

## The Practice in a Nutshell

The key to the practice of contemplative photography is to recognize that seeing and thinking are very different. Thinking relates to the world through ideas and mental images. Seeing perceives things directly, just as they are. Clear seeing is not covered over by thoughts of beautiful and ugly, good and bad, worthwhile and worthless.

We usually navigate our lives by thinking about where we are going, where we have been, what we are doing, what we hope for, and what we fear. This inner monologue overshadows most of our experience. Every now and then there are gaps in the flow of discursiveness where fresh perceptions shine through, but generally we gloss over them quite quickly. In contemplative photography, we call these fresh moments *flashes of perception*. Learning to recognize and value these moments of sense perception is the first part of contemplative photography practice.

Flashes of perception are simple, vivid, and direct experiences. They are clear seeing (or hearing, smelling, tasting, touching). In contemplative photography the power of the final photograph comes from joining clear seeing with simple, straightforward expression.

To communicate what you have seen powerfully and accurately, you need to be able to rest with the perception. The second part of this practice is called *visual discernment*. This is the way you maintain the contemplative state of mind: you stay with the perception in a soft, inquisitive way, without struggle. Although we call it discernment, this stage is not at all intellectual or analytical. You are not figuring things out, or evaluating the scene emotionally, nor are you reaching for your camera to capture anything.

The third part of the practice is *forming the equivalent* of the perception (this is the great photographer, Alfred Stieglitz's term). The photograph and the perception are obviously different things, but our aim is to produce an image that is just the equivalent to what we see. We do not try to make the photograph more interesting, more dramatic, or anything else.

The Practice of Contemplative Photography by Andy Karr and Michael Wood  
<http://seeingfresh.com/about/the-practice-in-a-nutshell>