

Your Inner Gift: Cultivating the Art of Simplicity in Photography

Session 1: *Introduction and Preliminary Musings*

*** Exercises ***

- **Exercise S1-1: *Describe yourself as a photographer***

“Tell me a little bit about your photographic history. When did you first start taking photographs. What generally interests you about photography? Are you drawn to particular kinds of photography? What generally compels you to pick up a camera, regardless of type or particular kind of lens attached to it, and point to – and capture an image of – something?”

Each of us has a set of unique answers we can give to this question, answers that may (indeed, *ought* to) change over time, as our experience with photography both *broadens*, in terms of subject matter that we are exposed to and/or expose ourselves to, and *deepens*, as we discover things about ourselves from the evolving narrative of our own images.

So, the first simple “exercise” I will ask you to do is to reflect on this basic question. *Why do you do photography?* What do you find yourself pointing your camera at most often? For what reason(s)? Is it to record the presence of an object? A moment from some event? Is it to capture some beautiful light, a sunset or sunrise? Of course, there is no one answer—there cannot be—and there is certainly no “right” or “wrong” answer. For some of you, it will be (or may seem to be) easy; for some, the task may prove difficult, since not everyone is predisposed to self-reflection (looking over a portfolio of your own photographs may help identify patterns that are otherwise unknown or only latent). However you choose to go about answering this question, please take your time with it. Spend a few days just thinking about it every so often; over a coffee break, before bed, or while walking. Afterwards, summarize your musings with a few sentences or a paragraph or two. Your answer will serve as a provisional anchor around which we will build tools uniquely tailored to helping you “simplify” *your* path toward, and your own unique vision of, what photography is all about.

- **Exercise S1-2: *Generate and parse your own word cloud***

Either start with the word cloud #1 that appears above, or build a “master word cloud” for yourself, making sure to include as many general word/phrase associations with the word “simple” as you can and that are meaningful to you. Then highlight the top five words and/or phrases that are most closely aligned with your interpretation of simplicity, as it pertains to photography.

- **Exercise S1-3: *Examples of photographers you admire***

Identify at least three photographers (living or not) whose work you most admire, and write a short paragraph (a sentence or two will do) explaining why. If you can find a link to some specific images (in case the photographer is not well known), that would be very helpful. Here's the harder part: select an image or two (by any photographer other than yourself) that you would best like to emulate (not necessarily the image, but general style), but – for whatever reason – have failed to do so. Try to articulate in words what you like (about the style you wish to emulate) and why you have not been able to “recreate” it.

- **Exercise S1-4: *Examples of your own work***

Look over your personal archive of images. Select a few examples from each of four categories: (1) those you consider to be your very best (i.e., images you would grab first in case of a fire); (2) those that others have told you are “your best” but with which you do not agree (and explain why); and (3) your most “complex” images (interpret to taste); and (4) your “simplest” images (again, interpret to taste).

- **Exercise S1-5: *Toward infusing photography with a Zen-like simplicity***

Please watch (nothing more! – well that, and muse some on what you hear in) this 8 min long *YouTube* video of John Daido Loori speaking about the Zen of photography:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPR_5MvFIXU&feature=youtu.be

We will pick up on some of the ideas presented here (oh, so eloquently) in later sessions. Please feel free to post whatever thoughts you may have on our Facebook page.