



**Bob
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Natures
Photos

The balance between technical and creative.

Those of you who know me or have been on any of my workshops will have heard me talk about how I feel that my photography is moving on from simply being technical craft to something more. When I started in photography I was happy to capture an original photograph of perhaps a lion or leopard in Africa or a stoat in the UK but now I want to do more to, dare I say, produce my own form of art. I want to produce the sort of photograph someone might be happy to hang on their wall, the sort of photograph that sums up the way I felt when I experienced the opportunity. To quote an American Photographer called Lisa Langell "Photography isn't just documenting that you saw it, its capturing how you experienced the moment".



I like to think that when I started every photograph I took cost so much money in consumables and I therefore thought more carefully before I pressed the shutter. Furthermore I had to wait a long time to see the results of my labours and could not take as many photographs or experiment in the way we can these days. I therefore concentrated more on the craft and getting the photo right technically than the capturing of the vision.



I think in truth however that this might have been an excuse but an excuse that no longer stands scrutiny. As in all forms of art there have always been many great photographers. Photographers, who we all admire and who were prepared to venture out, push and test the boundaries. We all surely admit that we need to master our craft before we can produce or capture our vision. If we strive to produce any form of art we need to first master the tools of the trade. The old masters had to learn how to use brushes and paint, oils and watercolours before they could produce a 'work of art'. The carpenter needs to master his tools before they produce a piece of cherished furniture. The sculptor needs to understand stone and master their chisels and mallet and before they can produce a fine sculpture. The potter needs to understand and how clay works

with their wheel before attempting an innovative piece of pottery. It's the same for the photographer. We need to understand light and how to capture and even manage it, how to master tools such as depth of field and perception, how to vision a scene in 3D before capturing it in 2D. In wildlife photography we need to understand how our cameras capture a moment in time and how, through the final image, to communicate an action, a feeling or an emotion. We need to understand how to use our tools to capture that wonder we first felt and communicate it to others.

This is no mean feat and you will meet many dissenters along the way but always remember it's your art your expression. If worked hard to master your tools and hone your craft and importantly strived to improve from your last photo then you need to stand up proud of your end result. As with anything worth doing it takes a great deal of practise to master and craft and indeed I don't think we ever master it but are always learning - I certainly am.



We live in an instant society, a society where so much technology is so easily mastered. I often find when working with photographers there is a greater resistance to developing our own style and our own vision and working to master for example your camera. Technology and the image we have just 'googled' or 'liked' is king. Everyone can master technology surely and the better it is the better our results even if we don't know how to fully exploit it. I wrote an article or musing on just this a while ago – you can read it by clicking [here](#).

I often hear the now haggard discussion as to which is the better camera instead of how do we produce art with what we already own. Surely, the advocate of this thought or theory states, if we spend more money on the latest camera we are sure to produce better images. In so doing we are achieving nothing but are just handing the task of creating our art to the marketers and their bosses namely Canon or Nikon or Sony etc. Apple, for example, spent millions of dollars developing the ubiquitous iPhone and its ease of use has become synonymous with our way of accessing information and communicating with others. This is so much the case that others are copying and emulating it. How many are however working to develop the next iPhone the next technological masterpiece. We are instead happy to leave this to the specialist and the technologist who are venerated and paid high sums by the large multinationals. In this post 'google' age how many will admit to looking at others images admiring them and wanting to produce our own similar result? I once watched a photographer armed with a camera, a tripod and a piece of paper moving around on a cliff top in Cornwall. I asked what he was seeking to do and he said find the spot where the photographer had placed his tripod to take the photo he had in his hand. I jokingly said but the cliff face has receded and that spot no longer exist. He looked crest fallen and I started a discussion on how much better it would be to produce his own photo with the light we were both looking at now, the swell and tide as he saw it and revel in the moment which he could then capture share with others. In the world of wildlife photography how many will see someone else's work and try to produce the same. There is nothing wrong with looking at what others produce but then we need to strive to produce our own work and in the process move on learning from others.



Whilst I often hear young people quoting what they have read on face book or google as gospel I remember the sage advice I was given at school namely "if you want to get better at something surround yourself with those who are better than you" – the teacher who told me this then went on to say "when you think you have got to the top of the hill always remember there is a new one to conquer the other side but celebrate the satisfaction you get as you reach and assail each and don't look for the easy route to get there". "The easy route never gives you the same satisfaction in the long term".

For me then there is a real purpose in mastering the tools of our trade learning the nuances of our camera and lenses and then how to work with them. Newer cameras will of course bring us tools that work better and achieve more but we need to master the basics first. It's all very well to rely on the technology to produce the perfect picture and it increasingly does - iPhones produce great pictures - but its when you master these tools and use them to venture to the edge and push the boundaries that you produce your best work. Now there is an opportunity not to just produce that "record shot" so many others have done before you but to produce your own masterpiece. A masterpiece that is better than yesterdays because you have worked hard to develop your craft and then used it to produce your vision. Take the



challenge, master your own tools and continually strive to improve than start producing your own art your own vision. I too often hear people on my workshops saying *so and so gave me this advice* or *I read this on a blog*. They don't go on to question it and measure it against what they know and see if it stands up to scrutiny. In everything in life we need to question what we read and are told to do this rather than reach for Google and get the next disjointed answer or ramblings of a blogger who is no better than us. It's very difficult in the day when we have all the answers in our pocket but it's always so much more rewarding, as my teacher once put it, when we scale one hill and use what we have learnt to scale the next. Don't give up on the craft and

expect the camera to do it for you, if you truly want to produce the best continually question how its working for you, look at and examine critically the advice you read and are given then move on to create your own vision.

My late father used to say to us as children “good better best, never let it rest until your good is better and your better best”. I used to parody Newton when speaking to my own children and telling them that it’s by standing on the shoulders of giants we see further and achieve more. I used to bore them by saying that if we bow at their feet all we see are their ankles and the footsteps they have wrongly taken. Instead be proud to learn from others but always examine and review what they tell you and strive to become your own master and your own person. That way in time others will stand on your shoulders to look even further. You can’t see far standing on an iPhone!

I could talk for ages about this and no doubt will but I read an article recently by David DuChemin who is a great exponent of the mantra ‘craft is great but vision is better’. David runs an organisation striving to explore this dichotomy and writes far better on these things than I can ever do, download his full article “From Craft to Art” by clicking [here](#).



More reflections and musings of a wildlife photographer.

If you have found this interesting please visit <http://www.naturesphotos.co.uk/pages/musings-of-a-wildlife-photographer.php> for more of my thoughts

If you are a member of camera club and would like me to come and share more of my thoughts on what it takes to be a successful wildlife photographer ask your programme secretary to visit my website [here](#) and look at the talks I provide together with the feedback from clubs where I have been in the past.

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