

On photography (especially landscape photography), creativity and connecting with nature – some favourite quotations

These are from notes taken over the past twenty years or so, and occasionally I've lost the original attribution (or I may have found the quote when someone else repeated it). I've applied UK spelling and punctuation to all the quotes.

Diane Arbus

'A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you, the less you know.'

Niall Benvie

'During the rise of photography in the nineteenth century [especially in the U.S.] ... wild landscape became a subject of veneration, somehow defiled by the explicit evidence of modern man. It is from this tradition that the fixation with edge themes has grown. These ideas developed during a time of increasing polarization between industrial man and the natural world that, directly or otherwise, sustains him. At the start of the twenty-first century, awareness of the indivisibility of the good of the natural world and culture is such that now is a good time to move on to the next stage in the evolution of the art – that of emphasizing the deep need for reconnection.' (*Creative Landscape Photography*, 2001)

'Marginal lighting appeals directly to our natural fascination with "the edge", and almost without exception the most compelling images of the natural world take the viewer

there. The edge is where contrasts arise and change occurs – from day to night, autumn to winter, living to dead, known to mysterious, land to ocean, ocean to sky. It is removed from the everyday, the ordinary, the usual. The edge is where we discover our limits, where, consciously or otherwise, we are drawn by our innate curiosity.’ (*Creative Landscape Photography*, 2001)

‘That colour has largely replaced black and white in landscape photography can be seen as a reflection of a wish to be at one with the subject. Represented in black and white, the landscape is imbued with an abstract quality, held at a distance from our sensory experience of it. It is made unfamiliar. Creative monochrome landscape work has traditionally been as much about the process of image creation as the photographer’s experience of place.’ (*Creative Landscape Photography*, 2001)

Bill Brandt

‘It is part of the photographer’s job to see more intensely than most people do. He must have and keep in him something of the receptiveness of the child who looks at the world for the first time, or of the traveller who enters a strange country. I believe this power of seeing the world fresh and strange lies hidden in every human being. In most of us it is dormant. Yet it is there, even if it is no more than a vague desire, an unsatisfied appetite that cannot discover its own nourishment.’ (*Amateur Photographer*, 23 November 1996)

Julia Margaret Cameron

(some of her photographs are intentionally out of focus)

‘When focusing and coming to something which, to my eye,

was very beautiful, I stopped there instead of screwing on the lens to the more definite focus which all other photographers insist upon.' (*Annals of My Glass House*, unfinished autobiography, 1874)

Henri Cartier-Bresson

'I'm not responsible for my photographs. Photography isn't documentary, but intuition, a poetic experience. It's drowning yourself, dissolving yourself and then sniff, sniff, sniff – being sensitive to coincidence.'

"There are as many photographers as there are owners of cameras. Just as any sensitive human being is potentially an artist. But if you have a gift, it's your obligation to pursue it. You have to live, you have to read, and you have to look. So few people really look – I mean search with their eyes. They identify [he imitates a rapid, page-turning motion] quick! quick! like this. You see? But looking is questioning, searching. Questioning the relationship of one thing to another; and enjoying. It needs concentration. And it needs time. It was Rodin who said, "What is done with time, time will respect it."' (interview in the *Guardian*, 31 January 1998)

Paul Cézanne

'Here, by the riverbank ... I could keep myself busy for months without shifting my position, inclining sometimes more to the right, sometimes more to the left.'

Lisl Dennis

'Anything that closes us off from our gut response, whether it is rationality, cultural close-mindedness, cynicism, fear, or a simple lack of knowledge of self, is the enemy of our vision.'

Our minds must be as open as our shutters, for it is through them both that revelation appears. Ironically, in this artform of clarity and focus, our dreams, memories, and the flotsam and jetsam of our lives play an enormous role. They must be trusted or our photographs will not reach others on these deep, compelling levels.' ... 'I feel that photographs are really self-portraits, symbols from the external world that correspond to our inner truths.' (*The Essential Image*, 1989)

'I have little interest in making 35mm replications of reality. And because colour film is so much closer to reality than black and white, the need to approach abstraction is even more imperative. Otherwise, photographs simply tell the world what most informed people already know.' (*Outdoor Photographer*)

"The Western mind is inclined to judge so: "This is the best Indian paintbrush in the entire alpine meadow. I'll photograph it." My friend, a Buddhist, took a more gentle, less exclusive tack: "This flower speaks to me the clearest."'
(*Outdoor Photographer*, May 1995)

Jack Dykinga

'Solitude, to me, is more important than the perfect subject. It's almost like a Zen thing – I believe you need to find what's important to you and not run with the pack. You can't do that if you just photograph the subjects and locations where everyone else is. I think this also gives you the chance to find something unique. Even if I go with a preconceived notion of what I'll photograph, being alone with the setting and fully experiencing it makes you more receptive to it. You become immersed in the location,

vibrating with that place. It's really hard to put into words.'
(*Outdoor Photographer*, May 2005)

Harold Feinstein

'My primary technique is prayer. For example, before I work, I feel gratitude for the beautiful flowers and the eyes I have to see them with. When people ask me to explain my approach, I could say, Well, I do this, I do that ... But the fact of the matter is, to me, it's still a miracle.

'When I look at a flower, I think, How can that flower be? You can read a book about science, but it still doesn't get to the miracle of it. So my work, in a sense, is a prayer of gratitude and appreciation for what isn't explained.'

'The thing that's wonderful about photography, in general, is that as much as we see at first, something happens in the process that gets us to see even more. My work reveals to me not only what I see, but the way I see.

'Do what you love to do. That's the key to excellent work. And don't be talked out of it. [e.g., by suggestions that you should be "practical"]'

'Let's face it, photography is easy. We like to complicate things. The thing I find in teaching – everybody thinks they have technical problems, but the real problem is the attitude that one has toward one's self. There's such a self-deprecation that many people feel, perhaps because of a lack of recognition as children and so forth, that they don't believe in what they can do. They can look at other people's work and call it wonderful, but when they look at their own, they're looking at every pimple on their subject's face. Getting people to trust themselves is the key to teaching.'
(*PCPhoto*, July 2001)

Ernst Haas

'Flowers are like silent friends, who have accompanied the human race since the beginning. They connect man with nature, making flower language the most universal one. Their duty to us seems to be to underline our joys as to console our sorrows [sic] ... and so they adapt themselves most naturally into the human condition, by sending signals and aromas in never-ending variations to appease us. For all that and more I want to also treat them humanly in my pictures. To see them not only in the climax of their life when in bloom, but also half-open or closed, too young or too old, alone or in company, and to show how these tender creations resist silently rain, storm, snow and ice. How glorious they look transformed by the sunlight, mingling and mixing with each other by sheer chance. Until later when the wilting will bring out the character like in a human face, transforming colour and form finally into what flowers mean to me. Symbols of impermanence.'

'I really wish that everybody in photography would try to do a creation story purely for himself ... The beautiful thing about the Creation is that only God can do it, make something out of nothing. We can only make something out of something. Even if this something is considered nothing, like garbage. But we can make and need something to make. So every artistic creation is basically a re-creation.'

'In the creation of the colour image we discover the fleeting and transitory nature of colour and light. Colours not only originate from the breaking down of light, but are also dependent upon it. Too much light, as too little, can destroy colour. It is a miraculous relationship based on give and take. There are colours which have their own illumination,

and others which require illumination to be seen at all. As there exists no absolute light there exists also no absolute colour.'

'Style has no formula, but it has a secret key. It is the extension of your personality. The summation of this indefinable net of your feeling, knowledge and experience. Take colour as a totality of relations within a frame ... Colour is joy. One does not think joy. One is carried by it.'

'I am not interested in shooting new things – I am interested to see things new. In this way I am a photographer with the problems of a painter; the desire is to find the limitations of a camera so I can overcome them.'

'The limitations of photography are in yourself, for what we see is only what we are.'

'There is no formula – only a man with his conscience speaking, writing and singing in the new hieroglyphic language of light and time.'

'Ask yourself about the source in your artistic longings. Why is it so necessary that you want to do your thing? How strong is it? would you do it if it were forbidden? Illegal, punishable? Every work of art has its necessity, find out your very own. Ask yourself if you would do it, if nobody would ever see it, if you would never be re-compensated for it, if nobody ever wanted it. If you come to a clear [yes], in spite of it, then go ahead and don't doubt it anymore.'

David Hockney

'I think that we might save ourselves from destruction by admitting what is close, what is intimate, which is what is

real, by perceiving the world with greater intimacy, which, in turn, leads to kindness. It is much harder to be unkind in a person-to-person situation than it is to be unkind when you are in your big group against another group.'

'If someone were to say that some kinds of art, like a painting by Rothko, are representations of inner states rather than outer appearance, I would answer, so is everything else. Someone once said to me while we were talking about Cubism, Isn't Cubism about the inner eye? I said, But that's all we have, that's all there is. There isn't actually any other kind.'

'I don't think we fully know what the world looks like, because I think you begin to realize that whatever you're looking at, what you experience is, after all, through your own consciousness. So you realize it's not possible to separate what you're looking at from yourself; at some point it's connected with you when you're looking at it.'

'What is an abstraction? We keep coming back to this and the reason why we do is, I think, because the emergence of abstract art is directly related to our belief that photography is true, realistic depiction ... [We believed] that there were two separate things: abstraction and representation, and that they were very different ... But now I am not sure at all about that. I think, in fact, the more you go on the more you realize there's actually only abstraction. The photograph is a refined abstraction, a highly refined one, just as perspective is.'

'When I began doing a different kind of photography I was attacked quite a lot. People would say, He's wasting his time, what's he doing, why doesn't he paint, and so on. I took no notice: I couldn't. If you are learning something

from whatever it is you are doing, you are not going to be put off because somebody says it isn't art. I couldn't care less whether it was art or not, I felt excited by it. I felt that the things I was doing were at least discoveries for me, whether they were for anybody else or not, and I found them thrilling.'

Dewitt Jones

'My experience brings me down on the side of a friendly universe. Not a vision that denies the world's pain and suffering, but rather one that accepts it and then looks squarely at the joy, love and beauty that, for me at least, seem to exist in far greater quantities. For those of you who agree with me, I propose we beat the nay-sayers at their own game. Let us counter senseless acts of violence with senseless acts of beauty. Let's put the loveliness of the world up in front of people until they can't do anything but admit that it's really there.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, May 1991)

'There's more than one right answer. Upon reflection, I think this is one of the real keys to creativity ... Our world is ambiguous, no matter how much our upbringing tries to teach us it's not ... There are a thousand right answers to every problem. The way I see it, the more gold medals they're willing to give out, the more chance I have of winning one. Let this idea sink into your consciousness and it really begins to change the way you look at things. My tendency used to be to stop the first time I found a good frame. ("This is good. It must be the right answer.") Later, I'd be crushed when someone would see the same scene in a more extraordinary way.' [So after you've got one 'right answer' see what you can do to go beyond it; keep looking and

homing in on what excites you.] (*Outdoor Photographer*, February 1992)

'I love to look at things and my cameras give me a socially acceptable way of staring.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, August 1993)

'I think of Lincoln's line: "I don't like that man; I'll have to get to know him better." How true that is of photography. "What an ugly parking lot; I'll have to get to know it better."' (*Outdoor Photographer*, February 1994)

'I have to fight the voice that says it's not worth bothering – the light's terrible, say – and remind myself over and over that the difference between a good frame and a great frame is usually a small subtle shift, not a giant reframe.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, August 1996)

'As I look through my lenses, nature presents me with an abundance of beauty beyond my wildest imaginings. Over and over again, she seems to be saying, "Relax. There is more here than you will ever need. When you believe it, you will see it." The more I believe it, the more I do see it ... not just in "nature", but in my family, in my profession, and in myself.'

'I try with any photograph to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, February 1999)

'I remember the first time I saw layers of spring trees shot by Eliot Porter or the huge foregrounds of David Muench or double-exposed flowers by Ernst Haas. These visions were new ground when they did them. Now I see thousands of knock-offs. Beautiful? Sure. Unique? Hardly.

'Are we simply re-orderers of nature – visual

scriveners? Or are we artists – vision makers? If we don't answer, "Vision Makers!", then in my opinion, nature photography will just slowly fade to postcards. We've got to take some chances, shake things up.'

'Digital offers us a million ways to take our art to levels we've never imagined. Just get into it! Nature never stops experimenting, so why should we?!' (*Outdoor Photographer*, October 2000)

Robert Glenn Ketchum

'I tend to let myself be led from one thing to the next by following my instincts. Ansel Adams called them intersections. By putting yourself out there, you're asking for something to happen. I don't sit around a lot and wait, though. My normal routine might be to grab my cameras and just walk a trail for the sake of doing it. Regardless of the weather, if I said that's what I'm going to do, that's what I try to do. By allowing myself to be open to whatever is happening that day, the serendipity, the moment, whatever you want to call it, transpires. Most of my pictures are things that occurred along the way.'

'Fine photographs occur wherever. It's got more to do with your seeing than with your placement. Put yourself out there, and things will happen to you.'

Jay Maisel

'There's no such thing as a boring subject, only boring ways of looking at it.'

Joel Meyerowitz

'I believe in the immediacy of the moment. I always photograph where I am when I'm there. I never say, I'm going to come back when the light's good. I've never

understood that way of thinking, and when I hear photographers talk that way, I think they're crazy. It's a deception. It stops you from doing something in the present, puts off the decision to another time. It creates expectations, and I try to go out without any. The only way to be free in your experience of the world, is not to have expectations.'
(*American Photo*)

Claude Monet

'In order to see we must forget the name of the thing we are looking at.'

William Neill

'The ultimate reward in photographing the landscape is tuning into the natural rhythms of the land and renewing a sense of wonder. The experience of seeing is most important – take the time to assimilate your surroundings. If I don't find a single image to make, I'm not going to worry about it. This virtually guarantees I'll find one.

'I see this as a Zen, or meditative approach. One waits patiently for, but doesn't force, inspiration. The joy of seeing something that moves me is the motivation to make an image. The urge to make photographs, regardless of inspiration, leads to a forced effort and results in lesser-quality images. The making of a photograph comes second but not secondary. The deeper the experience of seeing, the better the images can be. The combination of seeing and then resolving the vision photographically is vastly rewarding.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, October 1993)

Q. How do you make a landscape personal?

'I think it has a lot to do with trust and openness. You trust your own instincts. I find a lot of people don't think they're

creative or artistic. People forget that they're unique. Somehow I've had faith in myself that if I keep on trying, a few images – and it's a very small percentage – will allow something that's less derivative to come through.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, January 1998)

'The greatest lesson that I learned from Ansel Adams is the importance of personal vision. The essence of artistry in photography is expressing your own perspective as deeply as possible, not being derivative, and not mimicking, but pushing yourself to make creative images.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, February 2002)

'It's the experience of discovery that energizes me to photograph; what brings meaning to the artistic process for me is the encounter as much as the resulting image.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, November 2003)

Georgia O'Keefe

'Still – in a way – nobody sees a flower – really – it is so small – we haven't time – and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time ... So I said to myself – I'll paint it big ...'

Freeman Patterson

'When we free ourselves from our usual perceptions of scale, we can explore the world without leaving home.'

Marcel Proust

'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new lands but in having new eyes.'

Nancy Rotenberg

'Secret messages are known only to the quiet. While sitting peacefully, subjects reveal themselves. In silence, you begin to develop awareness, and it's in that state of being that thinking, feeling and seeing happen. It's an incredible moment when you realize that it's truly possible for subjects to find you.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, September 2003)

'The creative process is like a birth. It has a power all its own and your job isn't to control it, but to let it happen naturally. Your responsibility is to lose yourself in the process and let the baby come into the world.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, September 2003)

Galen Rowell

As I hope for a lucky moment while I am carrying a camera on an outdoor adventure, I often have the feeling that there is nothing in the world I would rather be doing and no other place I would rather be ... There is something unfathomably satisfying about moving under one's own power through the landscape toward an objective ... Making a fine image in such a situation gives me the power to relive something of the original experience as well as impart it to others. (*Mountain Light*, 1986)

The best photographs speak for themselves. Attempts to analyse their meanings invariably detract from the special quality that is beyond words in the first place. The photographs that move me the most propel me into an emotional realm where my experience is no longer verbal. I wince whenever I hear a photographer limit the effectiveness of his work by trying to express its meaning in words ... I do not attempt to discuss what any given photograph means to

me personally except as it relates to my discovery of the situation and my rendering of it on film. (*Mountain Light*, 1986)

'Being in the right place at the right time isn't the luck of the draw from time spent in the wilds ... but rather the direct result of following intuitive clues. What critics call style reflects the individuality of each photographer's search from the heart.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, November 1998)

'Most photographers are in denial about the role of luck, afraid to let the public speculate that their best work is based on it. The word is conspicuously absent from the indexes of manuals and the agendas of workshops, yet without it, photography would lose much of its job and all of its spontaneity. Denial of luck is usually a misguided effort to have one's art taken seriously, like the planned creative acts of painters and sculptors, who can't simply glance over their shoulders while a work is nearing completion, see something new and produce a totally different work in 1/125th of a second.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, May 1999)

'Had photography begun as a recognized form of art, our culture would be more keenly aware of the role of intentionality. The famous art psychologist, Rudolph Arnheim, has denied this by expressing the common, wrong-headed view that photographs only capture what was already there in nature: "passive recordings" that "register all detail with equal faithfulness". To the contrary, neither photographs nor direct observations fully represent reality. Successful landscape photographers are members of the small fraternity of artists, scientists and philosophers who have lost the certitude of most others that what they sense

in the shapes their eyes behold are actually there in that way.' (*Outdoor Photographer*, August 1999)

'Directly experiencing the natural world, with or without a camera, is the catalyst for all worthwhile outdoor photography ... Ansel Adams and Henri Cartier-Bresson worked wonders with very different styles and equipment precisely because they avoided letting technology complicate the simplicity of their vision.'

'Almost everything that can go wrong with outdoor photography can be turned into a compelling photo by creative orthogonal thought [taking the opposite path of a concept that you can't make work] – blizzards, haze, rain – with the exception of running out of film or giving up.'
(*Outdoor Photographer*, June 2000)

Arthur Schopenhauer

'The task is not so much to see what no one yet has seen, but to think what nobody yet has thought about that which everyone sees.'

Martin Scorsese

(on making movies) 'Every time you go out to do a picture, you learn that you really don't know. You rediscover how to make pictures every time – every time you're out.'

John Shaw

'We could spend a lifetime photographing the same location and never repeat the same picture if only we knew how to see.'

'A photograph is only a two-dimensional representation of our experience. The fuller the experience, the more it

touches all of our senses, the better our photographs are.’
(*Focus on Nature*, 1991)

‘One of my passions in life is to simply roam around exploring an area. Every map I’ve ever held seems to speak to me as an invitation to adventure. I’ve never found a dirt road that I didn’t want to follow. Take me off the interstate highways, plunk me down in some isolated rural area, and turn me loose. I think that having no set schedule, no definite destination, and no time constraints is absolutely perfection.’ (*Focus on Nature*, 1991)

Linde Waidhofer

‘What has always appealed to me in my personal work is that I’m not interested in literally seeing, in what the eye sees at first glance. I’m looking for something the eye doesn’t see initially, something that’s simpler, more mysterious than that. It’s always a question of exploring, of finding an image that captures the mystery of it. The thing that appeals to me most is a sense of mystery.’ (*Outdoor Photographer*, June 2001)

Charlie Waite

‘I know from experience that first thoughts are usually hopeless, second worse, and that only third, fourth or fifth ever have anything to say for them.’

‘I do not believe that a good photograph can be made without recognizing that the landscape will always be more important than either you or the photograph you plan to make of it. Of course it has to be helped and supported by all the techniques of photography, but when taking a photograph I know to be good, the sensation I always have

is a modest one. It is an inner ah, the knowledge that something is right. When this understanding is there, something strange happens to me. The heartbeat slows down, the whole metabolism seems to come down towards the rate of the landscape itself; and the mind, almost as if coated with an emulsion itself, starts to soak up the meaning of the place. There is nothing casual about it. It is not a snatch. Understanding grows as you allow the landscape to come into you. Passivity, not acquisition, is the key to this. A good photograph is a received photograph, an exchange between you and the landscape, in which – however unlikely this might seem – there is a form of dialogue between the two of you. It is simply courtesy to allow the landscape to speak ... The picture is not there to make a point. It is simply a recognition, as I see it, of something that is beautiful.' (*The Making of Landscape Photographs*, 1992)

'The landscape is the thinnest of living veins in marble, squeezed between the giant masses of rock below and sky above. It is where the fluid and mobile element of the atmosphere meets the solidity of earth. That meeting of those opposites is the great drama of the landscape. And of course the catalyst for it all, the one thing that a photographer must know, must learn to understand, must come perhaps, in the end, to love, is light. Perhaps it is like a love affair. Sometimes the landscape meets you quite willingly, sometimes it is a question of assiduous wooing. There are pleasures in both, but in my experience, the less the image is manipulated, the more perfect the experience for the photographer.' (*The Making of Landscape Photographs*, 1992)

'You should establish a relationship between sky and earth. The heart of a good sky in a photograph, I think, consists in your conceiving what is in front of you not in terms of two elements which have to be brought into relationship with each other, but as a pair. One part is in motion and the other is still but reflects the changes going on overhead. Think of sky and earth as an indissoluble coupling and you will not go far wrong.' (*The Making of Landscape Photographs*, 1992)

Edward Weston

'Peace and an hour's time – given these, one creates. Emotional heights are easily attained; peace and time are not.' (12 Nov 1925)

'The economic problem is a perennial one which I accept because I made my own choice many years ago. I could have spent time and effort making money; I chose to spend it on my work ...' (1934)

'I don't mind adverse or even abusive criticism, for I believe in my work, KNOW its importance, and know damn well where I'm going without being told.' (18 April 1938)