

Shooting from the Heart by Rob Goldman

Introduction

I once embarked on a 10-day retreat to Tuscany – with one goal in mind: I would create photographs of one beautiful woman in one beautiful location. Lisa Heywood accompanied me to Pieve di Caminino, a thousand year old monastery.

I had never been to Tuscany, and yet I felt I'd come home. I found myself sitting upon the ledge of a window of that time-honored building, sipping wine from grapes gathered from vineyards within my sights—vineyards spreading a thousand acres beyond the olive grove. I watched

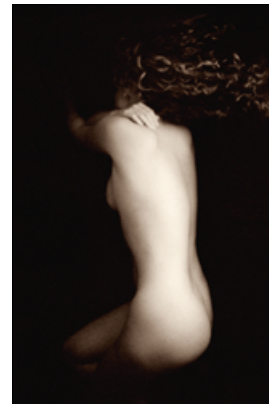
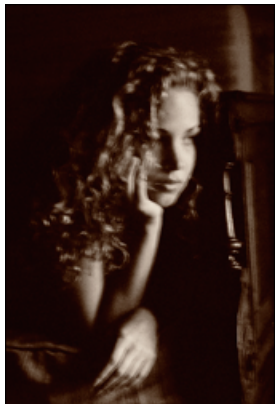
a glorious lizard basking in the sun and nearly, very nearly picked up my camera to photograph it. No. I decided instead to take in the sun myself, for just a few more minutes. Just a few more minutes, to breathe.

And then I turned to my subject. There, in a cloistered world, surrounded by beauty, I found her. There she was, Lisa, just there. And the photographs are intimate. They are, in the end, about something so basic as trust, the trust of your subject in you, your trust in yourself—nothing between

you but the emulsion that inherits the moment.

Photograph someone for ten days, ten months, ten years, and you will find your place, each in the other, and the faith to take the risks you must take as an artist and a human being. Find your subject, whether it be brick wall or black velvet, city street, mountain, seascape, or someone you see every day of your life. Find your subject again and again and again...

Refinement through Repetition



Lisa, Tuscany © Rob Goldman

Time and practice naturally leads the artists to a state whereby they find themselves capable of “doing” without “thinking.” This is not to mean that artists merely improvise, but that they have so mastered their form that they become entirely open to experience and possibility. In fact, they become the unobstructed conduit of their chosen medium. Such mastery, such freedom, is attainable only through repetition.

Masters in virtually every field, including painting, sculpture and photography have represented and recreated the same subject over and over again in their work. Consider Dante Gabriel Rossetti, founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. His sister, Christina, writes of his work:

*“One face looks out from all of his canvases,
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
We found her hidden behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,
A saint, an angel—every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.”*

—Christina Rossetti, 1856

And herein lies the promise of rapture; the artist's dream fulfilled. But I have yet

to meet an artist who speaks of any sustained feelings of completion, realization, perfection. No, he or she goes on seeking—to make manifest these visions.

Now we look to the man most often called “the father of modern photography,” Alfred Stieglitz, whose work Dorothy Norman describes in her book, Alfred Stieglitz, *An American Seer*;

“He discussed or photographed, retold or rephotographed, now from one angle, again from another, until for the moment there were no further nuances of interest.”

She further quotes Stieglitz himself, “I began to photograph objects thousands of times if necessary. To others at the Poly-

technic, who seemed satisfied with their first attempts, a brick wall was evidently just a brick wall. When I photographed a wall over and over again, or the white plaster cast draped with black velvet, I was trying to fathom the secrets of variations in light. I did so from an inner urge, without theory, just plain living.”

“...An inner urge, just plain living.” This is the artist’s innate and seemingly “natural” drive for mastery. It asserts itself in every field and becomes apparent in the work of masters of every discipline. It can be studied in Julia Margaret Cameron’s immortal portraits (influenced by Rossetti, Tennyson, Burne-Jones and each brought to public attention by Stieglitz), Helmut Newton’s definitive women, Brassai’s Paris, Edward Weston’s testimonies to natural objects. These artists release the beauty and mystery inherent in a simple object, in a human face,

in a street scene—so that each becomes a representation of the artist’s inner workings, a new work of art. Refinement through repetition.

Jock Sturges, my friend and mentor, whose work was exhibited at The Stepping Stone Gallery, recently confided in me:

“My work will never change radically. The simple truth is that my work is not about photography—it is merely a symptom of who I am. There is virtually no intellectual process in how I advance my aesthetic effort. My fascination with women and girls dates from adolescence. I make the pictures I do because I am so fascinated with the trajectories of all the various lives I am recording and because I want to own the images—plain and simple...”

There will of course be gradual change in what I do. Long practice helps me run the

camera better—that’s inevitable. But more importantly, the people I am photographing are changing as they grow and, necessarily, I follow. They are my most important teachers.”

Sturges, who returns again and again to the same subjects on the same beaches in Italy, France and California to produce his distinctive portraits, uses the word “fascination.” I’d dare call it obsession—not only in the example of Jock Sturges, but in the lifeblood of every artist—the need to extend beyond himself; so compelling as the need to reach into oneself. Indeed, when one looks back upon Rossetti’s self-portrait, dated March 1847, it is that selfsame face, the face of Rossetti’s women, hardly more masculine—gazing right back at him, the distinctive mouth, the deep and open eyes, the expression of introspection. Who do we represent in our work? Ourselves? Our subject? Both?

Be Prepared

Photography as a legitimate means of artistic expression has come a long way since the early part of the twentieth century, largely due to the efforts of Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Steichen, and others, who made it their task to carve out a place for photography in the art world. Their lives were dedicated not only to their personal work but to educating a public fearful of new ideas in virtually every field – art, music and science. Stieglitz, with help from Steichen, held the first American exhibitions of “revolutionary” works by Matisse and Picasso. He introduced to the public writers like Gertrude Stein and photographers like David Octavious Hill and Julia Margaret Cameron and in doing so, weathered severe criticism. But, he stood firm in his belief that the “new” art — be it abstractions of oil on canvas, pastel on paper, or an image produced from the manipulation



Lisa, Tuscany © Rob Goldman

of the properties of light-sensitive materials’ was wholly deserving of public viewing.

While today’s growing technology gives the artist more options, and more freedom to experiment, it also allows anybody and everybody who picks up a camera to be “a photographer.” As the medium becomes

more and more accessible, its exclusivity as a means of artistic expression diminishes. Photographic images are a part of our daily lives, and in many ways we take them for granted. Who would think twice before tossing the images printed in the daily newspaper in the trash?

So, we differentiate between the utilitarian photograph that serves the quickened pace of our lives by conveying complex information instantaneously, and the photograph that goes beyond its subject, into the domain of the extraordinary — the photograph that might be called “art.” The utilitarian photograph (unlike the work of art, which arrests the viewer and demands attention) actually saves us invaluable moments. It requires only a cursory glance. A beat. While both the utilitarian photograph and the art photograph might capture a moment or event, only one captures the viewer.

About the Author: Rob Goldman

Rob Goldman is an internationally published photographer whose fine art, advertising and portraiture work has been celebrated both in gallery exhibitions and in national magazines. Examples of Goldman’s work can be found in both private and corporate collections including the prestigious Polaroid Collection. In addition, Rob enjoys the sponsorship of The Panasonic Corporation, which has awarded Rob Goldman’s Shooting from the Heart® intensive workshop in Tuscany, Italy Grand Prize in their Digital Photography contest.

Goldman is perhaps best known for his work in Intimate Portraiture, which he defines as, “work that is connected – that goes beyond the physical nature of the sitter, offering a frank interpretation of their essential spirit.” He is founder of the Stepping Stone Gallery for Contemporary Photography in Huntington, New York.

Rob conducts private workshops internationally, and teaches college at the post-graduate level.



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