative urge, the better.

The best is to give way to this urge immediately when it takes a hold of us. To follow upon the example used in my previous essay, with the photographer sitting on the edge of the Grand canyon feeling inspired to create images of the Grand Canyon that represent his personal experience of the chasm, the best is to create these images right away.

Don't plan to do this on a later trip. Don't try to think about it too much. Just get to work right there and then and create the images that you have in mind right now. Don't postpone it until a later and uncertain date. The fact is that there may not be a later time. You may not be able to come back, or not until a long time, and when you do return the inspiration you feel today may no longer be there. Exercise your creativity now, today, on the spot. Don't delay. Don't wait for a "better" time. There won't be a better time. This is it.



Playa Reflections #2

4- We all have the potential of being creative

Eventually I discovered for myself the utterly simple prescription for creativity: be intensely yourself. Don't try to be outstanding; don't try to be a success; don't try to do pictures for others to look at- just please yourself.

Ralph Steiner

All of us have within ourselves the resources we need to be creative. In a way, being human means being creative. Why? Because being creative is being able to solve problems in new and unique ways, in *creative* ways. From the beginning of mankind the ability to solve problems is one of the things that has given man an advantage over other species. I should add the ability to solve problems *effectively*, so that the problems do not come back. Doing so means finding new solution to old problems. How do you find new solutions? You find new solutions by being creative and imaginative.

In other words being creative is not something that is specific to artists or to photographers. It is not something that is used only to create original art. Being creative is something that is used in all walks of life and in all professions, whenever a new solution is necessary. Being creative is being able to bring new solutions to both old and new problems.

Being creative is also being imaginative. It is being able to think ahead, to think into the future, to brainstorm, to imagine what may happen down the road. Scientists, mathematicians, engineers and all other professions need imagination and creativity to continue growing, to push the envelope further, to create new things, to be and to remain competitive, to do better than everybody else, to visualize something that does not exist yet, to imagine this new "thing" from conception to construction and finally to implementation.

Creativity and its sibling imagination are all around us. As soon as we seek to create something new, no matter how insignificant it may seem, as soon as we seek to solve a problem effectively and pro-actively, we become creative by using our imagination to find new and effective ways to complete the task we set to achieve.

From there we only need to take a small step to apply our creative abilities towards the arts and towards photography in particular. We only need to make minor adjustments in order to use our imagination towards creating photographs that are ours only, images that are new, images that we constructed in our mind and that are the result of our unique personal creative abilities.

3 – Liberating our creativity

One does not think during creative work, any more than one thinks when driving a car. But one has a background of years - learning, unlearning, success, failure, dreaming, thinking, experience, all this - then the moment of creation, the focusing of all into the moment. So I can make 'without thought,' fifteen carefully considered negatives, one every fifteen minutes, given material with as many possibilities. But there is all the eyes have seen in this life to influence me.

Edward Weston

Creativity is turning into fire the amber that was lit by inspiration. As such creativity is fragile and delicate because if handled improperly this amber can turn into ashes rather than into a blazing fire.

A number of things can stifle our creativity and, metaphorically speaking, turn this amber into ashes. When this happens creativity becomes captive of our beliefs, or of what we have been told to believe. To use the full potential of our imaginative skills we must liberate our creativity. In fact, liberating creativity is one of the most important aspects of the creative process. It is the key to being able to exercise our creativity. Why? Because our creativity is too often held back, or “chained” to put it in a more dramatic fashion, and this for different reasons.

This situation may not be the case for everyone. However I have found it to be the case for a large majority of people in one way or another. It was definitely the case for me. So much so that I had to spend years liberating my own creativity. Today I credit my personal style to the time I spent and the efforts I made working towards being free to do my own work rather than copy the work of the other photographers who influenced me.

In the next six sections (sections 4 to 9) we are going to explore the different reasons why creativity can be held back. We are also going to see how we can liberate our creativity.

4 - Fear of Failure

One is not really a photographer until preoccupation with learning has been outgrown and the camera in his hands is an extension of himself. This is where creativity begins.

Carl Mydans

To be creative, to use our imagination towards creating original art, we must do something new, something that we have most likely never done before. Doing something we have not done before carries with it the risk of failure essentially because we have to learn how to do this new thing from scratch. For many of us, whenever there is risk there is fear, in this case fear of failure. Fear of failure is one of the main things that can stifle our creativity.

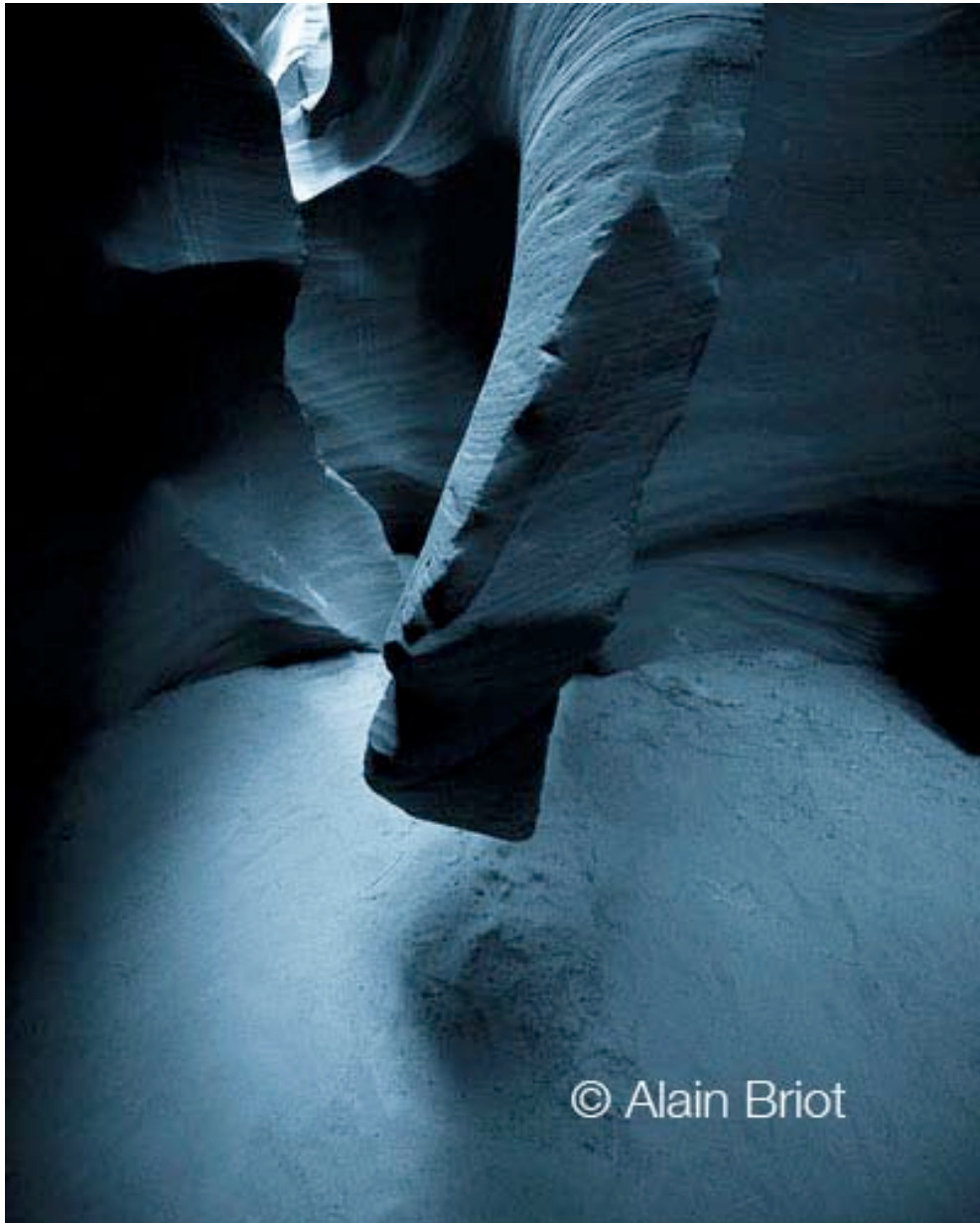
It is important to understand that there is no such thing as a failure. What there is are failed attempts. However, a failed attempt does not mean absolute failure. It only means that this one time things did not work.

Examples are best to exemplify this point. For example, Babe Ruth struck out more times than anyone else. However, he was also was the leader in number of homeruns for a long time. Thomas Edison failed over 400 times before he found the right way to build a light bulb. When asked about all these apparent failures, Edison said that he had discovered over 400 ways to not create a light bulb. To him, these attempts were not failures. They were successes in the sense that each attempt allowed him to narrow the field of possibilities. Eventually, the one way that worked was the one that was left out of all the others he had tried and that did not work.

Success, eventually, is a state of mind. So is failure, which can be seen as success when you look at it the way Babe Ruth or Thomas Edison looked at it. You can become depressed because of your failures or you can get energized by them because you look at them not as failures but as attempts that are paving the road to success.

As an artist you will rarely succeed on your first try. This is especially true if you are trying new ways to represent the world and to express your vision. A certain amount of trial and error is necessary, and a certain amount of failure is to be expected. If you let your failures discourage you, you will not maintain your creativity. Instead, you will be creative for some time, and then fall into depression when you fail to be successful at your first attempts.

In a way, if we follow this logic, success is the result of not giving way to failure. Success is continuing to try in the midst of repeated failures because we believe that there is a solution to the problem we are working on and that it is only a matter of time until we find this solution. In this respect failures are nothing else but valid attempts that did not materialize into the outcome we expected.



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Blue Antelope

A failure is certainly a setback. It is a setback that shows the limits of our knowledge. We failed not because we are inept, or lack talent, or are incapable of success. No. We failed because we lack the proper knowledge to succeed. The solution is not to fall into depression or self-pity. The solution is to find ways to acquire the knowledge we need to succeed. The process of acquiring this knowledge is what will enable us to expand our current boundaries. Knowledge is what will make us go beyond our actual limitations.

We have therefore two solutions in front of what is, as we just saw, lack of knowledge: first, self pity, which leads nowhere but to a circular pattern of depression and blame, and second seeking new knowledge that will allow us to exceed our current limitations and place us on the road to success. The first solution leads to failure; the second leads to success, be it in regards to liberating our creativity or in regards to any other endeavor.

When looking at failure this way you soon realize that failure is a door that one can decide to push open or not. One can look at the door and say, "This door will never open for me." Or, one can say, "I can open this door. I just need to learn how to do that." Failure, when looked at this way, is the opportunity to open new doors. These doors lead to a greater version of us, a version we currently ignore but whose potential is there. We just need to go and get it.

The fear associated with deciding to open this door or not lays in the fact that what is beyond the door is unknown. In other words, there is a risk, and this risk is that we will step into something unfamiliar, something beyond our comfort zone. By staying in front of the door in self-pity we are actually staying within our comfort zone. By deciding to learn how to open the door we are stepping into the unknown and leaving our comfort zone.

Taking the risk of stepping into the unknown carries with it the possibility that a reward awaits us once the door is opened. It carries with it the elation of new possibilities that will present themselves later on. In my experience this reward far exceeds the risks that creative endeavors bring with them.

5 - Moving out of our comfort zone

A dream is your creative vision for your life in the future. You must break out of your current comfort zone and become comfortable with the unfamiliar and the unknown.

Denis Waitley

Your comfort zone is represented by everything that you have achieved so far and by everything that you are comfortable doing. This is your safe zone, a place where you are comfortable, where you are not taking a chance and where you are not exposed to the risk of failure, ridicule or error. All that you have achieved so far, all that you are comfortable doing, is located within this comfort zone. Your comfort zone in a way is your *safety* zone.

Anything else you want to achieve, anything else you are not currently comfortable doing, anything else you do not know how to do, is located outside of this comfort zone. To learn how to do these things comfortably you must step out of your comfort zone. To do so you must be willing to take a risk to learn these things and to eventually enlarge your comfort zone and reach a higher level of experience, success and achievement.

If you continue to stay within your current comfort zone you will remain at the level of experience, achievement and knowledge that you are currently at. To expand both your knowledge and your achievements, you must leave your comfort zone and take a risk. The size of this risk is to some extent within your control. However, the size of the reward is proportional to the size of the risk. To put it succinctly: the larger the risk the larger the reward.

Liberating your creativity and making images you have not created so far requires leaving your comfort zone. It requires doing things that are new to you, things whose outcome is unknown to you. Because you have no previous experience creating or showing these new images, you cannot predict the exact outcome of your creative work and you cannot predict people's reactions to this new work. As we will see shortly, the most efficient way of addressing this issue is to focus on your work and push all other concerns aside.

6 – Overcoming creative fear

Thinking should be done before and after, not during photographing. Success depends on the extent of one's general culture, one's set of values, one's clarity of mind, one's vivacity. The thing to be feared most is the artificially contrived, the contrary to life.

Henri Cartier-Bresson

Being overly focused on an artistic goal can be so frightening as to paralyze the artist. This is, in a sense, what happens when an artist stares at a blank canvas, unable to put paint onto it. This is also what happens when a writer experiences writer's block and is unable to put words onto paper, or unable to type. In either instance creative fear, which is another term for fear of failure, is dominating these artists to the point that they cannot be creative in any way.

In photography one doesn't stare at a blank canvas. Rather, one stares at a viewfinder filled with a scene. In photography taking a photograph can be as simple as pressing the shutter release on a DSLR. However, it is still necessary to go out there in the landscape to create photographs if you are a landscape photographer or to go into the studio if you are a studio photographer. Sometimes, creative fear is so powerful that it prevents the artist even from doing that.

Because photography is a multi-step process, creative fear in photography also takes place after the photograph is taken. For example, I know a photographer who is unable to print any of his work. He is able to create new images in the field, he is able to develop his film (if you shoot digital you can compare this to converting digital captures from raw), but when it comes to printing he draws a blank and cannot do it.

Other photographers may print their work only to find out that they are unable to show it or exhibit it. This is something that I witness during workshop print reviews where a number of photographers who bring prints find themselves unable to show their work to the group.

How do you fix this problem? How do you stop creative fear? How do you put an end to being unable to create, print, or show your work? A very effective solution is to focus on the positive rather than the negative aspects of the process. Focus on what you are going to learn from a print review rather than on the criticisms that may come your way. Focus on the print quality you may be able to achieve rather than on the lack of it. Focus on the exciting new photographs you may take rather than on the ones you will have to discard.

In short, stop focusing on negative aspects of the art. All endeavors can potentially result in a negative outcome. However, if we focus on this negative aspect, we will get discouraged and give up even before we try.

Instead, focus on the positive aspects of the process. If you are a painter, focus on the beauty of a single brushstroke onto a white canvas. If you are a photographer, focus on the beauty of a single capture or exposure. Focus on a certain color that you love and that you want to apply to the canvas before any other color is put down, or that you want to capture in your photograph more than any other color in the scene in front of you.

Focus on the parts, not on the whole and definitely not on the finished product. Focus on the individual steps you need to follow to complete the artwork. Focus on what inspires you. Focus on anything but do not focus on what the finished artwork will look like or on what others will say when they see it.

Also, be playful with your medium. Give yourself the freedom to play with your subject. Playfulness may be the most effective way to remove fear because one is not acting towards creating a “masterpiece,” something that entails future consequences that can be frightening in their implications because one can succeed or fail in this endeavor. Instead, playfulness does not carry a success or failure implication. Playfulness only means that we are having fun, that we are being playful and that we are exploring what can be done and what can happen when we try this approach or that technique.

While playing, one’s focus is on the here and now, not on what may happen tomorrow. This approach removes the fear that comes from focusing on the future implications of one’s actions. The only implications of having fun is, well, that we are having fun. Playing is not serious, it is not considered to be “for real”. In fact, this is the very definition of playing: that it is a fantasy and not a real-life situation.

So make art a game. Make it playful and have fun with it. Rather than think about the future implications of your actions enjoy these actions at the present time. Focus on what you like in the scene you want to photograph. Do not focus on whether or not others will like your images. Focus on what you like to do. Do not focus on what others may say about your work or on what they may expect you to do. Focus on your inspiration and make it a point to express this inspiration freely and creatively.

7 – Fear of critique

Critique is important but there is a time and a place for it. The creative stage is definitely neither the time nor the place. Therefore, do not seek critical feedback or commentary on your work during the creative stage of the artistic process. Your goal at this stage should be to let your creativity run free and to create new images unencumbered by critical considerations.

Do not worry whether others will like or dislike the new work that you are creating. This is not the time or the place for that either. Focus on creating this work, on having fun, on enjoying yourself and above all on expressing your inspiration through the creation of new images. Feedback and criticism, if you want them, will come later. At this time it is far too early for critique to take place.

It is best to wait until after your work is completed to ask for feedback and criticism. For the time being, during the creative phase of your work, do the very best you can do. Once your work is completed, you will have the opportunity to show your work to others and to let them say whatever they think about your work if you so desire.

Similarly, do not worry whether you are creating a masterpiece or not. Just like criticism, this is neither the time nor place. Furthermore, this is not for you to say. It is for your audience, for the critics and for the reviewers to decide. Your responsibility at this point is to be liberate your creativity and to produce new work.

To liberate your creativity you need to take a chance; you need to get out of your comfort zone. For this to happen it is best to push aside any thoughts concerning what others might think of your new work. To give consideration to future criticism is to stifle your creativity and make you fear that the outcome of your work won't be pleasing to your audience. At this point this is the exact inverse goal that what you are trying to achieve. You want to liberate your creativity, not stifle it. So let it go and don't give it any thoughts. Just focus on your work and create.



White Sands

8 – Believing that everything has already been done

One painter ought never to imitate the manner of any other; because in that case he cannot be called the child of nature, but the grandchild. It is always best to have recourse to nature, which is replete with such abundance of objects, than to the productions of other masters, who learnt everything from her.

Leonardo da Vinci

Another cause for lost creativity is the feeling that whatever you want to do has already been done before. The feeling that you are, in effect, doing nothing else but re-doing what others have done before you. In short, your work is redundant and you are wasting your time.

Not everything has been done before. In fact, your vision is yours and yours alone. You are unlike anyone else. Certainly, at first, your steps towards expressing your vision are most likely to be the same steps that other artists have taken before you. We all have to start somewhere, and we all start pretty much from the same place: a blank canvas for a painter and a camera viewfinder for a photographer. Those are the same. What is different for all of us is what happens afterwards.

What I am trying to express here is that the logic of the “it has already been done” is a false logic. The best way I can prove it is by pointing to the contradictions that follow those who

embrace it. Usually, when you hear someone say, “everything has already been done” what you hear him or her say next is “all art looks the same.” Well, if indeed everything has already been done, then we should be surrounded by the widest variety of art that we will ever see. We should not be surrounded by art that is “all the same”.

This contradiction points to the fact that what we have here is not a statement by an enlightened person who has studied the art scene carefully and who is able to make an informed statement about it. What we have here is someone who is disillusioned by art, perhaps because they did not succeed as artists, perhaps because they listened to critics a little bit too much, or perhaps because while in school they believed what disillusioned art professors taught them.

9 – Believing that nobody cares about your work

This is another common source of discouragement for budding artists and another cause for not feeling creative. The best way to address this issue is to look at the potential audience for your work. The number of people who inhabit the Earth is growing exponentially. At the time this essay is written, in May 2007, there are over 6 billion people on Earth. If you think of this number as your potential audience, it is clear that it is larger than it has ever been for any artist that preceded you. Even if you reach only a small fraction of this audience, let’s say less than 1%, the numbers are still staggeringly high, higher than most of us would think at first.

The good news is this: there is an audience for you out there. It may be a buying audience or it may be an audience that simply enjoys looking at your work. It may be an audience of a few people, or it may be an audience of thousands or more. It may be an audience of people who like your work or it may be an audience who criticizes it. It may be a lot of other things as well. All that matters is that there is a huge number of people out there to whom you can show your work. What matters is that part of those who see your work will start to follow what you do. What matters is that those that do follow your work will, in effect, become your dedicated audience.

You cannot control the size and the nature of your audience. They choose you rather than you choose them. However, you can control what part of your audience you address. You have control over who in your audience you give your time to, who you favor, who you talk to and who you chose as your friends.

My recommendation, modeled after my own approach, is to favor that part of your audience who loves your work. This is where encouragement comes from. This is the audience that will encourage you to go further, to continue your work, to grow, to improve and to reach the next step with your art. This is the audience who likes you and your work. It is also the audience who is willing to support you in order for you to continue your work.

This audience focuses on the positive aspects of your work. They like what you do, they want you to continue and they are willing to help you do that. In short, this is the audience that, if you listen to its feedback and give it your attention, will foster your creativity.

What you want from your audience, in regards to creativity, is that this audience boosts your creativity. You want an audience that pushes you towards being more creative, more daring and more yourself. The only way to guarantee that this will happen is to focus on the part of your audience that is on your side, that likes your work, that sends positive reinforcement and encouragement your way and that wants to see more of what you have to offer.

Negative feedback, disillusioned audience members or overly critical art patrons do not generate creativity. Although these and other negatively oriented individuals may be part of your audience, it is definitely not the part of the audience you want to focus on. Certainly, they will approach you and tell you whatever it is they want to tell you. That you cannot control. What you can control however is your response to their remarks. And the response I recommend is to let them speak then move on politely without engaging into an argument or a detailed explanation, which by nature will be futile (I expand on this point in another essay titled *Just say Yes*).



White Sands Black & White

10 - Skill Enhancement Exercises

Nothing will give permanent success in any enterprise in life, except native ability cultivated by honest and persevering effort. Genius is often but the capacity for receiving and improving by discipline.

George Elliott

The best way to explore and liberate your creativity is to perform exercises designed to achieve exactly that. There is little about this process that is intellectual. Therefore, at this stage it is necessary to go out and photograph.

Below are three sets of exercises –A, B and C-- that I have found to be effective in this regard:

A - Breaking the rules

My first photography teacher, Scott McLeay, had a great exercise aimed at developing creativity. When I first practiced this exercise I found that it opened the doors to ideas and images that I would not have thought about otherwise. Today, after many years, I continue to think it is one of the best exercises to develop your creativity. For this reason I chose it as the main Skill Enhancement Exercise for this essay. This is a two -parts exercise:

- 1- List all the rules of photography that you believe you should follow, the rules that have been taught to you by others, the rules you made for yourself, the rules your parents told you about and so on. You may even want to get together with other photographers to help you make this list, or to create a list that lists not only the rules you believe in but also the rules other photographers believe in.
- 2- Go out and photograph with the goal of breaking each of the rules you listed. You can either do this in one day, working on all the rules, or you can do it in several days or over a longer period of time.

A few important notes about this exercise:

I recommend you do this exercise over several days or longer. This will allow you to break a rule a day, or to break a specific rule over several days by creating a number of photographs that each represent a different way of breaking a specific rule.

For example, let's say you decide to break the following rule: "always photograph with your camera on a tripod," and that to break this rule you decide to always photograph with your camera handheld during a 5 day shooting trip to one of your favorite locations.

What will happen as a result? For one, if you are a nature photographer, you will soon find yourself at sunrise or at sunset at a great location during your multi-day trip. This means that you will have to raise the ISO to compensate for the low light, and that you will have to cope with the increased grain or digital noise and the resulting loss of sharpness in your images. If you had been breaking the rule over a single day, or a single shot, chances are you would have worked handheld during the middle of the day and would not have had to confront the technical issue of noise or grain.

In short, breaking the rules over several days as opposed to a single shoot or a single image makes the process much more realistic. Over a multi-day shoot in one of your favorite locations you will become aware that you are walking away from creating images that you know would be successful should you have followed the rules that you normally follow. However, because you have decided to break the rules and because you are not doing what you think you should be doing, you will not get the shot that you think you should get. As a result you may be tempted very strongly to do away with rule breaking and return to your regular practice, “just for this one shot.”

I strongly urge you not to do that, for several reasons:

First, if you do that –meaning if you return to your previous approach and decide to not break the rules for the one shot that you really have to have,-- you will render invalid your entire attempt at breaking the rules because the time at which this attempt is the most valuable is the time at which it is the most real. The time at which it is the most real is the time at which it is costing you something that you really don't want to give up. In the case of the example above –photographing without a tripod while your rule says always use a tripod—it means giving up a photograph that you know will be successful on a tripod for a photograph that may not have any value at all.

What you really need to do to make the experiment valuable is do what you could not do with your camera on a tripod. For example, try multiple angles, change the camera height, vary the camera position and location in such a way that setting up your tripod in that many different ways could not be possible because you would never have the time necessary to do that in the short amount of time you have available before the sun sets. Or, photograph from a position or a location where setting up a tripod is virtually impossible. Or again, photograph with the desire to have movement, or noise, or grain be a positive attribute of your photographs and not a defect. Work with the goal of making this an advantage, an element that you wanted to feature in your images. Only then will you make the process of breaking the rules work for you. This approach will work for any rule, not just for the “no tripod” rule.

Second, if you refuse to break the rules because that one photo is too important, you do forget that each shoot is unique and that any photograph can be done again. Granted, we cannot return to all the locations we ever visited and the light, the specific plants, clouds patterns and all the other elements will never be exactly the same as they were on our first visit. However, we can return and we can pretty much compose a similar image on a different day. This means that we are not really missing anything. What we are doing is trading one approach – an approach with known results—for another approach – an approach with unknown results. That is all we are doing. Furthermore, we do not have evidence that the new approach we are using --the rule breaking approach-- will not generate good results. All we know is that the results will be different.

Third, we must not forget the reason why we are breaking the rules. We are breaking the rules either because we do not like our current results and want to try something new, or because we want to go further than we have gone so far, or again because we want to develop

a unique way of seeing, a way of seeing that is different from other photographers. Most photographers follow similar rules. Therefore, by breaking these rules we have a good chance of discovering something new, something that no one else is doing. It is also possible that this discovery will, in turn, lead to a new way of seeing the world, to a new vision and eventually to the development of a personal style.

In other words, rather than focus on what we are giving up –i.e. a known result—we need to focus on what we are gaining –i.e. a new way of seeing, a new vision and a personal style. There is a cost for getting anything and in this instance this is the cost. In my estimate this is worth it, especially if we believe that following the rules is not giving us satisfying results.

B – Using equipment that you do not normally use

This exercise will allow you to give a different direction to your work, to see things differently, to take chances and to get out of your comfort zone. It is also a lot of fun.

The list of equipment you can use for this exercise is virtually endless. Below are two possibilities that I have found to be effective both for my own work and for my students work:

1 -Use a Holga Medium Format Polaroid camera

This is an imperfect camera. It is a camera known for its defects more than for its image quality.

To use it to your advantage you will have to learn how to make these defects part of your work, how to make them a quality rather than a defect.

2- Use a Lensbaby on a DSLR

This will allow you to combine the most sophisticated digital cameras with one of the simplest –if not *the* simplest- lenses.

The distortion capabilities offered by the LensBaby, as well as the selective focus area that can be controlled to some extent, offer further opportunities for creative work.

C - Doing creative things on a regular basis

This practice will insure that creativity becomes part of your life on a routine and not on an occasional basis.

If you follow this advice creativity will become something that you do naturally not just something that you do occasionally or only when you photograph.



Four River Rocks

11 - Conclusion

The preceding exercises may have given you the impression that anything goes when it comes to exercising your creativity and that the goal is to be creative first and generate good photographs second. This is not exactly true and for this reason I am adding this remark immediately following the Skill Enhancement Exercises section.

Certainly, you need to liberate your creativity and the exercises above were designed with this goal in mind. If you practice them regularly you will find that you are becoming more creative and less fearful of unanticipated results.

However, the goal is not to be creative for creativity's sake. The goal is to be creative in order to materialize your personal vision. Eventually your creativity needs to be placed at the service of this vision.

For this to happen you have to have an awareness of what your vision is. Describing the process of developing and expressing your vision is the goal of the next essay in this series. Your vision must follow your inspiration and be served by your creativity. When these three pieces fall into place the outcome is the achievement of a creative style.

Don't be alarmed if this 4 parts process seems overly complex or if this description is a little too succinct. At this point we have only covered half of this process and we still have two essays to go before we cover it entirely.

Creativity is exploration and imagination. On the one hand it is looking for something without knowing exactly what this thing is. If you already know precisely what you are looking for you are not being creative. You are simply trying to find something that you know exists, something that most likely others have found before you.

Creativity must be channeled otherwise it runs wild without following a specific direction, without seeking to reach a specific goal. This direction, this goal, is your personal vision. It is vision that brings inspiration and creativity together under a single roof.

We will be exploring it in detail how this process takes place in the third installment of this four-parts description of the artistic process: *Developing your Vision*.

Until then, this series is a *suivre*...

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