

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a city street intersection at night. The image is characterized by long-exposure light trails from vehicles, creating vibrant streaks of orange, red, and white across the road. The surrounding buildings are illuminated, with many windows glowing with warm yellow light. The street features white lane markings, including 'BUS' and 'ONLY' signs, and crosswalks. The overall scene captures the dynamic energy of urban life at night.

Street Photography

Cynthia Taft

Excerpts from presentation on January 11, 2022

What is it?

Why do it?

What makes it artistic and impactful?

How to master it? or try to...



What makes it different from a *snapshot*?

- Snapshot is primarily about the main subject and not the rest of the image
- Goal of a snapshot is to capture people or places and record events that are personal to the photographer
- Goal is generally not to utilize elements of visual design to create an artistic image





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Snapshot? The context provides more of a story



Valerie Jardin





Gesture and Character in Rome

Valerie Jardin



© Valérie Jardin



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La Quinceañera at Vizcaya in Miami





*What makes a
good street
photo?*

They tell a human story that
we relate to

Often in a setting that is
unfamiliar and yet fascinating

You feel like you are part of
the action; a witness

They evoke many different
kinds of emotional responses

The artistry is often very
compelling



Alex Webb in Havana



Parade Action



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From Aristide: *There are two ways to take a street photo*

“The first is where the photo is completely candid and the subject has no idea that it was taken. [stealth] The other is when a photographer gains the trust of a subject and then they start to ignore the photographer. [interactive] .”

“...a talented photographer can be very inconspicuous even if the subject knows they are there and especially when there is a lot of drama going on around them.”



Rui Palha

What Jay Maisel said about street shooting

He was asked what he looks for when he goes out...

His answer:

“I’m not looking for anything – just trying to stay open to what is in front of me”



J Maisel

HOW TO BE INVISIBLE

Why?

- ☐ Preserving the scene as you see it
- ☐ Avoiding confrontations
- Blend in, move slowly, avoid eye contact
- Be a lamppost, wait, and shoot past people
- Work quickly and compose mentally before raising your camera

WHY ARE YOU TAKING MY PICTURE?

Conquer Your Fear of Being Challenged

- Why? You miss a lot of good shots
- Taking photographs in public places is legal in the U.S. and many other places
- People are usually *curious and often flattered* and rarely offended and mad
- Prepare your answer as to “why” – like I’m in a photography class or club, doing homework, working on a project
- Smile and be friendly. If asked, delete the photo



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Finding the action...after interacting

This couple in Central Park said it was their first trip to NYC from Texas





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Hudson Yards Dash

Street Portraits
on the fly...

Shot from the
hip walking by





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At night, look for sources of light



Indian Desert Scene by Grace Pui Wan Ho from Malaysia







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Recap: Some characteristics of great street photographers

From the book “Mastering Street Photography” by **Brian Dockett**:

1. Well-developed observational skills
2. Patience
3. Realistic expectations
4. Curiosity
5. Confidence and a thick skin
6. Ability to blend in/look anonymous
7. Anticipation
8. Fast reactions
9. Liking people
10. Stamina

Gordon Lewis, a street photographer for over 40 years, highlights these in his book:

- Strong composition with a clear subject (harder with street photos)
- The **moment** is the true subject – an unusual action, gesture, facial expression conveying an emotion or story
- Exceptional lighting – dramatic quality and direction of light, helps to create a mood: tension, mystery, drama, playful

