

Preface

Celebrez l'indépendance de votre vision artistique et photographique.*
Alain Briot

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First

The Personal Vision Mastery Workshop on DVD is about finding your vision and making it a reality. In a larger context it is about creating your oeuvre, your life's work, your body of work.

The goal of this tutorial is also to help you address today's main photography issue when it comes to being taken seriously as a photographer, and that is the fact that everybody with a camera, even if it is a cell phone, believes they are photographers. Never in the history of photography, and perhaps in the history of art in general, has it been so necessary to separate wannabes from committed and dedicated artists.

Certainly, if the definition or the qualification for being 'a photographer' is owning a camera, then virtually everyone is a photographer because cameras today have become as ubiquitous as pens or pencils.

However if the definition of being a photographer is having a vision, a body of work, in short an oeuvre, then the numbers dwindle down stupendously. Why? Because while everyone with a camera may be a photographer, hardly any of them has a vision, a body of work or an oeuvre.

What we need therefore is a new definition of what a photographer is because defining what is a photographer as being the result of owning a camera and taking photographs no longer works. What I propose is that we define what is a photographer in terms of a personal endeavor in which the practitioner is fully vested, an endeavor characterized by the presence of a personal vision implemented through a personal style.

I also propose that we expand this definition to include the career of the photographer. Real photographers do not just own a camera and take photographs. They have a career, have completed personal projects, have created masterpieces, have assembled a body of work and produced an oeuvre in short. They do not have just 'work' and they did not start yesterday.

They have studied photography and most importantly they have had a mentor or mentors with whom they worked with personally. Having a photography education is important. Studying art and photography, whether at an actual school, through a workshop program or during a mentorship, is not just about learning craft and technique. It is also, and mainly, about discovering one's artistic identity, finding one's purpose and vision, and being exposed to artistic concepts and ideas. It is about studying art history, discovering the work of other artists and being inspired by them. It is about meeting actual practitioners, artists who live and die for their art and whose insights can only be shared through personal interaction. Finally it is about understanding the importance of real criticism, through critiques and peer reviews whose goal is to help the student learn the stronger and weaker aspects of their work and shown the way to improvement and mastery.

Real photographers are known in the art world, have a presence, a reputation, a following and a track record. In addition to creating art they have exhibited in galleries and museums and have had their work reviewed, critiqued and published by respected individuals and businesses. They are members of organizations, societies, schools or other professional affiliations. As in any profession they are known by the company that they keep and their reputation precedes their work. In addition they have often taught classes, seminars or workshops, given presentations and artist talks. As a result they have a public presence and they have developed the ability to describe their work and present their vision to others verbally and in writing.

Above all they have a story, one that encompasses all of the above, a story that includes personal experiences that make the path of each artist individual and unique, a story that makes sense in the context of creating art, and above all a story that goes beyond buying a camera, a printer and a computer.

Second

Nowhere but in photography, in no other medium, is equipment and technique so important. As such writings focused on gear, software and techniques dominate the field of essays and tutorials on the medium. Looking at the teaching materials for photography, whether it is books, eBooks, videos, DVDs or other, may lead one to believe that studying photography is a matter of learning how to use photographic gear and software. Little is said about vision and inspiration and few tutorials, if any, focus on the subject of personal skills for which gear is not involved.

Understandably a lot of research, money and improvements go into making cameras, gear, software and consumables. Much more than goes into improving pencils, brushes, paint and canvases if we were to compare photography to painting and drawing for example. As such, talking about gear, cameras and software makes a lot of sense because there is a lot of interest for new and exciting products and development. As a result, there is a need for educational materials that teach how to use this gear and software. Finally, gear, cameras and software manufacturers understandably play an important role in the photographic discourse.

However, this situation promotes the belief that gear, software and cameras make the photograph, a belief, which is both misleading and erroneous since, as in any art, it is the practitioner who creates the art. The tools, be it camera, paintbrush, pencil or other, are only the means to an end. In that respect, photography is like other visual arts, gear and other supplies are only responsible for a small percentage of the final work. Ten percent seems a fair amount, even though it feels exaggerated to be honest.

Certainly a good camera, and good gear and software in general, go a long ways towards improving the technical quality of your work. However, as any photographer who has been praised for the quality of their gear instead of their vision will tell you, gear is not what makes the photograph. To have someone tell you that 'your photographs are beautiful therefore you must have a great camera!' leaves a bad taste in your mouth when you realize that to some members of your audience your gear is more important than your skills, your inspiration, and your vision.

Conclusion

Both of these concerns negatively affect the field of photography and limit the achievements of both newcomers and experienced practitioners. It also raises the question as to whether the majority of people using cameras are still doing *photography* (writing with light) or are, instead, doing *camerography* (writing with a camera).

The goal of this tutorial, as well as the goal of the Mastery Workshop on DVD series as a whole, is to address both of these concerns and offer constructive solutions that lead to serious photography, photography focused on the artist and not on the artist's gear.

Alain Briot

**Celebrate the independence of your artistic and photographic vision.*