

cole thompson photography newsletter

Issue 134 - April 25, 2025



Family Portrait

My Friend!

Everyone has an opinion! Barry says that I have too many quotes in my newsletters and John says they are too long. Whose opinion matters?

I think you know the answer to that question: in art (and maybe newsletters) your opinion is the only one that matters.

And so here's another long newsletter with lots of quotes...cheers Barry and John!

Cole

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Quotes

"I hate quotes!"

Barry, a friend and newsletter subscriber

"To make good photographs, to express something, to contribute something to the world you live in, and to contribute something to the art of photography besides imitations of the best photographers on the market today, that is basic training, the understanding of self."

Edward Steichen

"There is no such a thing as taking too much time, because your soul is in that picture"

Ruth Bernhard

"It has been said that art is a tryst, for in the joy of it, maker and beholder meet."

Kojiro Tomita

"The basis of all art is sincerity. To be yourself, to rely on your own judgement, your own gut feeling of what is right."

Toller Cranston

"Art is about emotion; if art needs to be explained it is no longer art."

Renoir

"Art deteriorates when it is done for an audience."

James Pierce.

"I always felt I was a bit of a pariah in the mainstream art world. I remember this discussion when I was in college, there was all this controversy: what is art and what is craft?

Someone said: 'creating and making art is a way for me to explain the world.' And then I raised my hand and said 'making art is a way for the world to understand me.'"

Ricky Boscarino

"Inspiration does not come through the ego."

Bartholomew (Mary-Margaret Moore)

"I am, as I am; whether hideous or handsome, depends upon who is made judge."

And perhaps a photographic interpretation:

"My image is, as it is; whether good or bad, depends upon who is made judge."

Ancient Stones



Ancient Stones No. 23

I have always viewed these ancient stones as living beings. They sit silently for millennia, moving so incredibly slowly that we do not even notice. They watch us as we scurry about like little ants, full of self-importance.

They smile, knowing that long after we are gone, they will still be here.

<https://colethompsonphotography.com/portfolios/series/ancient-stones/>



Ancient Stones No. 9



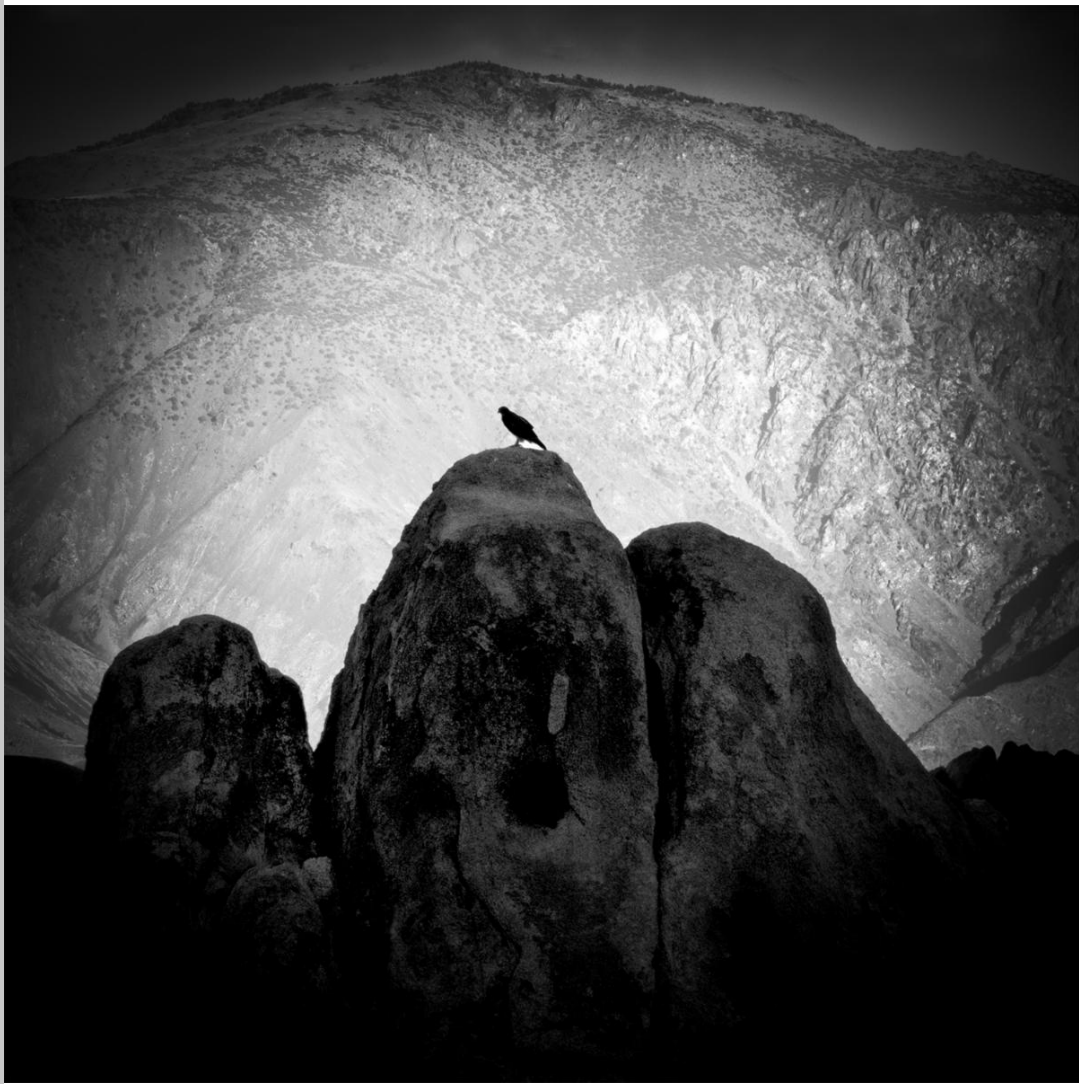
Ancient Stones No. 68



Ancient Stones No. 62



Ancient Stones No. 76



Ancient Stones No. 70



Ancient Stones No. 31



Ancient Stones No. 12



Ancient Stones No. 61



Ancient Stones No. 105

Horizon's Photography Conference
October 2-5



Horizons

PHOTOGRAPHY CONFERENCE

I've been invited to participate at the Horizons Photography Conference this upcoming October 2-5 in Durango, Colorado.

There will be many great photographers there and many good friends such as Beth Buelow, Brooks Jensen, Matt Payne, and Sarah Marino.

And no, "he" will not be there...



[Albert Dros](#)



[Andy Parkinson](#)



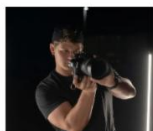
[Beth Buelow](#)



[Brooks Jensen](#)



[Cole Thompson](#)



[Derek Sturman](#)



[Dusty Doddridge](#)



[Huibo Hou](#)



[Ian Plant](#)



[Matt Payne](#)



[Michael Bollino](#)



[Michele Sons](#)



[Sarah Marino](#)



[Talor Stone](#)



[Theo Bosboom](#)

Learn more about the conference and start planning to come to Colorado in October for the beautiful fall colors! (did I just say that???)

<https://www.horizonsphoto.com/>

Something I forgot to mention the first time I promoted this event: you can use this code: **COLE100** for a **\$100 discount**. If you've already signed up, contact the good folk at Horizons and let them know I forgot to give you the code!

Random Thoughts



Windsurfing

As a photographer, I often explained my photographs by describing where it was taken, my equipment and the processes I used.

But as an artist I want to talk about why I was compelled to create the image, how it makes me feel and why I love it.

I've generally found that only photographers are interested in locations, equipment, and process. Those interested in art are focused on how the image makes them feel.

People often ask me to describe my Vision. I point to my images and say: "this is my Vision!"

Why would I use a few paltry words to inadequately describe my Vision when the image, the embodiment of my Vision, says it all?

I don't believe that Vision can be described with words. It is the essence of who I am, a unique perspective forged by my unique life experiences.

When asking people “why do you create?” The answer that always resonates with me is: “I am compelled to.”

“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery” so goes the well known saying by Charles Caleb Colton.

But then an unknown person amended it to say: “Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, *that mediocrity can pay to greatness.*”

I would rather be a poor original than a great imitation.

For much of my photographic life I considered myself a photographer and my objective was to document what I saw with my eyes. I was careful not to color the photograph with my perspective and I thought that manipulating an image was a photographic sin.

Over time, I transformed into a "fine art photographer" and gave myself permission to creatively manipulate the image in my quest for more likes, sales and recognition.

Now I've evolved into what I call a "personally expressive photographer," creating for myself and using my art to express who I am and how I see the world. While I still enjoy the likes, I no longer create for them.

I’ve fallen in love with Rick Rubin’s idea that my images are my diary entries, and I now use this simple analogy to test my photographic philosophies, for example:

Should I submit my images to be critiqued?
Would I submit my diary to be critiqued?

Should I enter my images into a competition?
Would I enter my diary into a competition?

Should I study another’s images to improve my own?
Would I study another’s diary to improve my own?

Should I “borrow or steal” someone else’s artistic ideas?
Would I “borrow or steal” someone else’s diary ideas?

My images are my diary entries. They are uniquely mine and cannot be improved upon by comparing, competing or asking others what they think of my work.

The way that I can improve my art is to improve my understanding of self.

I can choose to be a photographer or I can choose to be an artist. The choice is mine.

The more of a photographer I am, the more I’m drawn to competitions and reviews.

The more of an artist I am, the less I want or need those things.

Many photographers will see an image they admire and ask: how did you do that?

They want to know the techniques used, thinking that once they know those, they could create that image.

The question they should be asking is: how did you think of that?

Do I create for the likes or do I create for myself and then enjoy the resulting likes?

There is a huge difference between the two.

Finding and following your Vision will almost certainly result in fewer people who like your work.

The more personal it is, the smaller the audience. The more common it is, the larger your audience.

There is no good art or bad art, only different art. Just because I don't like or understand someone's art, doesn't mean that it's bad. I just don't care for it.

Report: The Vision Retreat



John and I completed our first Vision Retreat in early April and I wanted to report on how it went, what we learned, and our plans going forward.

In our minds, a retreat is different than a workshop or tour. We had a lot of deeply personal group discussions, we photographed in the same location each day, and there was absolutely no technical talk. This retreat was about finding and following our Vision.

Each day we met in my home and ate breakfast together, then we spent several hours talking about Vision and focusing on our motives as creatives. We then traveled to an undisclosed and non-iconic location to photograph for several hours, and wrapped up the day by doing one-on-one sessions during dinner and then returning to my home for an evening discussion.

There was lots of talking, sharing, introspection and even tears.

The retreat was a success, measured by how the participants viewed the experience.

What did we learn from this first retreat? The format worked remarkably well and it will remain largely the same with a few minor tweaks. But the real key to its success was the participants. We were all on the same page: everyone wanted to move beyond being a photographer, they wanted to find deeper meaning in their art and all were ready to find and follow their Vision. The quality of the people and their willingness to open up, was what made this experience a resounding success.

We will be talking more about our experiences at the retreat in an upcoming episode of:

[The Cole and John Photo Show](#)

Our plans moving forward? We will offer a second Vision Retreat this October 12-18, again held at my home in Colorado and going to an undisclosed non-iconic location. If you have an interest in this next retreat, please contact John Barclay and he'll provide you with more detailed information.

johnbarclayphoto@me.com

P.S. To those attendees at our first Vision Retreat, please help us keep our shooting location "non-iconic and undisclosed!"

The Story Behind the Image



Harbinger No. 22

This is the image I almost didn't create...because I wasn't paying attention.

When I created my first Harbinger, I never thought it could result into a series. How often would I find single clouds over interesting scenes? It seemed improbable.

But when you are passionate about a subject, you find yourself always looking and suddenly...Harbingers are everywhere!

To me a Harbinger represents "an omen of things to come." Interestingly, this single cloud idea has been around for some time, consider this report by Walt Whitman in 1865:

Washington was a grim wartime city for Lincoln's second inauguration, having endured waves of smallpox and torrential recent rains. The crowd that day stood in mud "almost knee deep." Lincoln rode in an open carriage, with a military escort of both black and white troops.

A Times account — by the poet Walt Whitman — noted that as the president spoke, "a curious little white cloud, the only one in that part of the sky, appeared like a hovering bird, right over him."

Perhaps that little cloud above Lincoln was an omen of things to come.

The Harbinger above was created as I was photographing at the Tongariki ahu on Easter Island. There were tourists in my frame and so as I waited, I listened to a book on tape and was not really present. Fortunately, and for no reason at all, I happened to look up and noticed this single cloud overhead. It was moving fast and I had mere seconds to create the Harbinger of a lifetime. I mean, Tongariki AND a Harbinger...how does it get any better than that?!?!

This image taught me to pay attention and not be "multi-tasking" when I'm out creating. But the bigger lesson the Harbinger series taught me was: If you're passionate about a subject, there's a good chance you can find a way to make it happen. It just takes a little faith.



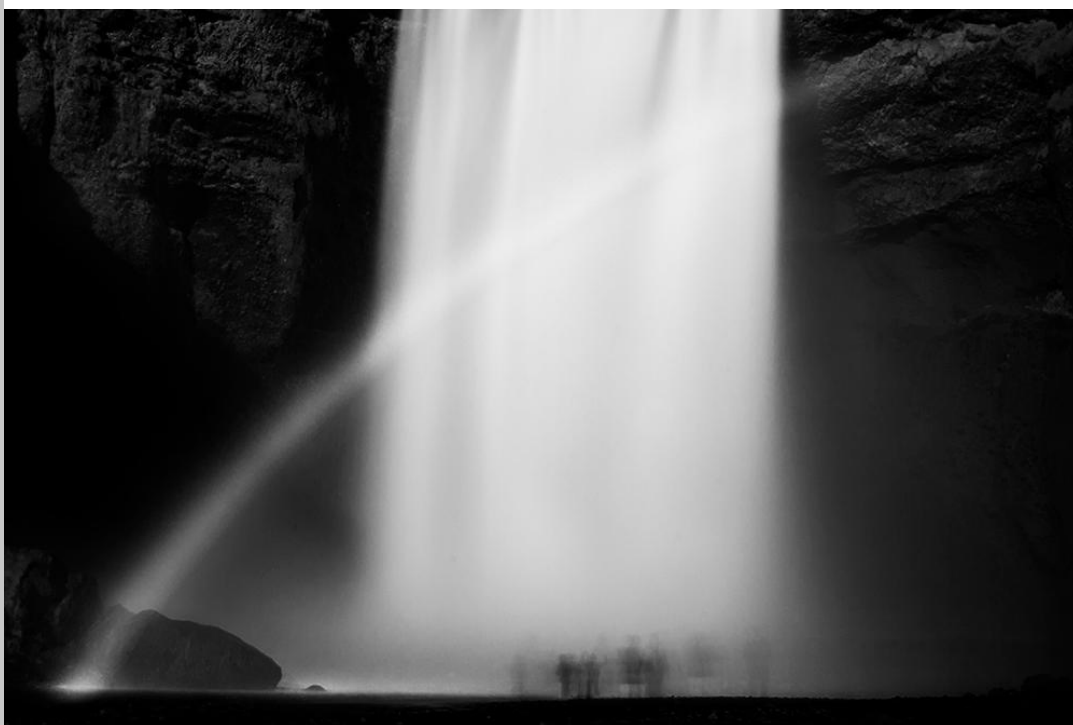
Tongariki No. 6

Here's the image I was working on when I saw the Harbinger.

If you'd like to see all of my Harbinger Images, click here:

<https://colethompsonphotography.com/portfolios/series/harbinger/>

Print Drawing



The Gathering

For this month's print drawing I'll be giving away "The Gathering."

To enter: send an email to Cole@ColeThompsonPhotography.com and put "The Gathering" in the subject line.

Thanks for entering!

[Email Cole and Enter the Drawing!](mailto:Cole@ColeThompsonPhotography.com)

The winner of my last print drawing is Maureen Testa who will be receiving a print of Dancing Windmills."

Congratulations Maureen, please contact me and arrange for your print to be delivered! (see Maureen, it pays to keep trying)

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