

What Stops Me?

by Skip Schiel (from a letter to a friend)

“What *stops* me?” you asked, as I wander through the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

What stops me while I wander thru the vast world of art, and what prompts me to show a particular something I’ve made, and what motivates a particular photographic project? Here are a few musings.

Love, passion, great need. For instance, the elm tree 25 feet from my bed that I’ve photographed over the past 4 years began as I came to sense the tree being somehow with me and as I was looking for something to try out some techniques on. The tree willingly stood for this. Now, reflecting on why I continue to depict that tree, and show my art to others, I begin to realize the tree is mother, wife, lover, each separately and wrapped together. Dead mother whom I miss, former wife who slept with me nearly 25 years, and lover (Louise) who I see and hold not nearly enough. I love the tree for what it could be, while trying to see it for what it is.



I choose to show certain photos because

- A. they seem fresh,
- B. they might surprise people,
- C. they do something hard well,
- D. they could be nourishing to someone,
- E. they convey a message I feel is important to impart,
- F. they’ve touched me deeply, and
- G. (occasionally) because someone I trust has said “do it!” or I need to try this photo out on an audience.

Compare this rationale for choosing which photos to show with why you speak in meeting. Why choose those particular words, at that time, in that setting?

Do you believe that some great spirit impels you to stand and open your mouth? That when you stand and open your mouth the words are formed for you by this girding, articulating, and enlightening source?

I do, without equivocation. Though I have no good idea how to explain this phenomenon. Except to claim: a message for worship is an act of opening, making ourselves vulnerable, ready for whatever lightning might strike us—and through us to be imparted as wisdom, provocation, delight for others.

Types & Shadows

JOURNAL OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF QUAKERS IN THE ARTS

Issue #7, Fall 1997

Here I am at the Museum of Fine Arts, meandering thru the halls, finding myself once again before Van Gogh, or Rembrandt, or DaVinci, to name a few of my favorites. They always speak to me. I suffer with Van Gogh, radiate with light with Rembrandt, and thrill with discovery with DaVinci. Always, or mostly always, I find others, artists and works, that stop me, where I've never been stopped before, and always, usually always, I walk right by sections of the museum that once enthralled me. Why?

Partly because "As you are, so you see", as Blake put it. We bring our experience to the sensed object, contribute our life, where relevant, to that object's appreciation. I change, continually; thus the object changes. As you can't cross the same river twice, you can never sense the same art in the same fashion twice. All in flux, all impermanent.

Same with meeting for worship: a message so rich today might tomorrow sink to the bottom of memory, lost with other messages that—if I could dredge them up—might seem platitudinous, self-serving, dumb. Including messages I've uttered.

Skip Schiel is a photographer and a member of Cambridge (MA) Monthly Meeting. He led a workshop on "What is arts ministry?" at this summer's FGC gathering.

A selection of Skip's photographs may be found on his web site, [Photography of Skip Schiel](#).

Types & Shadows is published quarterly by the Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts. Subscriptions are available through membership in the FQA.

This page revised July 2001