

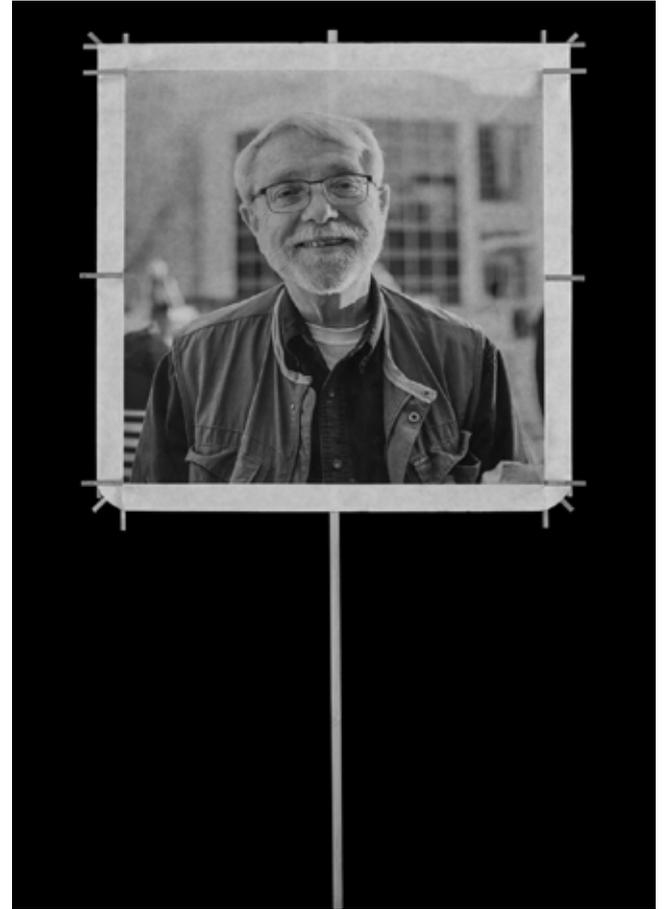
Becoming Panoramic

Thoughts About Photography, Art and Buddhism



Ed Heckerman

Dedicated to Stephen K. Lehmer
1947 – 2023



Contents



Picture Seeds

Gain and Loss

Pleasure and Pain

Fame and Ignominy

Praise and Blame

Becoming Panoramic

Picture Seeds

There are two types of scientists: the clinician and the researcher. The clinician is someone who learns the formulas, practices, and succeeds with its refinement. The researcher is someone who pursues the unknown and asks what happens if we take a risk, thereby discovering new roads and directions.¹

— *Steve Lehmer*

Writing this book was like going out to take pictures, exploring streets and neighborhoods and the vernacular landscape without a fixed agenda. The process of writing reveals things little by little. I have been asked on more than one occasion: “Who is your audience for this book?” This seems like a reasonable question. However, since I write in the spirit of exploration, not ever sure what, if anything, I will find, the question is difficult to answer. Some might argue that writing and artwork that does not illustrate theoretically rigorous concepts is self-indulgent and irresponsible. I humbly disagree. To embark on a journey of discovery is anything but irresponsible. It’s more a way of being. It keeps life inter-

esting and if you are lucky, serves up unexpected rewards. My audience is anyone curious and patient enough to pick up a book of words and photographs that at first glance looks different. Similarly, I am asking my reader not so much to consume the contents of this book, as to slow down long enough to let it seep in; interact with it and maybe get surprised. I don’t really see any point in looking at books, or writing yet another one, that merely reaffirm hardened opinions you may already have. I don’t have anything to prove, but I hope I have something to offer. I don’t want to tell you what that is before you get the chance to figure it out yourself, but I’ll give you a few clues.

My purpose in writing is not to become rich and famous. Rather, it helps me work stuff out. As a Buddhist I want to share what I have worked out with other practicing Buddhist artists who don't specialize exclusively in replicating traditional Buddhist iconography or focus on exclusively Buddhist subject matter.² This book is research into how to integrate the practice of photography with Buddhist thought. The structure of this book is to gather seeds in the form of quotes and then elaborate on them with commentary that will delve into what Buddhism calls *the eight worldly mundane obsessions*. These ordinary concerns are attachment and aversion to *gain and loss, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, fame and ignominy*.³ I will write about what it is to be a fine art photographer that is weary of these obsessions. Limiting the scope of my inquiry in this way is similar to a photographer deciding to work a defined site or theme rather than to wander endlessly. Anyway, this is perhaps the one thing I have to offer that hasn't been adequately dealt with in Buddhist literature, art theory and the photography book as a genre. You may ask why is this important to me? Many years ago when I was somewhat new to Buddhism, my teacher Shenphen Dawa Rinpoche, who was trying to get to know me better, asked me about my friends and social life. I responded that I didn't have a lot of close friends. Conversations with acquaintances almost always ended up dwelling on one or more of the eight worldly mundane obsessions. He said, "Yeah, that's the

downside." On the upside, being mindful of the eight obsessions has been a reliable attitude compass to help me stay centered on the path. Rinpoche never wanted me to give up photography or artmaking. In fact, he insisted I continue. I think if he were still alive today he would have approved of this project. His father wrote this:

Taking a humble position,
rich with the treasure of contentment
Free from the binds of the eight worldly concerns,
firm and strong hearted in practice,
Receiving the Guru's blessing,
realization becomes equal to space.
May we attain the Kingdom of the All Good.⁴
— *Dudjom Rinpoche*

I look forward to contributing whatever I can to making a case for the therapeutic uses of contemplative photography free of competitive intentions. The world is a noisy place, and most photographs are crowded with incidental details. Similarly, the mind can be a very noisy place crowded with discursive thoughts.⁵ The practice of

Buddhist meditation, particularly calm abiding meditation, is very helpful in quieting the mind. How you go about photographing the world of phenomenon hinges on your ability to be undistracted, present and open. Now and then when I am able to slow down and quiet the mind this is reflected in uncluttered and spacious compositions. However, to be honest, sometimes the impetus to go out and explore with my camera starts with a feeling of restlessness. With practice that feeling can be quickly displaced by slipping into an awareness less concerned with my ego story and more involved with what presents itself in the moment. It's a state of mind, a zone, a flow, an open inquisitiveness, a good place to be. If you have been there you know what I'm talking about. The process of exploring with a mindful sustaining of deep seeing⁶ helps me exhaust that initial feeling of restlessness into satisfaction. In other words, the process can go either way: inner calming to calm seeing; or outer friction exhausting itself into a calm mind. Recently, I cherry-picked from my archive of unpublished contemplative photography some examples of *photos for decompressing*. Unexpectedly, most depict water. My hope is that they offer up a feeling of spaciousness that helps the viewer slow down and take a deep breath. I am well aware that not everyone will experience these photographs in the same way. We each bring a personal relationship to particular subject matter that makes it impossible for the author of the image to predict exactly how the

observer of the image will react. Still, one has to put it out there and see what arises in the hearts and minds of others.

Taking pictures usually makes me happy when things go well and sometimes even when they don't. That alone is enough reason to do photography. This book will investigate what it means to be successful outside normal perceptions and opinions of celebrity culture and the marketplace. I hope my picture seeds will sprout wildflowers that populate a state of mind becoming panoramic in its openness.

Picture Seeds notes

1 In conversation over breakfast at Snug Harbor, Spring 2023.

2 There are a lot of artists in the west who practice Buddhism. For example, Dudjom Rinpoche, one of the greatest teachers of the Twentieth Century had four *phurba* holders all of whom practiced some form of art: the poet John Giorno; the photographer Lynn Davis; the writer and filmmaker Rudi Wurlitzer; and the conceptual artist Les Levine.

3 Buddhism explains that we are the architects of our own reality. Our bodies are born and die, but consciousness is continuous from one life to another. Our actions in this life have consequences in future lives. Who we are today is because of what we did yesterday, and countless lives before. Who we will be tomorrow and in the deep future depends on our actions now. This distinguishes Buddhism from nihilist materialism that understands cause and effect as random, and also from eternalist religions that see our destiny as divinely ordained. Pain and the experience of suffering in the form of blame, ignominy, and loss is a ripening and purifying of karmic actions. With the right attitude one can see this as a good thing because the consequence of one's former actions in this or previous lives is finally over and done with. Of course, it is better to purify the obscurations before they ripen. Fortunately, Buddhism has many practices for this. It has been said that the whole of Buddhist practice is the accumulation of merit coupled with the purification of obscurations that reveal pristine awareness.

4 From *The Heart Nectar of the Saints, A Prayer of Aspiration That Condenses the Essence of the Oral Teachings*.

5 My friend Steve Lehmer used to advise the many young people who looked up to him to just sit down and be quiet, and maybe take your shoes off, get your jeans dirty and lean against a tree for a while. If you do this with the support of a friend or mentor sooner or later whatever was bothering you will settle.

6 I first came across the term *deep seeing* through incorrectly remembering a quote from Cindy Bernard's website wherein she commented on her series of Block Watercolors, circa 2018 – 2019. She writes: I'm interested in being repelled by visual difficulty and yet drawn in and rewarded by "deep looking" — my version of Pauline Oliveros' concept of 'deep listening.'















Gain and Loss

All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely, by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.⁷

— *Susan Sontag*

I read this when I was eighteen years old. It was difficult reading for me at the time, opening me up to many new ideas that I struggled with, but there was no arguing with this quote. Whether photographing in a documentary style, or simply picturing the beautiful patina of the decay of ordinary objects, we are reminded of time's passing, and ultimately of death. For me photography isn't so much evidence of reality as it is evidence of impermanence. I can't return to the scene of where a photo was taken without something having changed in the interim. In Buddhism thinking of impermanence⁸ has a dual function. On the one hand it reminds us that whether or not this life is long or short it is finite, and consequently we are motivated to practice the accumulation of merit and wisdom necessary to transcend suffering.⁹ On a deeper level, we understand that all things are impermanent because they are compounded. Everything is made of

parts, which are in turn made of other parts without beginning or end. As these parts rearrange themselves through the force of interaction with other phenomena, things change. Nothing stays the same. Nothing lasts because there was never a static thing inherently existing from its own side in the first place. This is sometimes translated as emptiness.¹⁰ The fact of impermanence and the emptiness of inherent existence are two sides of the same coin. Resisting change is futile in the sense that change will happen whether or not we resist it. For example, you can't stop a wave rolling and churning to the shore, but you can learn how to ride it, or dive under it, or wipe out skillfully. As a Buddhist practitioner this means that sometimes we need to reorient the focus of our practice from peaceful to wrathful or vice-versa, which is to say, to be flexible in our methods. As a photographer and artist this means that sometimes we need to exchange

our cameras and modify our approach to image-making, roam a different street or landscape and move with the changes as they present themselves. I always used to believe that it was best to work with simple means, and to try and stay satisfied with those means. I still respect that viewpoint, even though I have allowed myself to move on. It's okay to be involved with complexity too, or even better to see the simple within the complex and vice-versa.

I'm thinking about loss today as I grieve my dear friend Steve Lehmer who died two days ago.¹¹ Part of me is still in disbelief. Steve was a major force in my life as an artist and photographer. We met forty years ago at Cal Arts¹² and our friendship grew deeper over time. We shared the rare ability to fully understand each other's perspective in making artwork, and this instilled a mutual respect that continued unbroken. If it weren't for Steve I probably never would have gotten the adjunct position at UCLA and my career as a photography professor would perhaps never have ensued. Mostly, I miss our talks at our two breakfast haunts in Santa Monica, *Snug Harbor* and *The Lazy Daisy*. The company I shared with Steve was unique and precious. I never tired of hearing and re-hearing his slowly unwinding stories that took circuitous paths before they arrived to the point. We were often seen together at gallery exhibitions and openings, and we came to know each other's families as well. In a word, I was *attached* to Steve. Indeed I loved him as a friend dearly, and so parting is

very painful. Better to suffer that pain than not to have known him. The question is what to do with that pain. There is no point to just wallow in it. As a Buddhist I can offer butter lamps and do Vajrasattva practice and acts of charity for him and dedicate the merit on his behalf. As a photographer I can continue to explore, just as Steve would have done. Indeed, yesterday, feeling really raw with the thought of impermanence fixed in my mind, I went to the *Walkstreets of Venice* and wandered the narrow sidewalks where Steve and I last photographed together. I got some good ones. Also, I will be making a kite with Steve's portrait on it. It is part of a series I have been doing over the years called *Memorial Kites*. It's a way for me to honor the dead, and emblematically lift them into the sky. In so doing, I let go of my attachment, even as I continue to hold fast the string of love and kindness that bonded us.

Sometimes insight comes through great loss. Photographs can be poignant reminders of who and what no longer exists. We don't always appreciate what we have till all that is left are pictures and memories. Making a memento mori can be very therapeutic because it is in alignment with how things are. The suffering of loss is understood to be normal. Grief is a necessary suffering that must be transcended and transformed. For me, post-grief is colored with melancholy, expressed more with the black notes than the white. It is a spacious, sonorous and venerable emotion because it does not deny loss or change.

*The Four Seals*¹³ is a Buddhist teaching that helps one identify what teachings are authentic. If a spiritual teaching is not in alignment with these four truths¹⁴, then it either belongs to a different tradition, or it is something made up and new age.

All compounded phenomena are impermanent.

Emotional obscuration is suffering.

Both self and phenomena are empty of inherent existence.

Nirvana is peace beyond conceptual elaboration.

The second seal regarding emotions asks us to look inwardly and investigate whether or not a particular emotion obscures insight into our true nature. We are not our emotions. Rather, they are something that happen to us. Emotions are a manifestation of the mind. Like clouds, they come, stay awhile, and go. From a Buddhist point of view, rather than identify with our negative emotions, we can work with their energy and transform or release them into the clear light of wisdom awareness. Energy is light. We need to be aware of the emotion rather than involved with its purported causes. By letting the various emotions simply be, they lose power over us. Perhaps I'm oversimplifying, but transforming and releasing emotions is pretty much

what Vajrayana Buddhism is all about. Art works with the energy of emotions as well, and the memento mori is a pictorial reminder where art and dharma have common ground. There can perhaps be no more poignant a reminder of loss than an honorific photographic portrait of the departed, whether displayed on an altar, a mantel, a gallery wall, a refrigerator door, or a memorial kite dancing in the wind. What do I hope to gain by taking pictures? Is it money and notoriety? If so, I should think again about the compromises necessary to make that play out. What do I fear losing? How can I engage in the practice free of hope and fear? Just walk, come into the present moment and notice relationships with a keener raw awareness. Let go of the impulse to grasp. Silence the critical mind that doubts the value of pictures to uplift and inspire. Confront the negative mind and problem-solve. Simply set up the camera and tripod and with the first picture dispel the obstacles erected by self-doubt.

One might ask: How one can an artist at this point in time ignore global warming? Shouldn't we all be doing everything we can through our art to bring more awareness of this existential issue? Mingling one's art practice with dharma in view, meditation, and action is part of the solution. The climate emergency is a human created crisis, and requires a human solution. The climate crisis is a corporate greed and disinformation crisis because we have been deceived with lies. Consequently,

it is an ethical crisis. It is a deficit of imagination and surplus of habit crisis. The climate crisis is a deficit of cooperation and surplus of competition crisis. It is an addiction to speed and endless economic and material growth crisis. As a species we have collectively failed to understand the connectedness of everything. At this point in history we really

have no alternative but to regain that lost understanding and plant the seeds of survival. This means learning to live in the spirit of slowness and generosity; prioritizing contentedness, and perceiving the land as sacred and living. A humble approach to photography, mindful of conserving resources, is now needed. The alternative is unthinkable loss.



Gain and Loss notes

7 Susan Sontag, 1973, *On Photography*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

8 In both the *ngöndro* practice and the seven-point mind training the contemplation of impermanence is one of four thoughts that reverse the mind and inspire spiritual practice. The other three thoughts are the preciousness of a human birth, karma, and the suffering of cyclic existence.

9 Buddhist thought accepts a continuity of consciousness that transmigrates endlessly through the six realms of suffering, which are the god, asura, human, animal, hungry ghost, and hell realms. Physical death is not seen as final, but rather as a transition.

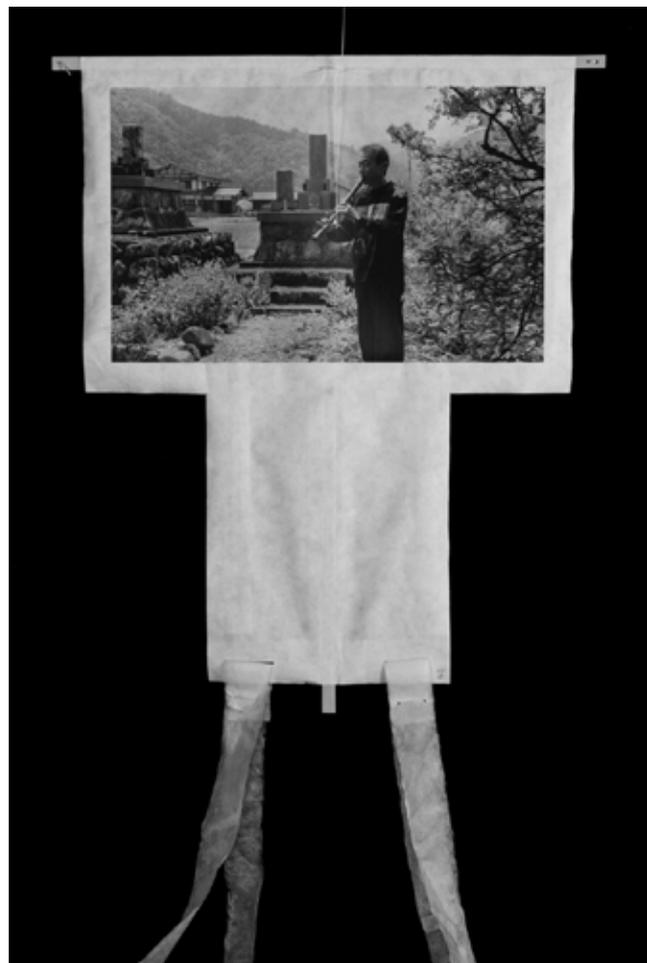
10 It is important to understand that emptiness is not a thing, result, medicine, or a theory. The text *The Lions's Roar* by Jigme Lingpa explains this in detail. There is an excellent translation included in Thinley Norbu's *Sunlight Speech That Dispells the Darkness of Doubt*, Shambhala, 2015.

11 May 27th, 2023

12 California Institute of the Arts

13 The word *seal* in this context means a hallmark of authenticity.

14 The four seals are not the same as the *four truths* taught by Buddha: the truth of suffering; the truth of the origin of suffering; the truth of the cessation of suffering; and the truth of the path.











Pleasure and Pain

My midlife revelation is that pleasure is paramount. Recent studies have shown that pleasure and play are more effective than (almost) anything at healing trauma.¹⁵

— *Michelle Carmela Fiordaliso*

Attachment to pleasure and aversion to pain is probably the hardest duo to overcome. Good photography brings visual pleasure. I try to always make the experience of giving pleasure an offering and see the acceptance of pleasure as the Lama's blessing. The first time I realized this was decades ago when I was offering the mandala in the *ngöndro*¹⁶ practice. The offering of the mandala is a Buddhist training in generosity and letting go of material attachments. In so doing one generates merit and increases positivity. In this sense the mandala practice is a solution to the mundane obsessions of attachment to gain and aversion to loss. In any event, at that time my kitchen doubled as a makeshift darkroom. One day while cooking I started laying down pizza toppings as if offering a mandala. Another day not long after, while printing in the kitchen / darkroom I spontaneously got the idea to offer photograph¹⁷ mandalas in the form of rice, tea, food and flowers in the form

of circles with five heaps, as in the *ngöndro*. I was for the first time consciously giving pictures rather than taking or capturing them.

The language of photography does not easily support dharma understanding. If you “take” pictures mindfully you're not really taking as much as participating in the *dependent arising*¹⁸ of an offering. Even that explanation makes it sound more complicated than the simple gesture of giving. The giver, giving, and gift are conceptually interdependent. They do not exist in isolation. Go for a walk. If all the conditions are right, especially the light, an open state of mind, and a degree of preparedness, then pictures might just present themselves. The job of the mindful photographer is to reveal them free of grasping. If there is grasping, then there is taking. Moreover, mindful photography must remain rooted in an ethical code of conduct of body, speech, and

mind. The word “mindfulness” was originally a Buddhist term that referred to many different levels of awareness practice. Fundamentally, mindfulness is a way of remembering the task at hand, in tandem with the purification of negativity and the collection of virtuous merit. *Hunting* and *fishing* for pictures are inappropriate metaphors because they involve killing. However, as the word mindfulness has become secularized it has come to mean an immersion in the present moment engaged with pretty much any kind of activity.

In what sense does the meditator’s awareness of nowness differ from the photographer’s? There are different levels of mindfulness and levels of practice. Simply stated, on a relative level the four close applications of mindfulness involve being aware of one’s body, feelings, thoughts, and phenomena.¹⁹ On the highest level, mindfulness of naked awareness is to dwell in the nature of mind without modification and free of intention; undistracted by grasping at phenomena in any of the three times: past, present, and future. One rests in clear awareness. This is the same as the Buddha’s awakened mind, an ineffable non-dual awareness which sets it apart from the nowness of the continuous present tense, which like all language is dualistic. The Photographer responds to outer appearances. A meditator does not respond to outer or inner appearances. In other words, the artist follows the thought, whereas the meditator lets it go.

Unlike words, photographs show things rather than tell us things. The act of taking pictures occurs in the ongoing present moment wherein subject, action and object continue to be perceived as separate. This ongoing moment is pinned down in a photograph; flattened to a two-dimensional picture plane. It can simultaneously show us what is about to be, what was, what no longer is, what continues to be, embodying a strangely floating grammar. My point is that I’m not making an argument for any kind of equivalence between the non-dual pristine awareness of nowness referred to in the Buddhist teachings, and the mundane nowness you need to occupy to see and take pictures. They operate on different levels. Similarly, it is a common mistake to think that mindful insight meditation and primordial awareness are the same thing. Yet we do need to avoid multi-tasking and stay attentive and focused while out exploring with a camera. Without coming into a place of deep seeing, not much will come of it.

Making art requires a fair amount of courage because you don’t know how it’s going to end up until you try. Exploring with your camera with a minimum agenda is a mild way of confronting your fear. Many photographers will spend their whole lives trying to control what’s in front of the camera. As Steve used to say every now and then, these types of photographer artists are most at home in the studio. However, to be fair, even the studio offers opportunities for exploration.

I have found that one of the biggest obstacles to my photographic practice is the desire to be creative. Ideally, the practice of making art is not the virtuosity of control, but rather as Rick Rubin put it “a way of being.”²⁰ Creativity is an expression of primordial emptiness. It’s a kind of radiating and absorbing, an offering and a blessing combined. However, when there is grasping involved and a strong desire to make something just for the sake of proving yourself, the results, if there are any, are likely to be underwhelming.

The classic painting of the wheel of *samsaric* existence is illustrated with six realms, three lower and three higher. The highest realm is the prideful God realm. It is populated by beings who live vast lifespans and bask in a multitude of sensual pleasures unimaginable for us mere humans. However, life in the God realm is impermanent. The Gods have clairvoyance and can see that when their merit is exhausted and their time is up they will fall directly to the lowest hell realm. One day they hear the drumbeat, their flowers wilt, they begin to stink, and are completely abandoned by the nymphs and studs that previously adored them. They slowly languish and perish with great anxiety. Whether we take this to be the true description of a place or an allegory analogous of disgraced Hollywood executives and cancelled role models, the point is that we mere mortals would be smart to try and find a way off the wheel of *samsara*. Why

not begin by gradually adopting an attitude free of the eight worldly mundane obsessions in all that you do, including making art?

There are some poisons, like Belladonna, also known as *deadly nightshade*, that have medicinal purposes when used in modest quantities in combination with other ingredients. Belladonna also means “beautiful woman” because long ago it was used to dilate pupils. It is a homeopathic remedy for many ailments. Just so, pleasure heals, yet it is unsustainable. Pain releases karma, yet excess pain is intolerable. In Vajrayana Buddhism we work with the poisons so that they can be transmuted into wisdom. In photography, visual pleasure engages the viewer rather than indulging in the myth of impartial and objective photographic truth.²¹ In other words, poisons can be medicines, and pictures can be deceiving. As Walker Evans put it “Very often I’m doing one thing when I’m thought to be doing another.”

We live in a time when the pursuit of wretched excess is packaged, sold to us and normalized. The Buddhist teaching on the suffering of change tells us otherwise. Dharma²² is often called “the middle path” because it avoids the extremes of both excess and austerity. We hope for more and fear less, yet sometimes excess brings us more suffering rather than less. We fear not getting what we want and not losing what we have, but at the end of this life we will be disappointed. Yes,

we need pleasure to counter trauma, but tip the scales too much and pleasure turns to pain. Eat too much and one's health suffers. It's a question of finding the right balance, not renouncing pleasure, but rather to be grateful for the pleasure that comes your way without making the pursuit of self-indulgence your life's goal.

Beauty unbuckles pain's armoring.²³

— *Jane Hirschfield*

I don't know why, but I find Jane Hirschfield's arrangement of words in this sentence beautiful. Similarly, some photographs are more than just information. They sing to us rather than just speak blandly. Beauty is more of a release or a sensibility than it is a thing. There was a time not so long ago when the "b word" was forbidden in art school. My generation was condemned to celebrate the virtues of ugliness.²⁴ Beginning in the mid-seventies, by the nineties the modernist virtues of beauty, truth, and excellence had been academically replaced by post-modernist theories focusing on race, gender, and class. Still, for me, even though I understood the theoretical arguments, I was never convinced that setting these purposes in opposi-

tion was beneficial or accurate. In art school I felt like I had one foot on the dock and another in a boat that was departing, and that I was going to have to think fast and join one side or the other, or get wet. I got wet, and I've been wet ever since. Regardless, over the years for me personally it has been difficult to have a serious relationship with artmaking without addressing the healing properties of beauty. I have found that to be in harmony and to make a picture that is harmonious are not two separate things. As my friend John Roevekamp clarified: "To make a harmonious picture one must be present in harmony. What we create cannot be separated from what we are."

As I make a quick inventory of beauty, my list includes the beauty of things, ideas, relationships, and moments of mindful presence; all beautiful in proportion to their ephemerality. There is also the transitory beauty of sensory experience, of forgiveness, of letting go. When photography functions as more than mere information, it transfers visual pleasure through the beauty of light and form, holding moments of time and space. For the poet T.S. Eliot it was "... the moment in the rose-garden, the moment in the arbour where the rain beat, the moment in the draughty church at smokefall."²⁵ For me there were other moments. Sometimes I had a camera, but most times I didn't. Each of us has a different collection of such intimate private moments, the memory of which carries the light forward.

Strange this acquired need to be original and leave a mark
(my middle name) -
So much of a life dedicated to making things
That hardly anyone noticed

But it was being seen by a handful of friends,
and the love and kindness that mattered -
The children's smiles,
And the uncultured moments

The moment at Laugeral - Rinpoche garbed in orange
Surrounded by smoke in the light beams,
singing Muni mantras on his throne

The night long moment in Lyme fever at Karma House - Being Pema

The ascending falcons, and the dolphin playing in the waves

All gone, yet somehow alive, like this haiku I wrote long ago
The mind never stops -
Pastel faded prayer flags
Playing in the wind²⁶

As a photographer I have to consider why is it that one photograph works better than another, the craftsmanship and subject matter being equal. I can't measure beauty, but only intuit it. I have to check why I hesitate towards one image and gravitate towards another, and sometimes it's impossible to say why. Words are the wrong currency for this exchange. Indeed, I need to quiet the mind to have any hope of really seeing the pictures. As mentioned earlier, the Buddhist practice of calm abiding is helpful training for this. Many things come together to make a picture just right, and sometimes it takes time and space to sort it out.²⁷ There are plenty of photography cookbooks, but they are of limited use. They only teach technique and rules. They teach what others have done. That will not suffice for the explorer. Maps, however, can be useful if they show us territory already covered by others so that we don't get lost. It's important to look at photography monographs and exhibitions and in so doing come to feel part of a lineage or sensibility. One also needs mentors who encourage us to think for ourselves. As John Densmore put it "When the heart is open, the muses will be attracted and show up."²⁸ Fire only comes from fire. One artist passes the fire on to another.

Pleasure and Pain notes

15 *Instagram* post, June 1, 2023

16 The ngöndro is usually translated as “the preliminary practices” of Vajrayana Buddhism, however, a more accurate translation, as my root Lama Shenphen Dawa Rinpoche explained, is “to go ahead” towards realization.

17 The photogram is a kind of non-lens-based photography that works directly with objects on paper.

18 This is sometimes translated as “dependent or interdependent origination,” which means that nothing comes into being independent of numerous causes and conditions. Things do not originate from an almighty creator god, an autonomous self, or randomly through time. One thing arises in dependence on another in a complex chain or matrix of causal events.

19 In Buddhism, *phenomena* means outer and inner appearances.

20 Rick Rubin, 2023, *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, New York, Penguin Press.

21 Whenever we say a picture could have been more beautiful or truer, we are tacitly acknowledging that the photographer could have taken steps to make a more beautiful or truer picture. In other words, the medium is not inherently documentary. This idea was convincingly proved to my satisfaction by Joel Snyder in several of his essays on photography in the 1980’s.

22 There are ten meanings to the word dharma. In this context the word means the teachings and practices found in the various Buddhist traditions.

23 Jane Hirschfield, 2015, *Ten Windows: How Great Poems Transform the World*, from the essay *Poetry, Transformation and the Column of Tears*, p. 259, New York, Alfred A. Knopf.

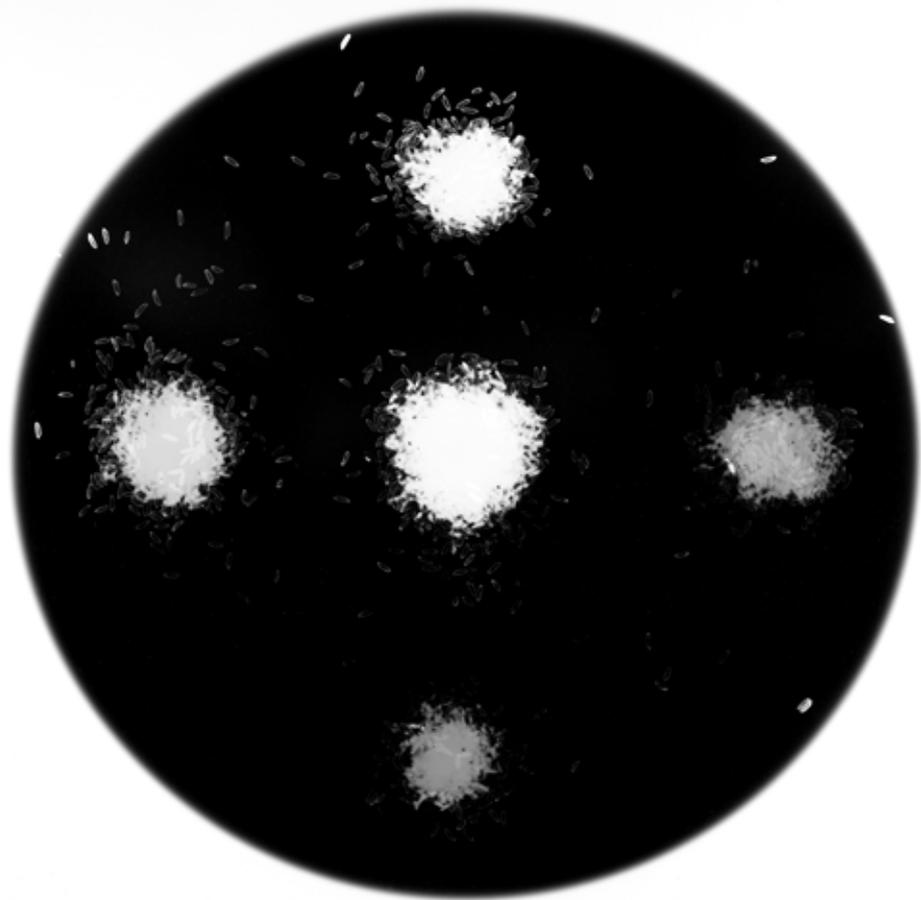
24 When I was teaching at UCLA in the late 1990’s Mary Kelly organized a symposium called “On The Ugly.”

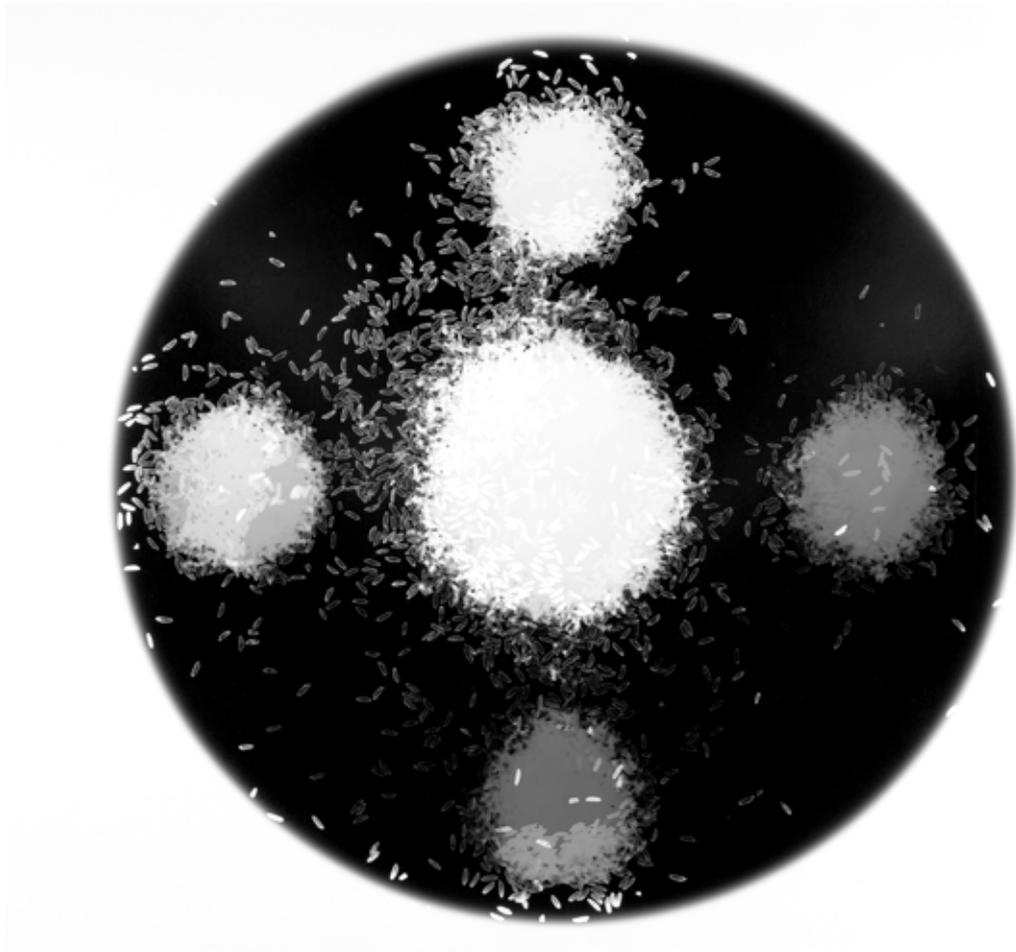
25 *Burnt Norton* from *Four Quartets*, T.S. Eliot.

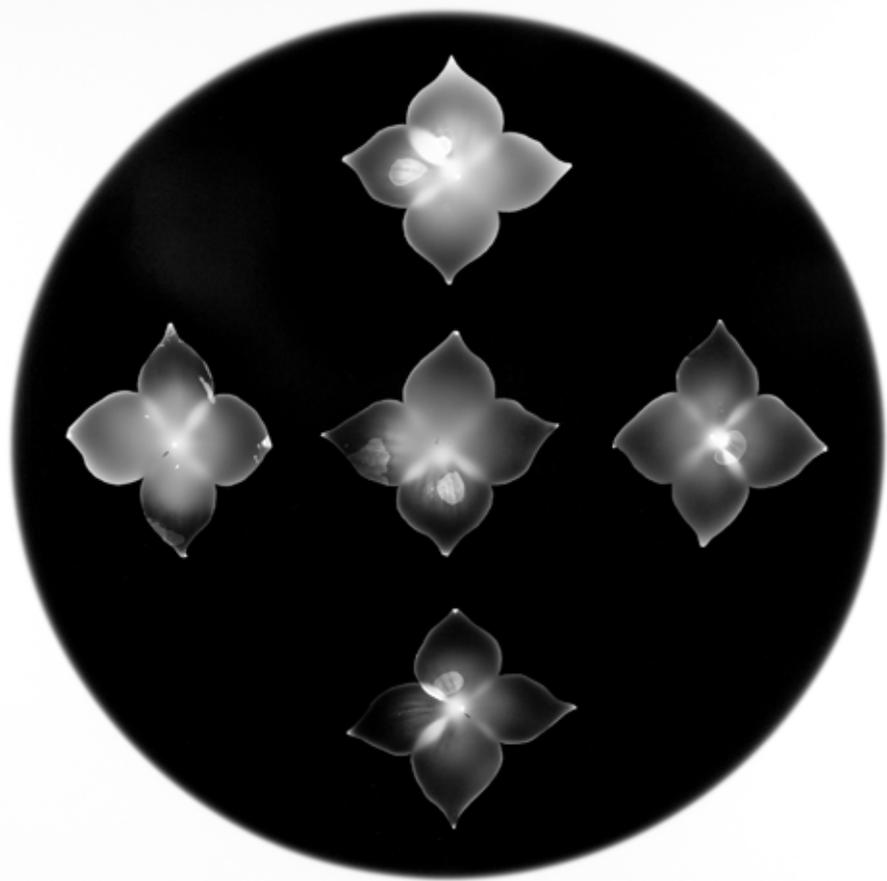
26 Excerpt from a poem I wrote called *Eulogy*.

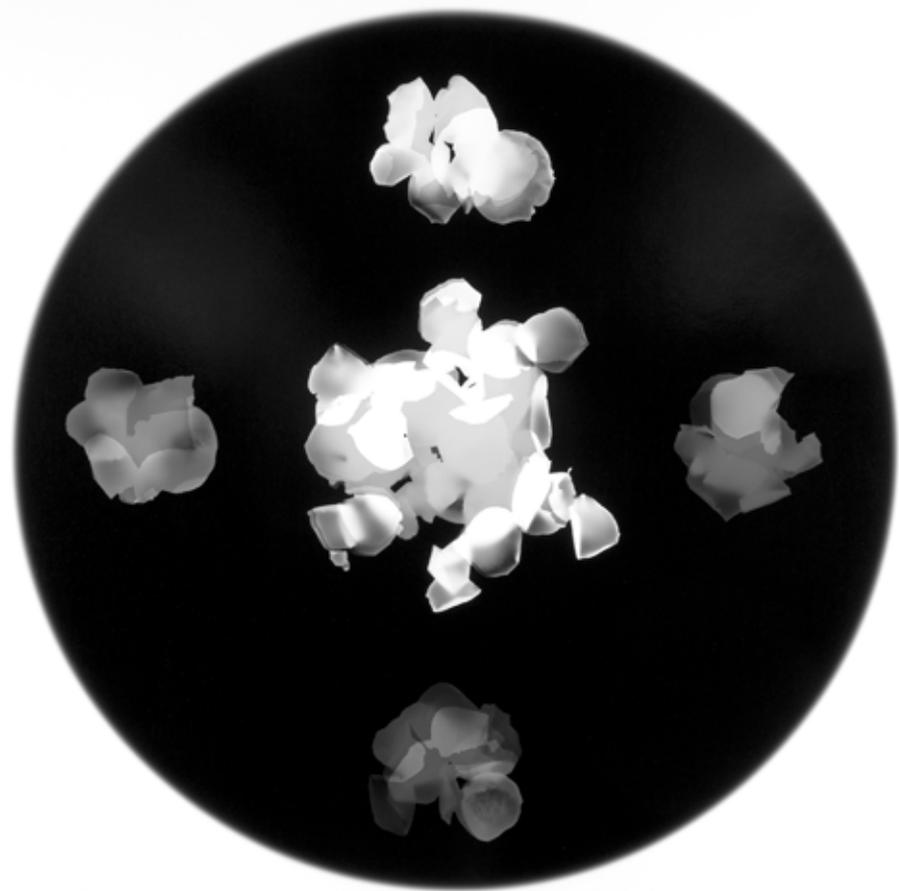
27 Putting images away in a box for a week, a month, or longer will help an artist lose attachment to them and see them more clearly when they open the box. Similarly, put them on the wall in a studio space and live with them for a few days and they will surely speak to you.

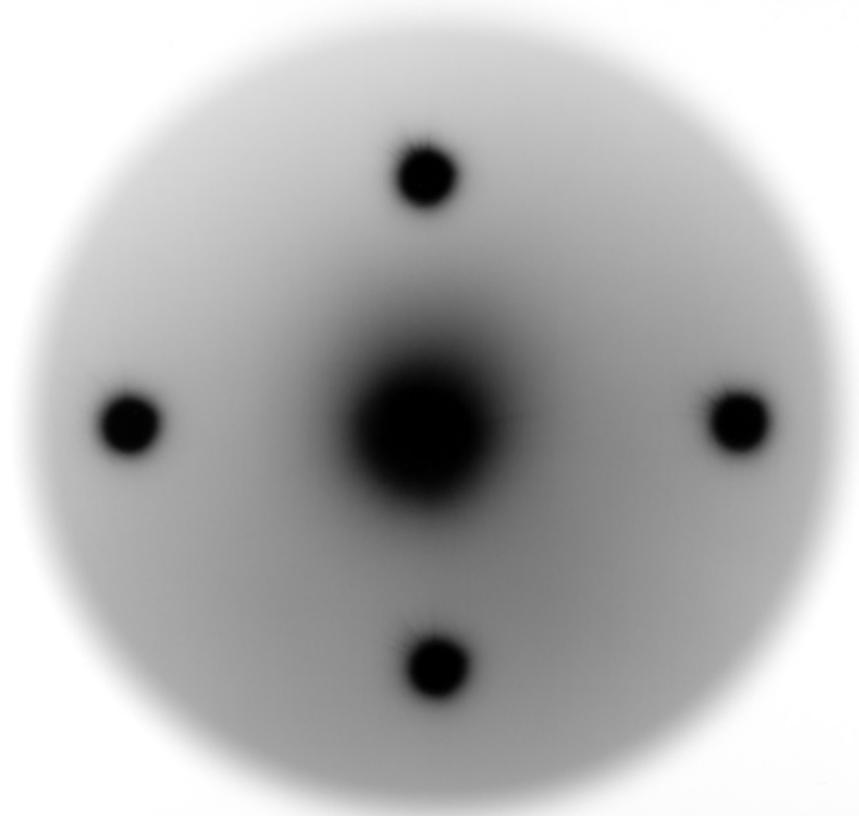
28 John Densmore, *The Seekers*, p. xxii from the Introduction, Hachette Books, 2021.











Fame and Ignominy

When people look at my pictures I want them to feel the way they do when they read a line of a poem twice.

— *Robert Frank*

I doubt Robert Frank ever felt comfortable in the limited limelight he eventually got way too late in his life. He definitely wasn't in it for the money either. He was a hold out for hope against all odds. In this way he is similar to another great photographer, Robert Adams. The eight worldly mundane obsessions distilled to their essence are about hope and fear, or put another way attachment and aversion. They are a package deal. *Ultimately*, we have to give them both up to be free of the idea that better external circumstances are going to solve all our problems. However, from the point of view of the *relative* truth, to dispatch doubt and have some hope is to be in the right kind of trouble. In Buddhism the union of the relative and absolute truths is called the *two truths*. Even though we can intellectually accept that there is no inherent existence to the self and phenomena, we have to respect the relative truth and understand that until that realization

is a daily lived experience we would do well to adopt a code of ethics that pays attention to positive conduct. This includes a hopeful outlook even in the face of despair.

When I was in high school I was the photo editor of the newspaper and yearbook, and I won many awards for my photography. By the time I graduated I had a big photo ego. However, when I got to college I was the new kid on the block and had to prove myself all over again. This happened again in grad school, and again afterwards. Even today with over fifty years of experience my work does not garner much attention. Sometimes I blame it on the system, which is to say the unabashedly dysfunctional art world built around fame for an extremely small number of artists, and ignominy for all the rest of us. However, I don't wish to indulge in sour grapes. Rather I aspire

to rejoice in the good merit other artists have had in showing and selling their work. This isn't always easy for me because in my professional opinion much of the artwork that garners attention doesn't seem to be very good. It's hard to fathom sometimes, but it isn't helpful or progressive in any way to feel rejected.

Buddhism is not a utopian religion. Perhaps we can each individually try to make art something more than the plaything of the absurdly rich, but we can't hope to erase the slate clean and start off with a new tabula rasa for an art world or anything else. Better to cover our feet with leather than cover the whole thorny earth.²⁹ The art world is what it is. It's the system we have, and so we can work within it and try to improve it, or around it, but we still need to do the work. The difference for a Mahayana Buddhist who has taken the Bodhisattva vow is that we aspire to do the work for the benefit of others. We shouldn't feel ashamed of participating in a far less than perfect system so long as we remain true to our vision. As Frank Gohlke put it: "You come to be who you are, and who you are tells you what to do."³⁰ This takes time. I remember many years ago I showed my Polaroid work to Chris Johnson who commented "They are very quiet." I had never thought about the work in those terms before. Of course, he was right. I had come over the years to a style which was "quiet,"

without ever even trying. It was just a reflection of who I was then and still now.

Last night I rewatched the film *Paterson* by Jim Jarmusch and was once again really impressed and inspired. It's about a bus driver named Paterson who lives in Paterson, New Jersey. It's really not possible to relate the story without major spoilers, but suffice it to say that he represents the unknown and humble poet who keeps real poetry alive and pure. Poetry like his³¹ continues to be important to me. Sometimes I think photography actually has more in common with descriptive poetry than visual art. William Carlos Williams, for example, seems to be more in line with the photography of Walker Evans than any of his contemporaries, except perhaps the painter Edward Hopper. During the nineties I coined the word *photopoetics* to refer to my photographic art practice. Contemplative fine art photography was very much out of fashion at the time, so I figured I didn't have much to lose. In any event, I dropped the word after a couple years trying and failing to promote the idea.³² At the end of the day it is important to try and find like-minded artists. It's more than a little bit nice to get respect from the artists you respect. That's much more important than fame. It's not about how many likes you get on *Instagram*, but knowing you have been understood by at least a few individuals.

Fame and Ignominy notes

- 29 An analogy used by Shantideva and Patrul Rinpoche and others regarding mindful awareness.
- 30 Frank Gohlke, *Thoughts on Landscape*, 2009, Tucson, Arizona, Hol Art Books.
- 31 The poems used in the movie were written by Ron Padgett.
- 32 Many years later I was happy and surprised to see a book at the Hammer museum bookstore that had a very different interpretation than mine in merging the words photo and poetic. (*Photo-Poetic: An Anthology*, edited by Jeniffer Blessing and Susan Thompson, 2015, A catalog for a show at the Guggenheim museum.)













Praise and Blame

Your photography is very poetic, but your poetry isn't.

— *John Baldessari*

That's what John said about my image/text work back in 1982. His words really stung and stuck with me. Rather than giving up writing I worked harder on it. Years later I realized that John didn't really like expressive poetry. He also didn't like photography that showed off technical skill. I'm grateful to John for being honest with me.

Personally, I find constructive criticism helpful, although rather rare. People you know don't always speak their mind for fear of hurting your feelings. Friends and family think they are giving you a compliment when they say your photographs look like a painting, as if that were inherently better. Professional critics seem to sometimes miss the point altogether. At the end of the day you are the foremost expert of your artwork. Still, it's good to seek clarity about how your artwork comes

across to other people, how it works on them, what it makes them think and feel. It's also important to consider how it fits into an ongoing impersonal art discourse, which is to say, a larger conversation in the art world. This is why critique is so important if the facilitator knows how to make it a safe and respectful space to speak openly. Nevertheless, it has sometimes been a challenge being both a professor and a Buddhist because I have had to give grades.³³ That's one thing I won't miss when I retire. Personally, I have found that critique tells us as much about the person giving the critique as the artist receiving it.

Dwell not on the faults and shortcomings of others;
instead, seek clarity about your own.³⁴

— *Buddha*

Looking at your own faults means to be self-effacing without descending into self-deprecation.³⁵ Being overly concerned about praise from others shouldn't be confused with simply wishing to feel loved and valued as a person. Giving positive support to others is an expression of compassion. Life has so very many rejections. It's good to keep trying, but at some point it becomes clear that the other party involved in a relationship, whether a person or a gallery, is just not interested. Then it's time to look for alternatives. Actually, getting a rejection letter from a gallery is rare. Usually, the response from galleries is no response at all. Most galleries are not like normal businesses that observe common courtesies. In any event, try not to take rejection personally. When I say rejection is unhealthy I mean that in the sense that there is a big difference between being humble and being humiliated. To be humble comes from a sense of inner satisfaction, without the need to show off and act superior. Being humiliated comes from the outside and has no benefit for anyone. The good news is, as Eleanor Roosevelt put it: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." It's a mental event that requires your participation. The next time someone attempts to humiliate you, reflect on the fact that everyone suffers, including the bully who is so insecure that they have nothing better to do than look down on others or see them as a threat. With that thought of empathy as a basis you may eventually come to the point of even seeing everyone with compassion.

One of the biggest myths we have to overcome is the idea of scarcity. We use the idea that there's not enough to go around for everybody to justify our excesses. This includes the idea that your success necessarily entails my failure. Indeed, the opposite is true. When the overlooked succeed, everyone benefits. This doesn't mean we have to hand out trophies to everyone disregarding merit and excellence, but it does question the idea of living in a meritocracy. When I first started teaching I always took it as a given that one should treat everyone equally. The alternative is equity, which means that if you want people of different heights to be able to look over the fence, you need different size step stools so that everyone ends up at the same height.³⁶ That is fair, even if it's not equal. To be honest, I am of two minds about the equality vs. equity debate. Either way seems to involve the suffering of someone feeling and being left out. Best is to treat each person you meet as a unique and special individual. That's not always easy, but it's something to aspire to. In Buddhism, merit refers to a person's capacity to do good.

Over time I have come a little closer to understanding the radical acceptance of otherness and the idea of "visual sovereignty."³⁷ It is a bad idea to impose your aesthetic on someone from a marginalized culture. Rather, one needs to be welcomed in. There are probably some good exceptions to this rule, like The Talking Heads *Remain In*

Light, but it's a good starting point. The problem arises when we validate the music and art of other cultures through the lens of Eurocentric culture. Then the likelihood of cultural colonialism takes hold. However, it's hard to know where to draw the line because there is no inherently existent line. Rather, we inhabit a multiverse of differing perspectives and states of mind.

The root of the problem as I see it is *pride*. We need to learn ways to transform the poison of haughty arrogance into the wisdom of equality. There are specific Buddhist practices for this. In the *ngöndro* we do prostrations to the three jewels³⁸ to reduce the obscuration of pride by literally getting down to earth and showing respect to something greater than ourselves. As such, doing prostrations is a physical expression of devotion. We surrender our ego mind and pay homage to the inner teacher, our innate pristine awareness.

Also, on the *bodhisattva* path³⁹ you learn how to do *the noble exchange of self for others* by imagining putting yourself in the other guy's shoes, thereby learning how others might perceive you. There is always going to be someone who has more discipline and merit as a yogi or meditator; someone who works harder or has more talent as a photographer or artist. That is no reason to feel envious or look down on others. Rather than being resentful of others who are more successful, imagine

exchanging places with them. Imagine the envy they feel towards you and how much suffering that creates for them. Next, meditate on exchanging places with someone of equal stature to yourself, and how through competitiveness they wish you harm. Think about how much unnecessary suffering that rivalry creates. Thirdly, contemplate exchanging places with someone in a lower position than yourself. Think about how they dismiss you, and how much unnecessary resentment this creates. Through these contemplations your pride is reduced.

On a higher level of practice, from a yogic point of view, we work with the five chakras, or energy centers in our subtle body, and the three male, female, and gender neutral energy nerve pathways. For example, the poison pride is associated with the earth element and the gut, the “great manifestation” chakra a few fingers below the naval. Through work on that particular chakra pride can be transformed into the wisdom of equality.⁴⁰ The poet Tony Hoagland has written about how poets of differing natures write from different power centers at different altitudes in their body.⁴¹ I wonder if this is also true of photographers as well. Do you take pictures from the head, throat, heart, gut, or sexual organs?

On another, even higher level of practice wherein we work directly with the nature of the mind, we need to have a clear and correct view. Some-

times we mistakenly think that emptiness is an antidote for pride and the other afflictive emotions. By seeing emptiness as a remedy rather than the essence of your own clear awareness, you wrongly think that it is something separate that needs to be applied like a medicine. Thoughts and defilements such as pride are primordially empty.⁴² If you are able to see the dreamlike nature of pride when it arises and rest in that awareness without grasping, pride dissolves on its own and you come into the wisdom nature of that energy, which is equality. This isn't just an intellectual exercise. It has been said that the degree of purification of one's chakras and channels determines the appropriate level and approach of practice that one should be doing. Consequently, the best meditation practice to do isn't always the so-called highest. I think this is also true of art-making. One shouldn't think that photographing from the head and doing artwork grounded in theory is somehow intrinsically better than photographing from other altitudes. Try to give pictures from the heart, not in a sentimental way, but rather to let it all go. All visualizations eventually dissolve in the heart. That is how to let go. You won't be left with nothing.

Part of the job of being an artist and a teacher is helping disadvantaged people take command of transforming their own lives and communities. We should at best be helpful, and at the least not get in the way, or try to appropriate the efforts of folks that have had a

very different upbringing, different experiences, and different opportunities. Correcting the wrongs of the past is not reverse discrimination, but rather giving otherness space to blossom. In so doing culture and diversity is enriched and everyone wins. For me this has meant endeavoring to create an understanding for Buddhist ideas to thrive in a contemporary context inseparable from the arts, including photography. I don't mean to imply that we shouldn't support, admire and quote traditional Buddhist iconography from the many cultures Buddhism has spread over its long history, but rather that we should continue to expand it. Photography is just one possibility. There is no problem whatsoever in photographing Buddhist subject matter, such as prayer flags, stupas, ritual dances, and portraits of Lamas and practitioners.⁴³ Indeed, it is very meritorious. The work of my good friend Don Farber, with whom I once shared a studio, is especially salutary. He stands out among the few photographers who have committed to focusing on generating portraits of great teachers and documenting Buddhist life and culture over decades and across continents.

It is reasonable to assume that most people will think of Buddhist photography as work that includes Buddhist subject matter. I'm simply saying it's not the only way to be a Buddhist photographer. Coming into the space of an awareness of nowness, and then mindfully walking with one's camera, open to any subject, tuning into

the unity of light and phenomena, is another approach. It's not even important if anyone identifies that work as Buddhist. To simply explore with one's camera without a big agenda; to be out of one's depth, following the scent of possible pictures, not sure where it will lead takes commitment and courage. In so doing, the practice of photography bridges perception and the imagination. The photographer imagines a picture into form through their craft and vision.

Before I met Steve Lehmer he was living in Montana where he came to learn the ways of the Crow Native American Tribe. I remember a sad story that Steve told me about a presentation he made about Native American photography at a photography teacher's conference. He was wrongly accused of cultural appropriation by some in the audience. A few individuals were not ready, willing, or able to accept a white man as the spokesman for Crow Indian values, even though he had been intimately accepted into their clan.⁴⁴ Through his association with the tribe elders Steve "learned how to listen," and by extension learned how to slow down and come into the ability of seeing deeply as a photographer. He learned how to not just take pictures of a landscape as a tourist might, but to participate with place and space; to let go of the need to control, and learn to work with what presents itself and dance with it.

Similarly, I have learned a little bit about Tibetan Buddhism, having studied and practiced in a dharma community for over thirty-five years. Realizing that you think like a Buddhist and then pursuing a path that refines this way of thinking is very different from appropriating the exoticism of another culture. I find this also to be true as a musician. I play the Japanese shakuhachi, a bamboo flute from the Zen Buddhist tradition. When I play traditional pieces from the *honkyoku*⁴⁵ repertoire I try to do so according to tradition, acoustically and without innovation or modification. This keeps the tradition alive. On an inner level the *honkyoku* are sound prayers that help the player loosen their grasping to self if played properly. However, from time to time I need to cut loose without prescribed form, and blow some very non-Japanese sounding songs that I treat with echo and reverb. I enjoy the extended flute very much. Some hard-liners would probably be offended by my use of the instrument, but I need to do it anyway. When a song or a poem or a picture comes to you, and you look the other way and ignore it, a small crime has been committed. To cut off the gifts of the muses is a serious offense and tragedy, for one has refused to bring more beauty and insight into a world that really needs it. As my dharma sister Natalie Rose LeBrecht put it: "I think with the creative process, finding what you love, staying in the flow, and leaving the ordinary ego mind behind is a great way to achieve timeless authenticity with one's work."

She also said:

I'm driven to create authentic music from my heart and soul and beyond, and hope it will help further connect listeners to their own inner splendor. It's actually quite painful to put myself out there and share this music that means so much to me and to speak honestly about it. However, it would be more painful to not share it because I am truly following my heart here, and my heart yearns to sing its truth, to deeply connect to and nourish others.⁴⁶

— *Natalie Rose LeBrecht*

Like many Buddhists and artists I have a solitary nature. This makes self-promotion of my artwork a painful process. Still, we must learn to be in the world and talk loudly when the call arrives. Like others who share my temperament I am grateful when people take the time to look at what I have put out there to share. I am not alone in these feelings.

It's important to remember that making art and doing photography are choice duties. We aren't really compelled to do them by someone else. Making marks is an impulse that comes from the inside that starts when you are an infant. We just need to get better at it without getting fettered by it.

To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away.

No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.⁴⁷

— *Dogen*

Praise and Blame notes

33 By the time this reaches publication I will have retired, hence the past perfect tense.

34 Verse 50 from the chapter *Flowers, The Dhammapada*.

35 Self-deprecation is a form of self-cherishing.

36 This analogy was used by my daughter Jana.

37 I first heard the idea of “visual sovereignty” expressed by the Navaho photographer Raphael Begay. I do not wish to appropriate the idea, so I want to be sure to give him credit. It is not my idea.

38 The Buddha, dharma, and sangha

39 The *Bodhicharavatara* by Shantideva, one of the most important texts in Mahayana literature explains this in detail.

40 The tsa/lung/thigle teachings are generally kept secret for the safety of the practitioner who must receive these directly from a master. Therefore, I will not explain in detail.

41 Tony Hoagland, *real sofistikashun: Eassays on Poetry and Craft*, from the essay *Altitudes, a homemade Taxonomy: Image, Diction, and Rhetoric*, 2006, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Graywolf Press.

42 This is the view of Ati yoga.

43 I have done so myself in two of my books: *That Which Holds* and *The Benevolent Moon*.

44 At Steve’s memorial in Montana, the artist Kevin Red Star told a lot of stories about Steve, including how they had been through a ritual wherein they became Crow brothers.

45 *Honkyoku* designates the original, mostly solo meditational pieces played by komoso monks, in contrast to *Gaikyoku* ensemble pieces and *Minyo* folk songs for musical entertainment.

46 See 15questions.net.

47 Eihei Dogen (1200 – 1253) translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi, 1995, *Actualizing the Fundamental Point, Moon In A Dewdrop*, San Francisco, North Point Press.





















Becoming Panoramic

No-one, no one is here
No-one, no one is here
We stand in the Atlantic
We become panoramic ...
A diamond night, a diamond sea
and a diamond sky⁴⁸ ...
— *Kate Bush*

With the help of my mother I opened a savings and loan account in Manhattan Beach when I was six years old, and I was given a free plastic camera.⁴⁹ It shot square pictures. I have owned a lot of cameras since then. Over the years I grew more and more comfortable with medium format and the monochrome square. I didn't need to decide between portrait and landscape format unless I worked with my 35mm or 4x5 cameras. Even though I had a lot of cameras, it seemed that life was simpler. Now we live in a time when we can use software to stitch numerous digital files together into a variety of aspect ratios. Both ways of working are honorable. Working with film and darkroom is more

straightforward, but much slower and more challenging to master. Digital photography offers more possibilities, but requires many more decisions, and becomes obsolete very quickly, especially now as we are confronted with AI technology. As a teacher I haven't really had a choice not to move with the changes, even as I have advocated for learning the old ways. In my own art practice I've moved out of my comfort zone and learned how to make panoramas digitally with simple means. However, I still love the square. At the end of the day, the shape of the picture or process that made the picture isn't nearly as important as what inspired the picture. It's important to avoid the eight obsessions, keep an open,

more panoramic mind and not deceive oneself. Be clear about why you want to generate photographs. This is where mindfulness comes in, which is to say to remember to check your intention. From a Buddhist point of view this is *bodhicitta*, the bodhisattvas enlightened intention to benefit others. On a more mundane level we need to ask why do we want to do photography? Is it to picture the vanishing, to picture fascination, to collect what would otherwise be impossible to gather? What do you want to give? Do you want your pictures to be emblematically quiet or loud; like candles or spotlights? What do you really feel passionate about? What makes photography meaningful for you and how does that benefit others? Don't think about any of these questions while you are taking pictures, but rather before and after. While you are out with your camera, quiet the mind and be present. Endeavor to cut discursive thinking so as to see more clearly. Enter the zone of enlarged perception with grace and gratitude for the Lama's wisdom blessings.⁵⁰

Vajrayana Buddhism seeks to see the world with pure perception, which is wonderous. I have an assignment in my introductory photography class called "Picturing Fascination." I don't tell the students what they should find fascinating, but I do introduce the idea to them that it's okay to be fascinated without knowing ahead of time exactly why. It seems to me that picturing fascination through exploration gets close to the root of desire without overtly indulging in it. It's a way of working

with desire without identifying with it. Similarly, the kind of photography that "pictures the unnoticed,"⁵¹ as James Welling put it, is very helpful for expanding the reach and range of one's awareness. Simply said, the photographer is saying enthusiastically "Look what I saw! How cool is that?" This is a kind of sharing that seems positive and free of grasping. It is a celebration of light and the ordinary sublime, as well as a way of understanding how history has shaped appearances.⁵²

Don't Make Anything Up.

— *Gyatrul Rinpoche*

This quote might very well be the hardest one for most artists to accept. Taken out of context it could mistakenly be understood to encourage conformity, but that's not what he meant. Many years ago Gyaltrul Rinpoche was giving dharma teachings in Los Angeles. As a teacher he was sometimes dead seriousness, yet just as often a real comedian, even as he never wavered from the true meaning of the Buddha. After the teachings he learned that I had been appointed a *Lopon*⁵³ and he suddenly got quiet and serious. He turned to me and said "Don't make anything up." It was clear to me that he meant as a teacher it was my responsibility to represent the Buddha's teachings accurately. If I didn't

know the answer to a question it would be best to admit it and not make anything up. There is no need to improve on or modernize the Buddha's teachings. They have been working just fine for many centuries. Rinpoche didn't say that explicitly, but that's how I understood it. I took his advice to heart.

As an artist I try to find ways to make new things and try new approaches to artmaking, so as not to get stuck in my habits. It's a way to keep growing and be more than a good craftsperson. The composer and artist John Cage, who I admire very much, once commented in an interview that "I always try to find something new... and if you want to say that always wanting something new is the same thing all the time, then again you are not using the language properly."⁵⁴ That was a very important teaching for me when I was in my early twenties. I think he was right. If our words cannot mean what we say, then there is no point in speaking or writing. So, to be clear, as a Buddhist teacher I don't wish to make anything up. That doesn't mean I have to be boring or that I can't try a new idiom or crack a few jokes, but it does require of me a faithfulness to the tradition. However, as an artist I operate at the hub of the intersection of many pictorial lineages that make what I have to offer distinct and unique. I am a bit old fashioned in that I still see value in making fine art photographs. Yet let me be clear, images are illusory phenomena. Photographs are a collection of grains or pixels

that form a visual gestalt that we mistakenly grasp as distinct entities. Photographs are part representation and part invention, but we usually view them wholly one way or the other. A photographer can't help but to make something up. The trick is to be aware of it and honest about it. Better yet, to be playful with it so as to give others something fascinating to imagine and smile or ponder about beyond mere distraction. That's why I'm okay with the label "contemplative photography."

If the Buddha could have given us all enlightenment he would have done so. Since that wasn't possible he has given us teachings and his inheritors carry on his wisdom blessings. Likewise, apprenticing for a master artist in no way guarantees that you will someday rise to their level, but it can't hurt to try. We need mentors to help us on the path, as well as like-minded companions. In Buddhism this community is called the *sangha*. Never be too proud to accept help from an expert or friend.⁵⁵

If we want to live life to its fullest potential we need to embark on a search for clarity and meaning.

Once the search is in progress, something will be found.⁵⁶

— *Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt*

This echoes Steve Lehmer's first picture seed of this book, "The researcher is someone who pursues the unknown and asks what happens if we take a risk, thereby discovering new roads and directions." I am a better man

for having known him. So I pass this open secret on to all ready to take the leap and simply explore with or without a camera; explore with an open heart and mind, free from the eight worldly mundane obsessions.



Becoming Panoramic notes

48 Lyrics extracted from the song *Nocturn* on the album *Ariel*.

49 It was a Banner, which would later be called Diana, still in production today.

50 In Vajrayana Buddhism devotion to the teacher is of paramount importance. The living teacher who gives you direct instruction is seen as even more important than the historical Buddha because they are the living embodiment of the teachings. A spark or flame is necessary to ignite another flame. Consequently, when good things happen to a Buddhist practitioner, rather than the ego taking credit we assign our good fortune to the Lama's blessing or to Dharmapala activity. Likewise, at the end of the Guru Yoga practice when you take the body, speech, and mind blessings of the Lama and mix your mind with that awareness, all phenomena are seen as the body of the Lama, all sound as the speech of the Lama, and all thoughts as the mind of the Lama.

51 "Picturing the Unnoticed" was the name of an assignment James Welling gave to his introductory photography students when he and I taught at UCLA in the late 1990's. I asked him if I could use it and he graciously agreed.

52 The book *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places* by John Stilgoe explains this idea very well.

53 *Lopön* is Tibetan for ritual master. The original Sanskrit word is *archarya*. In the Buddhist tradition one does not simply announce to the world that they are a teacher, but is rather a responsibility conferred during an investiture ceremony. In the case of the author of this text this happened in 2011 under the authority of H.H. Shenphen Dawa Rinpoche.

54 In conversation with Wim Mertons on a composition by Glen Branca from the cassette tape *Chicago 28 – A Dip In The Lake*.

55 This sentence is one card in a deck of cards I made called *Auspicious Openings*, an homage to the *Oblique Strategies* of Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt.

56 A card from the deck of the *Oblique Strategies, Over one hundred worthwhile dilemmas*, Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, Third, again slightly revised edition, 1979.















May my teachers live long
And may my root lama swiftly return
May I realize the authentic meaning of his teachings
And pass it along to others
Thereby dispelling suffering and the causes of suffering
For all that lives.

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