

cole thompson photography
newsletter

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Linnie No. 5

My Friend!

Did you know that you are creative and that you have Vision, whether or not you recognize it?

You have the power to express yourself through your photographs and create wonderful images that you love.

Don't doubt yourself or the importance of your work.

Cole

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Quotes

"When I see a color image I think, wow, that's pretty, but a black and white image shows the dramatic - the image inside the image, and makes you feel emotions completely unrelated to the photograph."

F. J. Morrison

"Photography records the gamut of feelings written on the human face, the beauty of the earth and skies that man has inherited, and the wealth and confusion man has created."

Edward Steichen

"Most things in life are moments of pleasure and a lifetime of embarrassment; photography is a moment of embarrassment and a lifetime of pleasure."

Tony Benn

"Be sensitive to your own mistakes. Observe your work. Put it on the wall for a couple of weeks. It may be that you can learn more from the study of your own work than

from others.”

John Sloan

"Photography is not about cameras, gadgets, and gizmos. Photography is about photographers."

Peter Adams

“Photography is an art of observation. It’s about finding something interesting in an ordinary place... I’ve found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them.”

Elliot Erwitt

“I can’t verbalize the internal meaning of pictures whatsoever. Some of my friends can at very mystical levels. I prefer to say that if I feel something strongly, I would make a photograph that would be the equivalent of what I saw and felt.”

Ansel Adams

“Photography for me is not looking, it’s feeling. If you can’t feel what you’re looking at, then you’re never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures.”

Don McCullin

“The whole point of taking pictures is so that you don’t have to explain things with words.”

Elliott Erwitt

"While there is perhaps a province in which the photograph can tell us nothing more than what we see with our own eyes, there is another in which it proves to us how little our eyes permit us to see."

Dorothea Lange

Artist or Activist - A Follow Up



Ghana Portrait No. 2

Last month, I wrote: "Does an artist have an obligation to speak out on subjects that they feel strongly about?"

And I asked for your thoughts.

Wow, I was overwhelmed both by the number of responses and the wisdom offered! While there was a variety of opinions, one pretty constant theme emerged: If Vision is about life, then follow your Vision.

Wise advice; I wish I had thought of that...

There was also this funny response: someone asked whether I really wanted their opinion or if this was just a marketing ploy to engage the audience. I assured them that I really wanted their opinion!

Thanks for your wisdom, encouragement, and especially kindness. It was heartwarming to see such kindness in a world that, according to the news, is filled with hatred, greed, and violence.

It isn't. Most people are good.

And for some reason, this reminds me of a quote by Abraham Lincoln:

"I don't like that man, I must get to know him better."

Thank you to the many who responded!

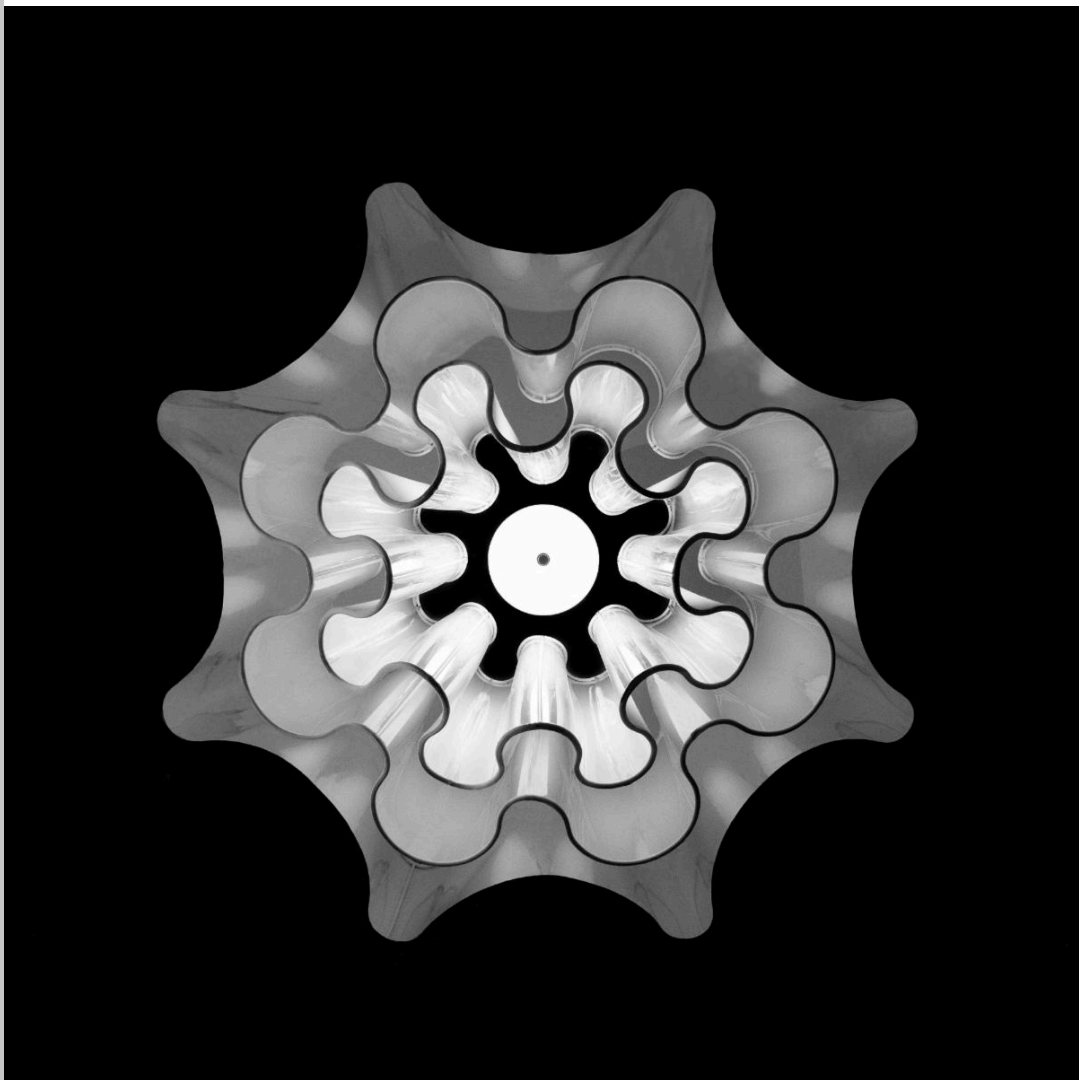
New Images



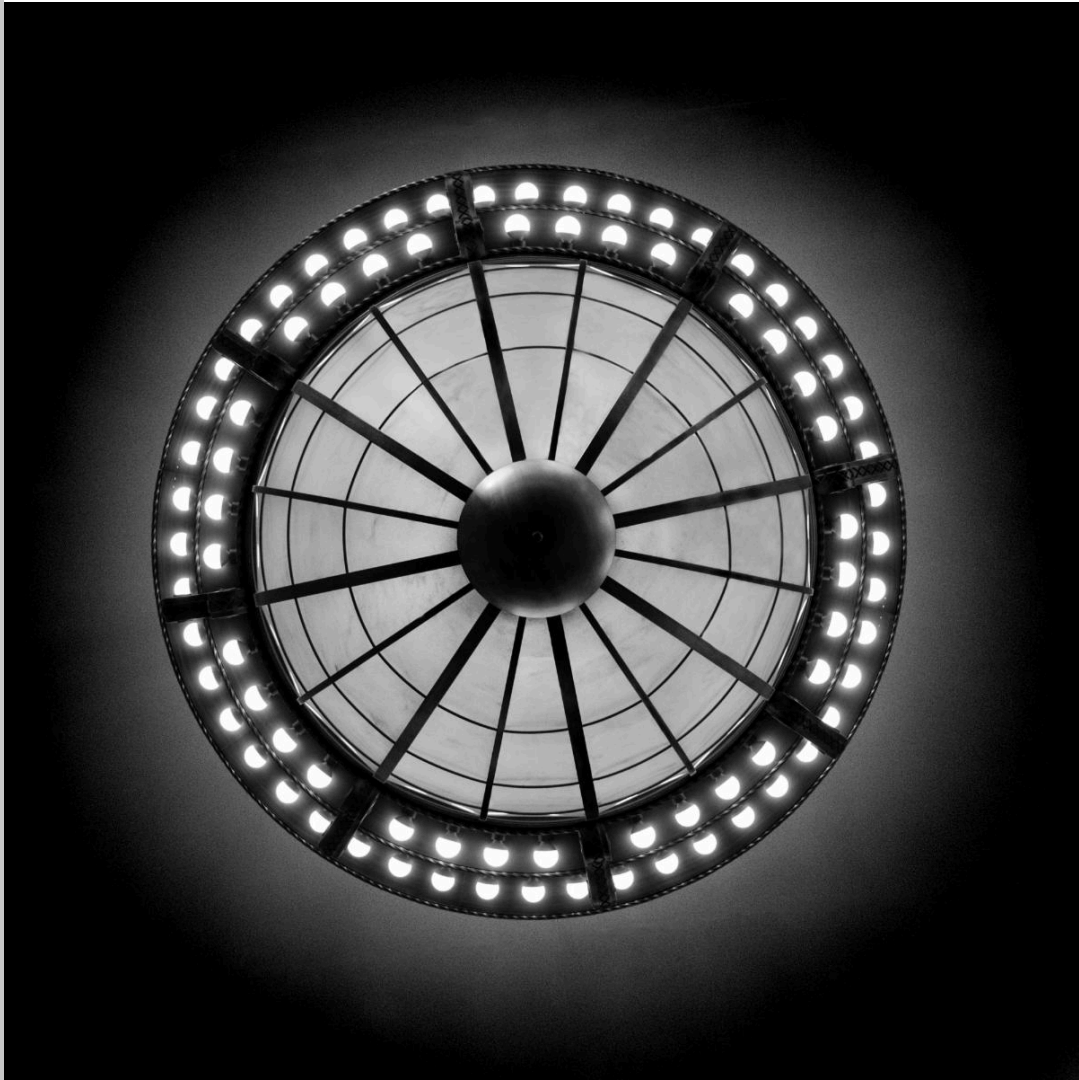
Two Hats



Harbinger No. 75



Ceiling Lamp - Denver Union Station



Ceiling Lamp - Denver Union Station No. 2



Harbinger No. 78



Light Poles No. 22

Learning to Unlearn



Shoes - 1970

Can you remember when you first discovered photography?

Can you remember the excitement you felt at finding something that you were passionate about?

Can you remember the feeling when you created an image that you really loved?

I can.



Gull and Moon - 1970

I created "Gull and Moon" at the age of 16, and this was the first image that I really loved and was proud of. I was young, self-taught, I didn't know the rules or how I was "supposed" to photograph, and I had not yet begun to follow trends.

I was a child with a camera and an imagination, and that was enough.

But then something happened: I decided that I wanted to be a "successful" photographer. I had never thought about what "success" meant to me, I just accepted the widely accepted definition for photographers: to be famous, to have my work in a big-name gallery, to sell my prints for lots of money, and to have a book of my work published.

What else could success mean?

And so I started doing what I thought would make me successful:

- I copied others' work
- I imitated others' subjects and styles
- I followed rules and common wisdoms
- I focused on technical perfection
- I created for popularity
- I listened to others' advice

It turns out that everything I did was the *exact* opposite of what I should have done. (That's a Seinfeld reference; do you know the episode?)

And the result? My work was average, boring, and indistinguishable from everyone else's. I did not create original work, but I took pride in my technical perfection because that was all I had to offer.

Over time, I lost my passion for photography. I felt frustrated, empty, and unfulfilled, but I didn't know what was wrong or how to fix it. But in 2004, when I was challenged to find and follow my Vision, everything changed.



Me at age 14

As I found my Vision, I noticed that my natural child-like creativity and love for my work were returning. Why was this happening? Here's a thought from Rick Rubin:

“Beginner’s mind - one of the most difficult states of being to dwell in for an artist, precisely because it involves letting go of what our experiences have taught us.

A beginner’s mind starts from a pure childlike place of not knowing. Living in the moment with as few fixed beliefs as possible.

Seeing things for what they are as presented. Tuning in to what enlivens us in the moment instead of what we think will work. And making our decisions accordingly. Any preconceived ideas and accepted conventions limit what’s possible.

We tend to believe that the more we know, the more clearly we can see the possibilities available. This is not the case. The impossible only becomes accessible when experience has not taught us limits. There’s a great power in not knowing.”

One key to regaining my child-like creativity was learning to unlearn everything I thought I knew about photographing. I had to:

- Unlearn years of teachings.
- Unlearn rules and conventions.
- Unlearn my dependence on the advice of experts.
- Unlearn my need for others to like my work.
- Unlearn my belief that there's a right way to photograph.
- Unlearn everything that restricts me.

It's really, really hard to turn back the clock of time and to think, see, and feel like our younger selves! Here's how I started the process:

First, I found my Vision. I learned to see through my own eyes and not through the eyes of Ansel, Edward, Imogen, or Wynn.

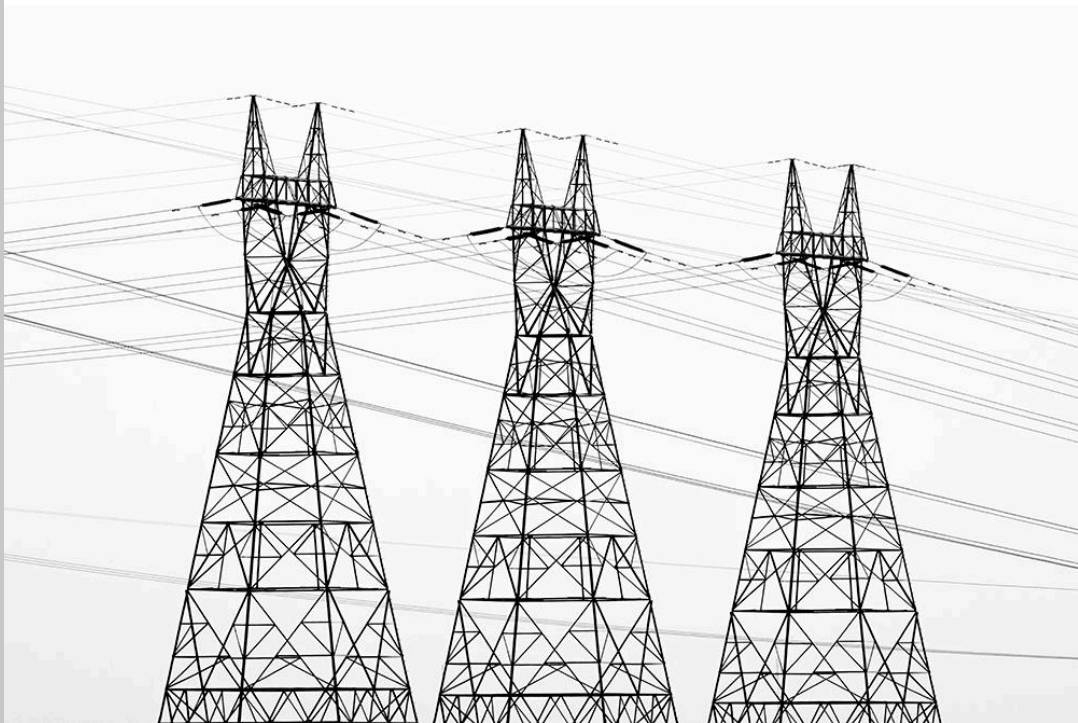
Second, I had to understand why I photographed. When I began photographing at age 14, I did so for only one reason: the pure joy of creating.

Third, once I understood why I was photographing, I was able to define success for myself: creating images that I love.

Fourth, the hardest thing of all was to learn not to care what others thought of my work. To do this, I had to keep reminding myself why I was creating.

I feel good when I create something that I love and am proud of. It's like being 16 all over again, and that's a feeling I wouldn't trade for a thousand likes.

The Story Behind the Image: My Love of Anthropomorphism



Powerlines No. 72 (or "Three Sisters")

A theme that runs throughout many of my series is anthropomorphism, which is defined as:

The attribution of human traits, emotions, intentions, or behaviors to non-human entities, such as animals, gods, or inanimate objects. Humanism.

My "Powerlines" series is a good example; I see these power towers as giants that march across the landscape. They are alive! (maybe an idea for a really bad "B" horror movie?)



Moai, Sitting for Portrait No. 36

"Moai, Sitting for Portrait" is another example. I've created stories about each individual that I photographed, their traits, and relationships.

Here is a father and two sons. When I photographed them, the boys refused to stand close to their father. I sensed a tension between them.



Light Poles No. 17

My "Light Poles" series explores communication between individuals and reflects the complexity of relationships.



Dancing Windmills

Similar to the "Light Poles" and "Powerline" series, my "Windmills" series is about giants that walk the earth.



Ancient Stones No. 76

I think I first recognized this tendency to anthropomorphize my subjects with my "Ancient Stones" series. I imagined that these ancient stones were alive, but because they moved so slowly, we didn't notice them.

They would sit for eons, watching us humans scurry about, full of self-importance, and just smile.



Melting Giants No. 21

"Melting Giants." When I saw these icebergs along the coast of Newfoundland, I was saddened.

These magnificent creatures live such a short life; born in Greenland, they spend 12 months wandering the ocean until they come along the coast of Newfoundland, where they break apart, run aground, and then die on the shore as 30,000-year ice cubes.

This saddened me.



Monolith No. 78

"Monoliths" is another series where I relate to them as living creatures.



Isolated No. 15

My "Isolated" series is about isolation, featuring a single tree or a group of trees isolated from the group. In my mind, they are sentient beings with complex social structures.

I do not know why I see these inanimate objects as living beings (that's a shrink question), but I don't worry about it; it's a part of my Vision and it serves me well.

Print Drawing



For this month's print drawing, I'll be giving away "Melting Giants No. 21."

To enter: send an email to Cole@ColeThompsonPhotography.com and put "Melting Giants" 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 Rick Simon, who will be receiving a print of Harbinger No. 57.

Rick, please email me and arrange to have your print delivered!

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