

“Wisdom through the lens”

Photography as a mean of personal transformation, and why “Zoom In” makes me feel “Out”

As a photographer, I always have this gut feeling that photography does not amount in composition nor is it always what I actually see and perceive using my eyes. The camera on my neck being somewhat of a “Third Eye”, through-which I feel I'm capturing a different reality, far beyond reality itself.

I've spent long years studying the matter, trying to understand and feel what is the thing that really gets me in the process of photography? What makes me decide that this specific moment should be commemorated while the other should not? What makes me take a picture that I will fall madly in-love with later on? What makes a photo good, emotional, moving? It is not always possible to recognize or point out a certain aspect and logically explain it.

The book “Wisdom through the lens” by Pierre Poulain, expresses in exact words what I've been feeling for years: the essence of photography lies not in what you see with your eyes. If you want to shoot your truth, close your eyes and allow yourself to shoot from the gut.

Poulain talks about intuitive photography, absent an intellectual procedure. Photography that recognizes from the gut the truth and beauty, beyond the specific shape and visible meaning of it. He ties intuitive photography to Buddhism's non-attachment theory, since “as a man must act without being attached to the results of his actions, the photographer must act – meaning shoot – without being attached to what he sees. In fact, the photographer shoots when he 'sees' the unseen, and in order to achieve that, he must see through the eyes of his soul”.

According to Poulain, constant engagement in photography can change our viewpoint not only through the camera lens, but much further, in life itself. The photographer is welcome to respect the reality as it is through the lens, try to uncover the beauty by the photographs, even if it is foretold that complete perfection is unattainable. It does not matter, because the process, the journey, are much more important than the result. Doing by itself and not for an emotional, material or social gain, is what gives depth and meaning to life.

“Zoom In” makes me feel “Out”

Confession: I have never had a heavy and expensive camera lens, not even throughout my photography studies period, in which I've felt that size really does matter. I have always limited myself to a fixed lens, requiring me to do the thing I love the most in photography: getting close to people. Really see them and love them through the camera.

Poulain talks about the great freedom in using a fixed lens. Allegedly, this is a limitation for photographers, amateurs as well as pros, but limiting the selection options in photography (speed, sensitivity, shutter aperture) really enables us to focus on the scene, the occurrence, the object in front of us. “The point of the photograph's seeing skill is not by 'seeing', but by being present”, wrote Roland Barthes in his book “Camera Lucida”. Isn't it the important thing in creating, simply being?

To my eyes, the experience of photography is an experience of a great affinity, an experience

of consent and choice of the photographer or photographed. Yes, it damages spontaneity. God knows of all the frames I've had to give up in my life due to my lens's limitations, and due to my difficulty in "stealing the moment" of someone else without their consent. Yet, many other moments were immortalized as a result of a soft and easy flirt with the camera, and in the most powerful cases, as a result of connections and acceptance for a deep and intimate exposure.

The book "Wisdom through the lens" is a wonderful philosophical journey for everyone that sees photography as a way of living, an inquiring essence of the mystery and a practical tool enabling a different experience of reality. Poulain creates a connection, completely not obvious, between the life behind the camera and those occurring in front of it. Reading the book definitely makes you want to place the camera in its natural position, hung close to the heart :-)

"Wisdom through the lens – A practical guide to photography as a mean of self transformation", Pierre Poulain. New Acropolis Publishing House