

Some quotations selected by Jeffrey Saldinger

For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass and simply for those moments' sake.

Final sentence of Walter Pater's *The Renaissance*

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The photographs...are little gifts from the world, hidden in its chaos, hidden in a piece of time.

Henry Wessel

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I have always concentrated on a far narrower field of subject matter than most other painters, so that the danger of repeating myself has been far greater. I think I have avoided this danger by devoting more time and thought to planning each one of my paintings as a variation on one or the other of these few themes. Besides, I have always led a very quiet and retiring life and never felt much urge to compete with other contemporary painters. My only ambition is to enjoy the peace and quiet that I require in order to work.

Giorgio Morandi

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Age gives you patience to outlast your frustrations.

...a knowledge the writing requires that is not your knowledge. When I'm not writing, I don't know anything.

Philip Roth

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[Rudolph] Serkin's philosophy [was] seeking the perfection beyond precision -- the truth of the noblest, most honest effort.

Alex Ross

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Your style is a function of your limitations, more so than a function of your skills. You've heard plenty of great, great singers that leave you cold. They can do gymnastics, amazing things. If you have limitations as a singer, maybe you're forced to find nuance in a way you don't have to if you have a four-octave range.

[unidentified]

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During [Clarence White's] long, fruitful career it seems that he made not one memorable statement concerning his sources, his intentions, or his methods...Surrounded [at Columbia University] by theorists, prophets, and publicists, White remained merely an artist.

John Szarkowski in *Looking at Photographs*

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I walk, I look, I see, I stop, I photograph.

Leon Levinstein

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For whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books.

from *Moby Dick*, cited by Louis Stettner
in his *Wisdom Cries Out in the Street*

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One does not choose one's subject matter; one submits to it.

Flaubert, cited in *L'Histoire de France*
(*Photographs by Ralph Gibson*)

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Peter Galassi
in
MOMA's Lee Friedlander catalog

Friedlander set out to master photography's slumbering record of creative invention, and his interest in what had been done fueled his desire to see what he could do...his work became enriched by his persistent poking around in the pictorial past. This lively exchange began to yield sly winks of competition, open affirmations of homage, and a playful variety of other echoes and inflections that invite us to regard tradition as a very busy two-way street.

The nudes remind us...that a rich pictorial legacy is only more likely to propel Friedlander's obsession more eagerly; like an athlete at the top of his games, he often performs best against the best competition.

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Those of us who only *look* at photographs need to remind ourselves periodically that making them is a physical adventure in which (if the photographer is any good) obdurate realities and elusive intuitions figure far more prominently than memories of pictures past.

What makes the past a gift instead of a burden (for photographer and viewer alike) is Friedlander's trusting curiosity -- the confidence, at once unassuming and audacious, that the lessons of the past and the wiles of his craft will conspire with the fascination of his eye and the concreteness of his subject to create something that he himself couldn't have guessed at.

...forms of riveting strangeness, displayed with an unblinking immediacy that obliterates any memory of tradition...

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Intensity will always find its medium.

[unidentified]

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**From Ben Shahn's
*The Shape of Content***

Like most artists I am deeply offended by the application of public approval as a standard for the evaluation of art...it is not the degree of communicability that constitutes the value of art to the public. It is its basic intent and responsibility...a work that is tawdry and calculating in intent is not made more worthy by being easily understood. [Shahn's quotations continued next page]

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I feel that each work of art -- each serious work -- has an innate value...The work of art is the created image and symbol of a specific value; it was made to contain permanently something that was felt and thought and believed. It contains that feeling and nothing else. All other things have been excluded.

The values that reside in art are anarchic...[and] the apprehension of such values is intuitive; but it is not a built-in intuition, not something with which one is born. Intuition in art is actually the result of long tuition...the popular eye is not *untrained*, it is only wrongly trained--trained by inferior and insincere visual representations.

Craft itself, once an inexorable standard in art, is today an artist's individual responsibility. Craft probably still does involve deftness of touch, ease of execution -- in other words, mastery. But it is the mastery of one's personal means. And while it would be hard to imagine any serious practitioner in art *not* seeking craft and mastery and deftness, still it is to be emphasized that such mastery is today not measured by a set, established style, but only by a private sense of perfection.

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**From Robert Adams's
essay "Writing"
in
*Why People Photograph***

Art is by nature self-explanatory. We call it art precisely because of its sufficiency. Its vivid detail and overall cohesion give it a clarity not ordinarily apparent in the rest of life. And

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so if the audience lives in the same time and culture as does the artist, and if the audience is familiar with the history of the medium, there is no need to append to art a preface or other secondary apparatus.

Successful writing about works of art...[is]...devoted to establishing the adequacy of the art without the writing.

Photographers look like they just record what confronts them -- as is. Shouldn't they be expected to compensate for this woodenness by telling us what escaped outside the frame and by explaining why they chose their subject? The assumption is wrong, of course, but an audience that knows better is small.

...I came to wonder if there was...a single case where an artist's writing did not end up making a picture smaller, less complex, less resonant, less worthy of comparison with life.

[Photographers] choose their medium because it allows them the most fully truthful expression of their vision. Other ways are relatively imprecise and incomplete...as Robert Frost told a person who asked him what one of his poems meant, "You want me to say it worse?"

Words are proof that the vision they had is not, in the opinion of some at least, fully there in the picture. Characterizing in words what they thought they'd *shown* is an acknowledgment that the photograph is unclear -- that it is not art.

Probably the best way to know what photographers think about their work, beyond consulting the internal evidence in that work, is to read or listen to what they say about pictures made by colleagues or precursors whom they admire.

Adams's quotations continued next page

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C.S. Lewis admitted, when he was asked to set forth his beliefs, that he never felt less sure of them than when he tried to speak of them. Photographers know this frailty. To them words are a pallid, diffuse way of describing and celebrating what matters. Their gift is to see what will be affecting as a print. Mute.

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I don't put labels on it, I just sing...it's all in the ear of the listener. Let them decide.

Nancy Wilson, cited in her *New York Times* obituary, December 15, 2018

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Here it is. As an artist I aspire to be as remarkable as Leonardo da Vinci. To be fantastic, astonishing, one of a kind. I will never get there. He's the one who stopped time. I just did *Singin' in the Rain*. It's pretty good, yes. It's better than most, I know. But it still leaves you reaching up.

Stanley Donen, quoted in his *New York Times* obituary, February 24, 2019

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[Don Nice] was once asked about the meaning of his Hudson River works. “I’d rather think of the paintings as meaningful rather than having meaning. Meaning is a specific message, but by *meaningful* I mean some reference to something beyond definition, something we can’t pin down, nor should we.”

Don Nice, quoted in his *New York Times* obituary, May7, 2019

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Prints are getting bigger while ideas are getting smaller. If one looks carefully at most of the very large prints in galleries and museums, it is clear that most of the pictures are not very interesting if you take away the size factor...By trying to make photographs more than what they inherently are, we LOSE [his capitalization] what they inherently are, and the magic disappears.

Since photographs are not very complex physically, the difference between an ordinary picture of something and a photograph that has a transcendent or other emotive quality can be extremely subtle and fragile. I’m not suggesting that making large prints is wrong, it’s just not necessarily a gain and can be a loss.

Philip Perkis
Teaching Photography: Notes Assembled
2nd edition (2005) , p. 38

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...the camera lures, then compels, a man to create through seeing. It demands that he learn to make the realm of his responses to the world the raw material of his creative activity. Creative understanding is more camera-like than invention.

Minor White
“The Camera Mind and Eye”
Magazine of Art, vol.45, no.2 (1952)
reprinted in *Photographers on Photography*,
1966, Nathan Lyons, ed., pp. 163-167

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I’m tired of words. You strive to be accurate, and then words come along and falsify everything.

Amos Oz, “All Rivers”,
The New Yorker, January 14, 2019, p.49

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Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire.

Gustav Mahler