



Dear Joe – Single Category by Stephen Spiller

#### Reviewer Feedback

Hello Stephen. I have taken some time to study your series, titled, "Dear Joe", looking for visual clues that point to what you are trying to accomplish with your photography practice. You are obviously a skilled photographer with a strong sense of composition. You provide an informative and insightful statement that says, "These five photographs are from what I intend to be series called "Dear Joe". This work will be constructed as an open letter to Joe Biden, with whom I have a personal connection, albeit limited. And it will be my voice showing him, through images of moments critical to our democracy, my despair should he not win the November election. "Joe", I'm saying we can't let this happen again." Or, "Joe, this is the life we must leave our children"."

Looking through the portfolio I feel like this is very much a cohesive series – visually and conceptually a creative, thoughtful study presented in a very surreal way. The result is a collection of mysterious, almost romantic images of scenes on the streets of New York. Your collection of photos and the way they are edited make them seem as if they are imaginary locations, dreamlike and poetic – like a possible view of

the future. The scenes spark the imagination, appearing to be the magical places from a post-apocalyptic fairytale.

The framework of your color pallet makes for a moody atmosphere, which seems to be your source of creative inspiration. With this project you create a visual effect that brings the viewer to the scene, looking through your eyes - to reveal fascinating visual observations! The photos speak of memories, of the mind's eye as it looks back at the places of the past – or maybe of the future? Your images also show that you are aware of this intimate relationship between possible futures and whether or not Joe Biden is elected as President.

I see your photos as timeless and, in a way, shadowy compositions of tonality, texture, and shadow. And I see that you are fascinated by the way the positioning of painterly, overlapping forms that can create pictorialist designs, especially when the frame isolates the subject matter from its surroundings. The organic structures and the textures in the frame define new visual structures in space. Your creative photos remind us all of the wonders these valleys and the interdependence we have with our political leaders.

I think your creative observations are very unique. From a practical perspective, you explore these places, photograph these scenes, move in and out of light and shadow while looking for what catches your eye. I think this is a good description of what a lot of photographers do. Out of the infinite photographic possibilities that arise around you, these meaningful compositions are most likely to catch YOUR eye – the same scenes that go mostly unnoticed by others. Then, you frame the images and create new perspectives of what you saw and photographed. Your thoughtful attention to these subjects and the way they relate to the viewer of the photos creates images that influence the way other people see these impactful subjects.

On the surface these images have a type of visual complexity that concentrates on surface structure and rich tonality, but I also find them to be conceptually complex! These photos create a sense of mood, atmosphere, and drama. The designs lead the eye up, down, and throughout the frame in a way that makes the viewer feel as though they may have walked by these scenes and not noticed them. To me, the photos are interesting because they blur the line between street photography, documentary, and fine art photos. It would be great to hear more of your thoughts, your inspirations.

Your visual observations and interpretations are clearly important characters in your stories. I think you are also asking that the viewer be sensitive enough to look deeply at your images, to see the details you have included in the frame and to consider how the misty environments relate to the size and texture of the timeless forms. Some of your compositions become almost abstract (like photos 2 or 5). They focus on shapes, lights and darks. In fact the sharp focus in some photos gives the impression of fine details and colors painted on a canvas. The photos leave much the imagination of the viewer. The viewer tried to find their bearings by bringing their own experiences of places like these. And while the viewer explores, he/she is confronted with bringing their own imagination to the scenes.

I see that you captured patterns, textures, and shapes that point to isolated “places”. In all the photos there is a kind of ambience that is a kaleidoscope of mysterious structures, and full of drama. The images also function in a way that communicates your experience to the viewer. Anyone that is willing to set aside their compulsion to have to identify every part of what they are looking at will relate to the feelings and emotions your images communicate. For me, I sense sadness, loss, and destruction in these photos.

My first observation/suggestion is about presentation. I can imagine these photos printed large, to inspire feelings of awe by creating a sense of scale for the viewer. Large-scale presentation could prompt the viewer to feel small when confronted by the ideas of standing in front of these mysterious places. I think you need a large scale to allow viewers to see the detailed textures in the stones, grass and trees. Viewers would feel confronted with unexpected perspectives and that could inspire creative interpretations. This is the way Joe should see them!

My next observation/suggestion also has to do with presentation. I suggest that the photos would be effective in a book. I think your ideas, combined with the photos will make a more cohesive presentation.

Also with a book, the viewer can hold the images, making the interaction more personal. The title of the book could be the same as the series! You could use the title for the series as the title for the book and send Joe a copy!

Your images are very dynamic. They are full of observations and questions about life and politics! Your images prove that being creative with your images is very exciting and who knows where it will lead. Also, don't feel like you need to be married to the photography world. My advice is that you enter juried art exhibitions and/or show your work within art communities. I think that your images would do well in an "art" environment. Your photos really do cross a lot of boundaries, which is highly encouraged in the art world. I suggest you keep an eye on [www.callforentry.org](http://www.callforentry.org) for themed calls for artists.

I have enjoyed looking at your photos and it is clear that photography is one of your passions! Your images and your project are very thought provoking and creative. They are full of stories waiting to be discovered! I would strongly encourage you to keep pursuing your ideas. But, look at lots of portfolios that will inspire you continue the project. I suggest you look at the photography of Alexander Rodchenko and Man Ray. Your work shares some qualities with his and I think you may find his work inspiring. I very much enjoyed looking at your photos and I appreciate the way your images are masterfully considered and carefully designed. I hope my review is helpful. I hope my words answered your question and I look forward to seeing what you will do next!