

Street Photography

What is street photography?

Photographs taken in the street.

To me, street photography is - just photography.

My interest has always been to photograph whatever I observe – a sort of record of my experience.

From this rather broad canvas I've developed themes and ideas about what to look for – However, more or less any random event, circumstance, situation, scene or object which presents itself to me as an idea, a composition, a social statement, a juxtaposition, humour, an issue, an emotion, a collection or substance is what I know as photography, and which has become labelled as “street”.

The range of street stretches from journalism, documentary and narrative to snapshots and family memories.

Limiting ones ideas and pursuits to a defined “street” paradigm is missing the point I think.

Debates rage on about classifications and genres in art and photography just as they do in music...what is jazz, classical, contemporary, etc....the extremes are easy to identify but there are mixtures, crossovers, stuff which doesn't fit any category. It's an infinitely variable seamless tabula rasa.

Ultimately I start to look at all of it as aspects of art.

So much “street” photography has become “art”. Many images taken by photographers as a fascination or merely an interest have become historic and examples of an art...and have become the art in themselves.

A good enquiry might be whether an image was taken as art or a street photograph or as what?

This is the art that I have pursued and practiced and I could call most of it “street”. (I suppose landscape, wildlife, portraiture, studio and still life, constructed art images and commercial work are all other separate genres – but as I mention these classifications I can find a street photograph in most of them.)

I think this can include series, sequences and the recording of history.

Many unambiguous aspects of photography which lend themselves to street photography are travel, local investigation and depiction and the representing of a sense of place.

No limits?

What would be your limits? Should there be a definition for street photography?

The Why

I see photography as an adjunct to my experience of life.

It forces me to observe...it insists that I'm present.

A sort of Zen...being here now.

It's an opportunity to practice a multifaceted skill which is constantly evolving and it can be quantified, evaluated and assessed with clear outcomes.

A much ignored aspect of photography in this era of billions of throwaway images, digital files and a lack of esteem for photographers and their work is that it is and can be a record for a history...no matter how insignificant.

As a comment on aspects of human behaviour and interference, political interference and negligence, issues and concerns it is immediate and powerful – both as art and as propaganda.

Individual relationships, societal successes and failures can become visible.

Photographs serve for the simple sake of memories.

The How?

THERE ARE NO RULES

A certain veracity, honesty and integrity.

Non - interference, non – manipulation is a good place to start, but rules about “what constitutes truthful “street” photography are just opinions.

All photography is a manipulation of reality...one person's view. An image is two dimensional, a moment in time however, it does allow us to stop and stare, to see things in a frozen state (never seen before photography) to study a face without embarrassment to the owner.

Limiting yourself can be a very good exercise to help develop courage and a good sense of composition but It doesn't necessarily create better or more honest work.

Try using a fixed focal length lens for a fortnight. Which lens to use. A wide angle preferably. This will force you to get closer and overcome your misgivings.

Some tips and techniques.

Getting over fears...getting close.

Shoot first and ask afterwards.

I rarely have any aggressive response. Most people in the world don't mind. Occasionally people will turn away or indicate that they don't want you to take their picture, I've usually got a shot before they have noticed.

Be very familiar with the camera.

However:

Judge the situation.

Ask yourself, can I get close?

Is it safe to take pictures?

Should I ask?

Ask afterwards and there may be a second shot – entirely different from the first one.

Use your feet to get closer, a better light, composition or a better background.

Perspective is based on where you are, **NOT** the lens you are using.

Keep shooting. More than one frame.

Shoot from other angles and not always from head height.

I'm not keen on the idea of stealth – but it may be a good way to develop the courage to just shoot. Pretend to shoot something else or look as though you are setting the camera. Use a longer lens if you can't get closer.

Hang out of a tall building perhaps, from a car window or off a boat.

Choose your shutter speed first. (250th – 500th of a second)

Depth of field should be a later consideration...

some shots will only work with a deep depth of field.

Change you settings as necessary and

don't expect the camera to do it all.

Auto is fine for the Hyper-focal...being prepared...but in a situation choose the right settings.

ISO very important. Learn appropriate ISO settings for different lighting.

For example, sunlight = 100 ISO, cloudy = 400 ISO indoors and heavy cloud = 800 – 1600 ISO and higher for each of these if what you are photographing is moving rapidly.

Stop worrying about noise.

It's a sales gimmick.

Carry the camera low.

Use a right angled finder.

Switch off as many noises as you can.

Where?

Anywhere. Everywhere.

Events

Streets

Tourist spots are easy.

Travels

What?

Anything and everything.

I have a subconscious list of themes which I'm always looking out for...

But anything which crosses my field of view...

Setting projects – themes. Setting a subject.

What are you interested in? (If it's astronomy for instance, how about photographing astronomers doing what they do? Cars – what about races, garage workers? Sailing, gardening? I've always thought allotments would be a good subject.)

I get inspired by things which are changes in our behaviour such as mobile phones, the way we play and have hobbies and events.

Notice what you get the most out of when your photographing.

Post Processing.

I use Lightroom.

Andrew Mills 2017

On leaving school I learnt the basics of photography from Mr Quarry, the husband of Mrs Quarry my excellent art teacher. I went to art college and studied graphic design and finished my course as a photographer.

I became a professional photographer on leaving college in 1969. I had been taught by Gordon Goode...the theatre photographer at Stratford on Avon (<http://collation.folger.edu/2014/01/see-the-1960s-royal-shakespeare-company-now-at-the-folger/>) I was also very heavily influenced by the photography acclaimed in "Creative Camera Magazine".

I became an assistant to Ed Pritchard and was represented by Richard Cooke who is now an excellent air to air photographer for the RAF. (<http://www.richard-cooke.com/portfolio-2/default.htm>)

I met Richard who started to give me advertising and commercial work and I became successful in a small way almost immediately. I worked as a photographer for various studios and was the manager of an advertising agency studio. Success as a freelance followed and eventually, after about 20 years in advertising I decided to follow my dream of spending my time developing art, documentary and street photography. I applied to colleges for teaching posts and became a senior lecturer in colleges and eventually a University. During this time I studied for master's degrees in education and art and became familiar with the art and documentary styles and lives of many famous photographers.

I still practice my art and I'm engaged in producing books – to “make real” what I fear will disappear into the ether as binary code on hard drives and memory sticks.

These days I travel extensively and run a photography group: The Phorum.

The Phorum is a vehicle for people to have their work seen...we have exhibitions and reviews – and no competitions!

I run workshops and give talks and lectures on a broad range of subjects from technique for beginners to advanced workshops on art photography.