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A black and white photograph of a lone, leafless tree in a field. The tree is the central focus, with its bare branches reaching out against a pale, overcast sky. The ground is covered in low-lying vegetation, and the overall mood is desolate and quiet.

DEBUNKING 10 MYTHS ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY  
**PHOTOGRAPHY IS EASY**

# PHOTOGRAPHY IS EASY

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## About the author (me!)

I'm Adrian Vila (aows), a Spanish-American photographer based in both countries.

I love traveling the world making images along the way. I try to show my own perspective of all those beautiful places, the beauty I see but also the impact of humans in nature and the passing of time.

You can find a lot more information about me, articles about photography and the outdoors, along with much more educational material on my website: <https://aows.co>

I also have a YouTube channel where I bring you along on my adventures across the US and the world: <https://youtube.com/aowsphotos>

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Photography has historically struggled to be seen as art.

Painting, one of the quintessential arts, requires skills, time and effort: one doesn't just grab a brush and come up with the Mona Lisa. Taking a photograph, though, is as easy as pressing a button on a machine.

Surely, to be considered art, there needed to be a way to distinguish the crowd of amateurs and wanna-bes from the real artists. The medium needs to be properly learned and mastered before you attempt to follow your vision.

So, you want to be a photographer?

You need to learn the rules of composition and the exposure triangle; you need to work your way up from point-and-shoot cameras all the way to -at least- full frame, if not medium or large format; you must gather years of experience before you can even call yourself a photographer; you have to master manual mode or better yet, use a film camera -the older, the better-; you must slow down and think about what you are doing, and only

press the shutter at the decisive moment; you need to make sure everything in your frame is in focus and sharp; and you ought to hate on Instagram and focus instead on creating gallery-ready prints.

These are some of the worst and most dangerous myths about photography, most of them created and spread by fellow photographers. Their goal seems to be a barrier of access high enough so that they can keep the cake for themselves for a bit longer. Unfortunately for them, and fortunately for everyone who truly enjoys art, the democratization of photography is now complete: everyone has a camera, and while that doesn't make them photographers automatically, everyone has the potential to become one; furthermore, the middleman has almost disappeared as online platforms took over galleries and magazines as the preferred way to share and consume art.

In this book, I'll debunk these myths and present to you my vision of photography.

Ernest Hemingway said that "there's nothing to writing, all you do is sit down at a typewriter - and bleed". Similarly, I believe that there's nothing to photography - all you do is get out there and shoot.

It is that easy.







## **Myth #1: Go Manual or Go Home**

Chances are you got started in photography with a point and shoot camera, a Polaroid, a phone... cheap, small and easy to use cameras.

At some point you compared your images to those of well established artists or professional photographers, and you thought they sucked. Chances are, at least in part, you blamed the camera.

That's exactly what I did, after some quick research about how to improve my photography.

I found out about the importance of having control over the settings, to bend the camera to my will. I was the artist, I was in command, I didn't want to depend on a machine to create my art. Being able to do this was definitely what separated amateurs from the real pros.

## I'm a pro!

For several months, I followed this advice. I bought a camera with a bunch of buttons and dials, and took the time to learn what every one of them did. I even used manual focus lenses.

My first images were a disaster, technically speaking. They were either under or overexposed, I hardly nailed the focus in any of them, and I felt lost with all the options. I'd often freeze when faced with a scene worth photographing: *What shutter speed should I use? Should I step down to the sweet spot of the lens and get maximum sharpness, or should I create some background separation? Is the dynamic range at this ISO enough for the scene I'm trying to capture? Will this noise level make this image unusable?*

Eventually, I got better at it. I realized that all I needed to do was to settle on some base settings and modify them just slightly depending on the scene I had in front of me. This still required to manually adjust the shutter speed if I were to change the aperture, and the other way around. And of course, I was still focusing manually.

Despite nailing focus and rotating dials with graceful skills -I looked like a real pro-, I was missing a lot of shots. I was too concerned about apertures and shutter speeds to pay attention to what I was actually capturing. My images weren't any better than the ones I was making months earlier.

## Settings don't matter

I finally realized that settings often don't matter, as long as you are in the ballpark of what you are trying to create. Being aware of the environment, paying attention to the landscape, feeling what you see, those are the things that matter when it comes to creating images.

After this realization, I started to shoot in **P mode**, and I haven't looked back since. No, P mode does not stand for *Professional mode*, but for *Program mode*. It's a mostly automatic mode where I set the ISO range I allow the camera to work within, and delegate the responsibility of choosing shutter speed and aperture to the machine. I do have control

over something called *exposure compensation*, which I use to tell the camera how bright or how dark I want the image to be. I use autofocus.

When I use *P mode*, the camera disappears, and it's just about me and the landscape. I no longer have to worry about the settings. It's not about being faster -even though some times that is key-, but about freeing your mind so it can do what it should be doing: **seeing**.

It wasn't until I fully embraced *P mode* that I didn't start to make good images in a consistent way.



Where does this realization leave simpler point and shoot cameras? Well, I love them! I own and use 3 Sony RX100 cameras, tiny devices that I can fit in my pocket, pull out at any moment, and trust them to do an awesome job adjusting all the settings while I focus on what's in front of me.

I use *P mode* on my bigger APS-C cameras, as well. When shooting with my Bronica, I just copy over the settings that mode is telling me to use.

## When I use manual mode

Of course, sometimes I still need to mess with the settings. I'll switch to more manual modes if I need to, but I find that *P mode* serves me well for the vast majority of my images.

One of those cases where I need to use *Manual mode* is during long exposures. Some cameras come now with a feature called *Live Time* that can greatly automate this process. Unfortunately, my cameras do not have it and I still need to do this by hand, engaging *Bulb mode* and manually stopping the exposure once the time is up.



## What cars have in common with cameras

The "Go Manual or Go Home" approach reminds of how I felt about automatic cars a long time ago, before I even used one. I used to think less of them: they were made for dummies who didn't know how to drive. Growing up in Europe, I had never used -or even seen- an automatic car

before. It wasn't until I moved to America that I got to drive one, and my first time was also the worst possible situation I could find myself into: in a busy parking lot trying to drive away with a big U-Haul automatic van. No one had explained to me how to drive an automatic car before, what was I supposed to do? I felt like I didn't have any control over the van but somehow, I got out of that embarrassing situation, and not too long after, bought my first automatic car. I ended up loving it. The tables had turned, and the next time I drove a manual car, I really disliked that I had to do all that stuff just to drive. I now believe automatic cars are easier to use and that makes them safer, since the driver can focus -hopefully- on what matters most: to stay on the road and to avoid hitting stuff.

People who like to drive appreciate a manual car, and I understand that. I do too. But most of the times I'm driving, I only care about getting from A to B, as safely as possible. Same thing applies to cameras: yes, sometimes I enjoy using a manual camera like my Bronica, taking the time to frame a shot, focus, adjust the settings and all of that; most of the time, though, I'd rather focus on what's in front of me and capture what I feel.

## **Use whatever works for you**

Using an automatic mode doesn't make you less pro, the same way that pressing all sorts of buttons and rotating dials before taking a shot doesn't make you look more professional. Use whatever mode works best for you, the one that allows you to engage the most with the scene you are trying to photograph.





## **Myth #2: The importance of camera gear**

When you hear a photographer talking about gear, they are probably going through a rut. I know because it's what happens to me.

I have a nomadic lifestyle, alternating periods of time on the road with several weeks at the same place. When I travel, I'm making images in new places everyday and I never run out of inspiration. When I'm not moving, I lose that inspiration and start to think about gear. These are the times where I usually acquire new cameras and lenses. Coincidence? I think not.

Don't get me wrong, new gear can definitely spark inspiration and push you to make something new. But unless it brings a brand new way to work to the table, its effect will wear off and you'll find yourself longing for yet a new camera or lens not too long after.





## **More gear, more problems**

Having more camera gear that you can use is also a problem. There are only so many lenses you can bring with you, so you'll need to choose which ones are coming along and which ones are staying behind. More gear means more friction.

## **The “upgrade path” myth**

Common advice is to start small, with a camera as simple as possible, and build your way up to bigger and more expensive cameras. That's sound advice if your budget is tight and you aren't sure yet about what you want from photography. But if you have the resources and know what you need, I'd say go for it: get the camera you need, right away, even if you aren't “ready”.

You see, cameras work the same way no matter the size of the sensor or the film. Both a 35mm Leica and an Intrepid 8x10 large format camera have lenses with apertures, shutter speeds and a sheet of film to expose.

When I bought my Bronica, I was told I was going too fast: supposedly, I needed to build my way up from a 35mm camera. The funny thing is, I had tried 35mm film before, many times, and I had never liked it. I found it an experience too similar to shooting with my digital cameras, but I was looking for something more satisfying. The Bronica's big and bright square viewfinder gave me that new way of seeing I was seeking. Good thing I didn't follow the advice of building my way up, and made the jump instead.

## **Do you need a new camera?**

Photographers don't buy cameras, they buy better versions of themselves. Money will give you shallower depth of field and less noise in low light, but it won't get your ass out there to take photos. You don't need a camera with an impressive dynamic range to capture a sunrise; you just need to wake up early.



## **In praise of small cameras**

I'm a big advocate of small, compact cameras. They fit in your pocket so they are always ready to capture whatever you might run into. You can have the best, fastest and sharpest lens ever, but it won't help you much if it's sitting on the shelf. "Better" camera gear is usually heavier and more expensive, meaning we will think twice (and thrice) before taking it out and exposing it to the elements.

I believe that every photographer should have a small and cheap camera that they can carry with them at all times. One you aren't afraid to get stolen if you show it in public, one you are able to replace if it gets damaged by the elements, one that you forget you have with you.

As I've mentioned before, the RX100 line of cameras fit the bill for me. There are some cases where I'll still reach for my APS-C cameras, though: being able to switch lenses gives me the flexibility to capture wide angles and far away scenes that wouldn't be possible with their small cousins.



## Camera abuse

Let me be clear: I'm against camera abuse.

But also, don't forget: *it's just a camera, not a baby.*

Some people like to collect cameras, put them on a shelf and enjoy seeing and touching them. I understand and respect that. A camera that is not part of a collection, though, is a tool: a machine to make images. And like any other machine, it will eventually die.

"We must all either wear out or rust out, everyone of us.  
My choice is to wear out" -Theodore Roosevelt

I do choose to wear my cameras out. This doesn't mean I'm careless, but I'm not going to think twice about exposing them to some rain, cold, heat, wind, snow or whatever the weather might throw at me.

I can't think of a better way to *honor* our cameras than using them to create beautiful images, so when the day finally comes they can proudly say: *"I've done my job"*.



## **A word -or two- on smartphones**

Many see phones as the ideal “always-with-you” camera. While they definitely tick a few boxes (they are small and you always have them with you), I am very wary of using my phone as a camera.

I use it extensively in my photography: I have many useful apps that help me while scouting new locations, to write down some ideas, to know when and where the Sun and Moon will be rising and setting, to check the weather, as a light meter when I shoot film, to edit my photos, to share them and even to sell them.

I try to use it as little as I can, though, because the smartphone is distracting by nature, a black hole of productivity. I have pulled my phone out to meter a scene that I'd carefully composed, in a beautiful, calming and soothing setting, just to find a notification from Twitter or Instagram, or a new email. *“I'll reply to this message really quick”*, I'd tell myself. Several minutes later, I would not remember what I was going to do on my phone, having forgotten about the image I was about to make.

That's why I prefer standalone cameras, they don't have this problem: they are about making images. I can focus on that and only that. I believe a photographer needs to be in the zone to make good images. I see photography as a form of meditation and a phone can easily disrupt that state of mind.

Now, this is my case. If you don't find your phone distracting, then by all means go ahead and use it for your photography as much as you can. They are definitely more than able to create stunning and amazing images, and they are only getting better.





### **Myth #3: Film vs Digital**

I wonder how many times Stephen King gets asked about the software he uses to write his books; perhaps other writers do, but his readers only care about what he writes, not how.

The same should apply to photography: the images you make are all that matters, not the camera you use. And for the most part, this is true. That's why the question "*what camera and lens did you use?*" always comes from other photographers.

### **The journey matters**

That being said, the way you work and the camera gear you use provides a story that could help you selling your images. A photograph made with a compact camera from the top of mountain won't be as interesting as one made with a heavy large format camera, even if both photographs are

pretty similar. After all, carrying a heavy and big camera to the summit takes a lot of effort. The photographer's journey matters, and shooting film might give one's work that charm that digital cameras lack.

I experienced this myself while showing my first solo exhibition of "America Untitled", a project that consisted of 45+ images made with film and just one made with a digital camera. I could see how people got more interested when I started telling them how I made each of those images, including the camera I used. The story behind the image gave them a new light.





## **Unique prints**

If you go analog all the way and have your own darkroom, then your prints can gain a different level of status: they become unique creations, almost like a painting. There will never be two exactly equal prints. That increases the value, and that's why many galleries will work only with film photographers -or at least prefer them. You can charge only so much for something that can be replicated *ad infinitum*.

## **Instant gratification**

Many photographers also value the lack of instant gratification when shooting film. As I mentioned before, being able to be in the zone and free of distractions is an overlooked requirement for good photography. Another point for film.

## **A good image is a good image**

These are some of the reasons why film is not dead, and photographers would do well to not underestimate them. They are valid and powerful selling points.

That being said, let me be clear: at the end of the day, a good image will be a good image no matter what camera you used to shoot it. Equally, no matter the film stock you use, if your images are bad, bad they'll stay.

Many photographers spend their lives searching that camera, that lens, that film stock, that developer, that development recipe... something that finally makes them take that leap, something that makes their images good. That will never happen because that's not what their photography was lacking to begin with.

While many of the points I mentioned above are desirable, they build upon a good image. Without that, no one will care about how unique your print is.



## **But film is better**

By far, the questions I get asked the most about my film images are about which film stock and developer I use. To a point, they do play a role in how the images turn out, but reality is that I use whatever I have available. I've shot plenty of different film stocks and used different developers, and I've mixed my film and digital images in coherent collections of images. Very few people could tell the difference.

I know because I get a lot of messages praising my medium format film images, some mistakenly so. Quite a few people believed some images to be medium format when they were actually made with a tiny, one-inch sensor compact camera.

Film is not better than digital. Nor digital is superior to film. They are two complementing ways of making images and a photographer would do good to embrace both.

I personally love using film for long exposures or for planned shots. If I'm just walking around and trying to improvise, digital is my weapon of choice.

## **Camera gear matters**

There's no denying it: camera gear matters. Some cameras will inspire you more than others, some gear will be better for hikes, while other will work better in more urban environments.

The gear you use will also affect the way your images are perceived by the public. If you work in a different way, or use a unique camera -say, a Leica, a Phase One, an old large format camera...-, market the hell out of it. The way you make your images sells.

Do not forget, though, that the most important thing in photography is to make good images. A large format camera might be a selling point if your work is good, but it won't do anything for your bad photographs.

When marketing your way of working, be wary of labels, as I explain in myth #9.





## **Myth #4: It's all about location, location, location**

I used to believe that you need to go to epic locations to make good images. Landscapes like the Canadian Rockies have left a big impression on me -I still feel shivers today when I think about those mountains-. I love visiting places that make me look in awe and admiration, locations that make me feel there's something much bigger than me, something beautiful that is worth capturing and protecting.

Some might say that making an image of a grand vista is easy and cliché. I disagree. Epic locations might offer easy good images, but for that same reason, they also make it much harder for a photographer to stand out. Those places are usually crowded and nearly every angle has been made into a photo already. It'd be very hard for a new photographer to succeed by making only this kind of images.

I think epic locations and grand vistas are elements you need in your portfolio, they complement those images that might define your vision better, giving them context.

Anyone can capture that lonely tree in the Grand Canyon. Now, that tree along with the one in your backyard that looks so good on a foggy morning... that combination, only you can capture that.

For 40 years I have been traveling. I never stay in one country more than three months. Why? Because I was interested in seeing, and if I stay longer I become blind  
- Josef Koudelka

## **New places bring inspiration**

When you go to a place you'd never been to before, especially in a different country and culture, your senses are bombarded with new sights, smells and noises. It's the little details that catch your eye.

During my first weeks in America, I couldn't stop noticing everything that was new to me: the above ground power lines in towns, the mobile homes, the backyards, the fire hydrants, the windowless dive bars, the wide streets, the big cars... and even smaller details: free water in restaurants, the huge greeting card section at the grocery store, everyone carrying water or coffee at all times.

You literally can't stop seeing. Back at home, where everything is the same day after day, there's not enough stimuli. As Koudelka put it, after a while, you become blind.

That's why I love traveling to new places and experiencing new cultures. It's not only good for an open mind, but also good for your photography. They don't have to be epic locations, though: any place that is new to you will awaken your senses.

Because when you see, you make images.



"The only Zen you can find on the tops of mountains is the Zen you bring up there" - *Robert Pirsig*

### **Go far to appreciate home**

What I didn't know is that traveling could change the way I saw my home. When I got back to Spain after years living in the US, the old felt like new. I looked at those things I'd looked at my whole life in a different way. I gained appreciation for some things, while I became aware of others I didn't like as much.

Balance is the key. I see now that periods of traveling should be followed by periods of time at the same location. This gives me time to process all the images I took, reflect on them, and grow as an artist. Being constantly moving and pushing forward doesn't leave any room for reflection. Nor does it give you any time to work on bigger projects.

Before, I'd dwell during these times, feeling stuck in one location, envying other photographers who were traveling the world and making amazing images. Now, I appreciate that time and use it to sharpen my photography skills. I go on daily walks following the same paths and roads, trying to see what I couldn't see before, trying to make images where I didn't think it was possible. If I succeed, while they might not be epic images of epic locations, they will almost certainly be original and unique.

I also use that time to work on the images I made on my trips, and organize them in little projects. Zines, books -like this one-, or simply a blog post, it's about giving them a place where they belong.

Once it's time to travel again, having sharpened my senses, I can be sure I'm ready to move on and create something new.







## **Myth #5: You have no experience**

Starting a portfolio from scratch can be a daunting task. New photographers have a lot to prove, and that will take a lot of work and a lot of time.

Photography is unlike other arts and crafts, though: we don't need any experience at all to create good images. We might improve our chances to make good photographs by acquiring new skills and camera gear, but this doesn't mean we'll be making better images in 10 years than the ones we are making now.

Indeed, a quick look at the masters of the past reveals that most of them created their best images not at the end of their careers, but much earlier on. This is, perhaps, proof that experience is not only not beneficial in photography but something we might want to avoid.

## **Strive to always be a beginner**

Zen has a word, *Shoshin*, that means "Beginner's mind". To them, someone who is just getting started can see things that experts can't. After all, the mind of the beginner is "empty, free of the habits of the expert, ready to accept, to doubt, and open to all the possibilities", while in the expert's "there are few possibilities".

The best way to approach photography with a beginner's mind is to go to new places, where everything is new to you. Do your research but try not to look at other photographer's work in that location. Keep your mind in a blank state when it comes to that place.

Along the same lines, while other photographers' work can inspire us, I'd recommend you to limit your consumption so your mind stays open to all the possibilities, not only to those that have been chosen by other artists before you. Focus on your own images. If you like to consume art, do so with other mediums, like cinema, painting, books and so on.

## **You are one click away from your best image**

Indeed, today's cameras are so advanced that technical knowledge and skills are no longer required to create good imagery. Sure, you still need to operate the camera in very specific ways to create long exposures or do astrophotography, for example, but cameras are able to take over for more mundane scenes.

This means that from the moment you have a camera on your hands, you are one click away from making your best image. It doesn't matter how long you've been doing this for.

I believe this is very exciting.

## **Live an interesting life**

Your photography is a reflection of you: if you do interesting things, you'll create interesting images; if you become boring and predictable, so will your photography. Your images, like you, won't necessarily get better over time. It might be the opposite!

That's why I love photography so much. We must be in a state of permanent becoming, always striving to do something new, seeking that beginner's mind. Photography is not so much about acquiring knowledge, but about experimenting. And as such, there's no right or wrong way to do it.





## **Myth #6: Slow down, think more**

### **Make every shot count?**

I took this advice to heart. At the time, I was shooting film exclusively and seemed very fitting. If nothing else, it was a good way to save money by exposing less film.

I was mistaken.

I started to worry about things like my *keeper ratio* - the amount of good photographs I'd make per roll. If I got home with just a few, I'd feel bad. That meant I hadn't given those shots enough thought, and I'd just wasted film unnecessarily.

As a result, I started to shoot less and less, making fewer images. Bad... and good.

What I failed to realize is that an image isn't the result of thinking. The source of our photography should be the heart, the soul, somewhere deeper than the brain.

Today, I shoot a lot: I probably take *150 to 200 photos a day* when I'm traveling, sometimes even more. Very, very few are good enough to make it into my portfolio, and I'm fine with that.

This change in mindset has made me a better and more aware photographer: if I'm waiting for the perfect moment to get my camera out and shoot, I tend to become distracted and disengage from the environment; if I'm constantly shooting, I'm focused, I'm working, I'm in the zone.

Yes, going through hundreds of photos to select just a few takes time and effort. However, this is not something I want to avoid anymore because I've seen the advantages both in the field and back at the laptop.

## **Only the best**

Some photographers seem to strive for only the best: the right place, the right light, the right composition. They keep their cameras in their bags, tripods away, in their search for that elusive image that only a few can find. I can't help it but to think that the result of all those efforts are images that feel forced, often too clever, with overthought compositions and lacking emotion, a feeling, a mood. At least, that's how I feel about many of the photographs I took when I was *thinking more*.

A better approach, in my opinion, seems to lie somewhere in between the "praying-and-spraying" and the "only-perfect-conditions" approaches. There are situations that lend themselves to a more contemplative photography, say, a sunrise over a beautiful landscape; the photographer would be wise to get their camera ready and wait for the right light, while taking all in. When heading back to where they came from, though, they would do better by keeping their cameras out and being ready to capture whatever they might run into. It's usually in those images that we make when we expect them the least that we are able to capture *something else*.

## **Always carry, always ready**

I used to keep my cameras away while hiking. After all, they were big and heavy cameras, better kept away in my backpack. I'd only take the camera out if I thought it was really worth to capture something. That of course would rarely happen, and I realize now that I missed plenty of good images because of this.

Now, I have my camera out and ready at all times. This way, I'm more aware and tuned in with my surroundings, I pay more attention as I'm always looking for images. I no longer have a destination in mind, the whole journey becomes the destination.

I don't go on scouting trips: since I always have a camera with me, every time I'm out is a chance to make an image. Even if I'm checking a location out for a possible future shot, I'll still try to make the most of that.





## **Just take the first photo!**

Going out to make some images? Take the first photo as soon as possible! By doing this, you'll get your mind and body started, your creative juices will start to flow.

It's all about gaining momentum and putting yourself "in the zone". This is true for many aspects of our lives: it's hard to start, but it gets easier over time. To write -be it a blog post or a book- you just need to start typing, whatever that is. You can always delete it if it's bad. Why would it be different for photography?

When I go out, I start taking pictures as soon as possible. Sometimes, before leaving home, I photograph the room, my backpack full of cameras, my breakfast, myself in the mirror, whatever. I do it to document the trip, but also to help me focus on what I'm about to do. It puts me right to work so I'm ready for when inspiration strikes.

My YouTube videos are another example of something I do because it actually helps my creativity. Adding some video work to my day helps me to take a break from image-making and to stay fresh. By looking for good shots for my videos, I'm constantly thinking about the place and what's different or beautiful about it. Which in turn helps my photography as well.

Next time you go out to make some images, just take a few random photos. The subject doesn't matter, it could be your keys, your shoes, yourself on the mirror, the car parked next to your home, the clouds, or the lack of them. It doesn't really matter. Just take that first photo.

## Work the scene

Say I find a beautiful tree that catches my eye. I may or may not stare at it for a bit, then I'll start working the scene by taking a bunch of photographs from every angle and position that feels right. I don't stop to consider which one is the best composition, and I don't feel bad about heading home with so many shots of the same thing. Quite the opposite, when I review the images later on my computer, I usually appreciate the fact that I have different angles to choose from.

Some of my best images were born this way: I knew the scene I had in front of me was special, but I didn't know which one of the shots was going to work the best.

Having several different compositions of the same scene has proven to be tremendously helpful for my work in the field, I can focus on exploring my subject, on having a conversation with it, instead of worrying about the amount of shots I might be taking (which no one but you cares about).



Stop worrying about your *keeper ratio* and shoot away. Don't let anyone make you believe that real photographers make every shot count. The only reason why photographers from yesteryear took fewer shots was because of the limitations they had.

Embrace what technology has to offer that empowers you as a photographer, work those scenes and leave for the future you the decision of which image works the best.





## **Myth #7: The proper exposure**

Some believe that an image has an objective proper exposure, a faithful-to-reality brightness, and we should strive to get it right.

This is true, if you're trying to capture the real world accurately. But as we've seen, creating art is not about capturing the real world in an objective way, it's about our interpretation of it. And that, very often, means we will be the ones deciding how we want to expose a scene.

Some images work better when we crush the blacks, removing details from the shadows, allowing the viewer to focus on the subject or other parts of the frame. Others images might call for overexposed backgrounds, to make our dark subjects stand out or to, again, get rid of distracting elements in the highlights.

Make the exposure compensation dial your best friend, that's the only setting you should have to worry about when taking photographs.



## **Embrace imperfection**

In these same lines, common advice says that an image has to be sharp: blurriness is to be avoided. Everything should be in focus, the colors should be accurate, the image should be noise-free.

While many of these might be desired qualities for our images, we might decide instead that a blurry, under exposed and noisy photograph is what we are after. That creates a mood that a "perfect" photo will never be able to achieve.

In fact, in an era where making a "perfect" image -properly exposed, sharp, in focus, noise-free- is at the fingertips of anyone with a camera, I

believe we should embrace the imperfections and celebrate photography as a medium to express ourselves, rather than to just capture reality.

Most of my images are black and white, full of noise, either under or over exposed, many are blurry or out of focus. Rather than distracting from the subject, I believe that through the intentional use of these elements we provide an atmosphere and a context in which the subject is completely transformed.

By trying to be faithful to the scene, you are limiting yourself to reality. When we chase things like sharpness, proper exposure and focus to show everything in the frame, color accuracy... we narrow down our options of making images our own.

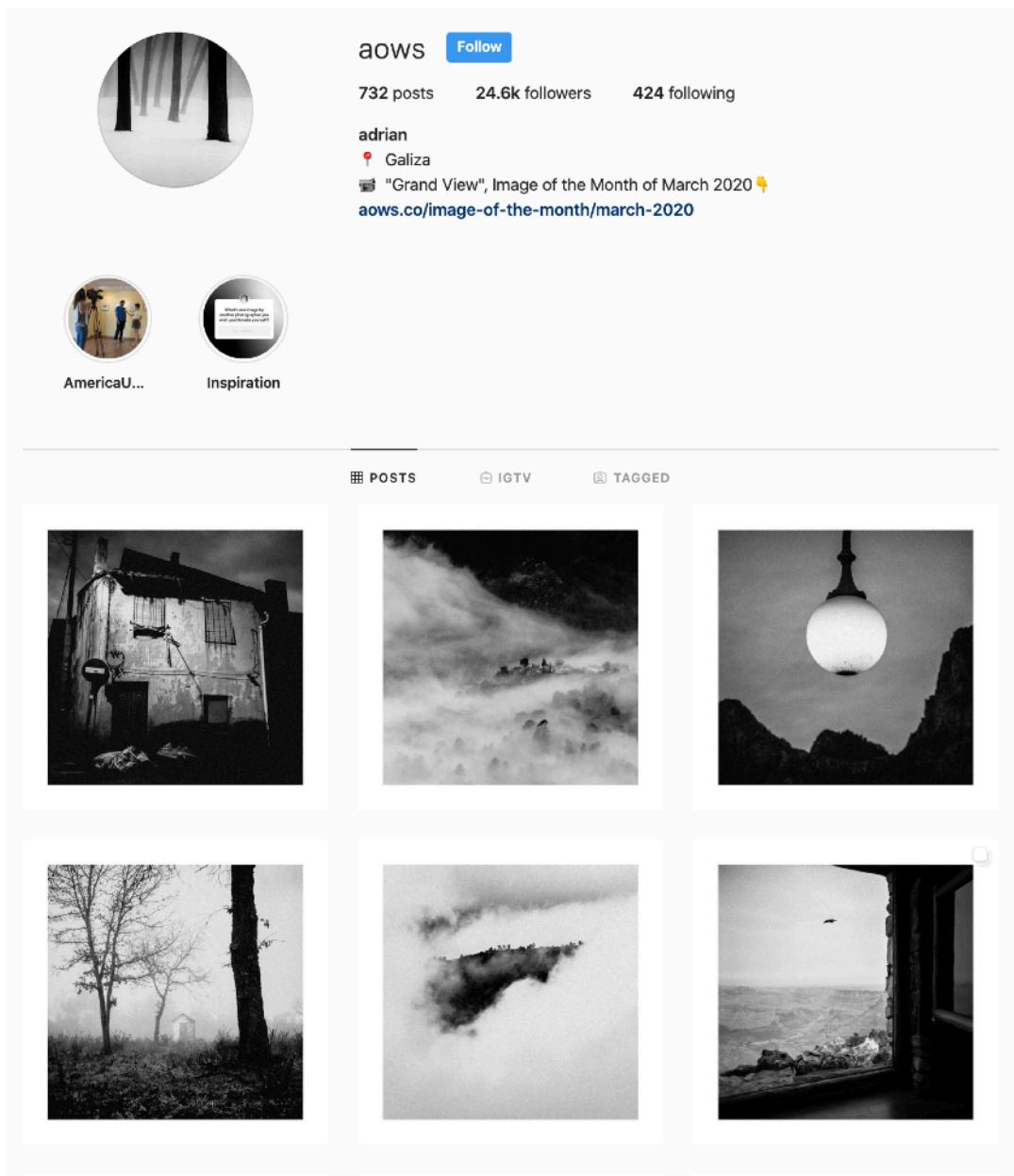
In order to develop your own style, embrace imperfection. Imperfect images are good for creativity: you can do whatever you want with them! It's all up to you and your personal taste, you create your own aesthetics. Imperfection gives you the freedom to be you, to be unique, to create the world you envision.

## **You are free to do whatever you want**

Nowadays, it's easy to forget that if you don't work for a client and you treat your photography as art, you are free to do whatever you want. Again, there's no right or wrong way to take photos, only your particular vision of the world. So, don't pay attention to anyone telling you how to do it -including me-, and follow your own feelings.







## Myth #8: Instagram is killing photography

I believe that you should be sharing what you create. Creating art for oneself is fine, but why deprive the world of what could be inspiring work to so many? Imagine if the greats thought the same way, we wouldn't be able to enjoy Beethoven's nine symphonies, Van Gogh's *Starry Night* or Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

While sharing your work is optional if you don't intend to make a living with it, you must share your images if you do want to make money with photography. You must expose yourself by showing your work. You need to be findable.

This has always been true, but it's even more important today with the Internet. Many will not like this, but reality doesn't care about your feelings: if you are not on the Internet, you don't exist.

## **Exposing yourself**

Sharing your work isn't easy. You've worked hard and done your best, the last thing you want is someone criticizing your images, or to have underwhelming feedback compared to other photographers.

It's true, the Internet can be cruel. I've received plenty of messages criticizing almost every aspect of my work - and my hair.

Still, I'll take that criticism any day over the one I got when I was looking for a gallery to represent me. After building a portfolio with my best images, I spent a couple of days visiting several art galleries. Only one of them took the bold step of even looking at my work, and I suspect that was because the guy was bored and actually appreciated the chat we had.

When I share my work online, I'm reaching an audience. Not everyone is going to like my images, and I'm fine with that. I don't do this for them, I do it for the ones who are inspired by my work.

When I tried to go the traditional way, through the gatekeepers, all I got was rejection not based on my merits as a photographer—how much could they profit from promoting an unknown photographer?

Despite its many flaws, I consider the online world the best way to share your art nowadays. If you aren't posting your images online, you are doing it wrong.

## **The place where you were born doesn't matter anymore**

Photographers need other photographers to grow, artists need other like-minded people around them. That's why some places seem to produce great artists: Mozart and Beethoven moved to Vienna to find more opportunities, like many actors and actresses do when they move to LA, or finance industry people when they move to NY.

How many greats we've lost because they weren't born in the right place?

The Internet can give a chance to those who live in the wrong place, a chance they wouldn't have had otherwise. Including photographers.



Take my case, for example. I was born in a place where there are no artists whatsoever. Here, you get a job, make money, buy a house and are nice to your elders. This is what life is about, very few people have big aspirations, or the desire to do and think differently.

But with the rise of the internet, that is changing. Everyone has a chance, even if a slim one. There's no way I'd become a full-time photographer if it wasn't because of the Internet. I wouldn't dare to quit my job, grab my camera and move to a big city in search of an opportunity in the photography world (besides, I'm more interested in photographing the wild, rather than big cities).

Today, across all the platforms including my website, somewhere between 35 and 50k people follow my work. Even if half of them are bots or fake, and half of those are abandoned accounts, and half of those are people who don't really know why they are following me... even then, I'd be reaching around 5k people who do care about my work. And that, to me, is a huge number that I could never aspire to reach from my small hometown and with no connections in the art world.

Also, I have met some photographers and artists that I would've never met otherwise. That alone is something priceless to me, and another good reason to have an online presence.

## **Instagram empowers photographers**

Many people have achieved their dream of becoming professional photographers because of Instagram and other social networks. And while you might not like their work, I think we should all celebrate when people accomplish their dreams.

Instagram hasn't made me famous or rich -yet-, but I recognize its power to do so with other individuals. I think this is fantastic.

## **You don't have to be an influencer**

Many reject Instagram and other social networks because in order to be popular, they argue, you'd have to compromise your work and create images that are more likely to be popular.

No one is saying that you have to become an influencer, though. You don't have to produce work for the masses. You don't need hundreds of thousands of followers.

Post only what you like, do it often, and you'll find your people. It might be a small group, but the exchange of ideas and the shared passion for your and their images will be totally worth it, and something that would be very hard to find elsewhere.



## **Be careful, though**

Social media brings a lot of issues to the table, there's no denying that. People might get addicted or develop mental issues because of these platforms.

For you photographers, I'd recommend to stay away from social media usage as much as you can. And I say usage in the sense of consuming content from others, not your own. To avoid getting sucked in, I schedule my posts in Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, and my videos in YouTube.

I spend around 5 minutes a day on Instagram, on average, and it's mostly to respond to DMs and to connect with other people.

## **We tend to romanticize the past**

I am a full-time photographer thanks to technology and the internet. Had I been born in the 50s, I'd still have my day job. I wouldn't be able to afford photography back then, and I wouldn't have the connections to share my work.

Today's technology gives us incredibly powerful tools to create and express ourselves, and many options to share that art. I believe this is the golden age of photography: there's a lot of noise but people are creating amazing images nowadays, much better than they used to be, and they are more accessible than ever.

We tend to romanticize the past and we forget that photographers like Ansel Adams lived on the edge of technology, using the latest cameras and film stocks, trying to perfect the medium, always experimenting with new techniques. He didn't idealize photographers or technologies from the XIX century, he strived to improve them.

As a photographer and artist, I consider myself extremely lucky to be able to live in this day and age: my 16-year-old past self would not have believed what I'm able to do today from the palm of my hand from anywhere in the world.

The fact that you are reading this, from wherever you are, is proof that technology is pure magic. Embrace it and use it to your advantage.







## Myth #9: Stick to what you do

At the beginning, it might be tempting to label yourself. You feel like you've got everything figured out and, after all, you need a clear identity to stand out. I made this mistake myself.

When I finally made the jump to being a full-time photographer after a few years playing around with photography, my selling point was that I was shooting medium format film, exclusively. I labeled myself as a *film photographer*, and since I used only the Bronica, I became *the Bronica guy* -not the only photographer out there shooting with a Bronica, but rather that I shot exclusively with that camera.

This label worked fine for a few months. People interested in film photography and more specifically in the Bronica were finding me and my follower count grew because of this. I made what was different about me the camera.

But then, I found myself using digital more and more. I thought I'd everything figured out and I'd be shooting film for the rest of my career, but after months of doing it, I realized it was negatively affecting my work. You see, there's no perfect camera. Some situations call for a small and compact camera; others for a big, heavy and slow one. By limiting myself to the Bronica, I was limiting the scope of my work.

Fixing this mistake was extremely hard. I'd built an audience around the Bronica, and even though I was hoping most would stay with me because of the work I was producing with it, the reality is that many cared more

about how I did it than what I did. Growing as an artist, broadening my scope, was going to cost me part of my hard-built audience. But I thought it was a fair price to pay, so I did.

Now, I'd gone through a similar process a few years before. My early portfolio was full of color images of crispy landscapes; all of a sudden, I moved to square, black and white, gritty, grainy images. I had around 2k followers on Instagram when I made that move, and I lost almost half of them over the following weeks (it might not seem like a lot, but it definitely felt like a lot to me).

The move from *Bronica guy* to *any-camera-will-do* was going to be much more painful, since I had 5x the followers by then. But I knew it was the right thing to do, otherwise it'd only get harder and harder. This time, I didn't pay attention to the numbers. I do miss some people from back then who definitely abandoned ship after my move to a mostly digital photography work, but I feel like my audience is more diverse and a better foundation for what I want to build in the future.

This is the danger of labels. They help you stand out and give you an identity. But the more you do it, the bigger your audience grows, the more people you reach, the stronger those labels become. At some point, it will be very hard, if not impossible, to do something different.

If you decide to give you and your work labels, make sure they are the right ones, because changing them will be hard and painful. There are many photographers out there who have built their names and careers around their camera or preferred medium. While that's probably what made them popular in the first place, it's also true that that limits what they can do and how they approach their work.

These are limitations I didn't want for myself. It's up to you as an artist.

That's how I label myself nowadays: *an artist*. This gives me freedom to shoot film, digital, or both; to work directly with negatives in the darkroom or to over-process them in Lightroom; to shoot landscapes, street photography or wildlife; to do it in square or panoramic; to stay monochrome or go color; to do whatever I want to do.

I remain open and free.





## **Myth #10: You have to print your images**

The saying goes something like this: anyone can post images online, making good prints is a different story.

As you might have guessed by now, I believe this is just another way of trying to separate amateurs from the real photographers. In this case, those who only post online from those who create prints.

Years ago, a print was the only way to share our creation. Photography was consumed on paper, be it a fine art paper or a magazine. In order to have your work seen, you had to print.

Today, it's a whole different story. Most people spend most of their time online. Not that many buy physical newspapers or magazines anymore,

and not everyone can afford to travel to see their favorite photographer's last exhibition. The vast majority of art consumption today happens online.

No matter how hard we try to deny it, this is a fact.

Even though they've been gone for years, you can still listen to The Beatles today. You don't have to attend a concert by Pink Floyd to enjoy their music. You don't have to depend on your local movie theater to watch a movie, or on the TV channel to watch your favorite show.

The way we consume stuff, including art, is always changing.

Let me be clear: there's nothing like a live performance by your favorite band or first-row seat at a football game. One thing is to see the *Guernika* in person, and another to see it in a photo. I think that printing your work is something every photographer should do, there's nothing like seeing that image on paper. But you don't *need* to. Your images aren't any better or worse depending on whether they've been printed or not. The print is no longer the final step for an image.

I personally print some of my work, in the form of prints that I sell on my website, or as part of books or other collections. But the vast majority of my portfolio is and will remain digital only, living on my website, Instagram or YouTube. I don't think less of those images: they are still my work, my art, and they fulfill their purpose as such.



## Final words

Don't let anyone fool you: photography is one of the most accessible art forms and anyone can make good images!

The most important skill you can develop is an eye for good photographs. Camera gear and the settings you use are things we can leverage to build upon our vision; but without that foundation, they won't matter.

You don't need experience, which could even be detrimental to creating new and original work. Remember that you are always one click away from your best image yet, so be ready and always have a camera with you. It's cliché, but still true: the best camera is the one you have with you. Your phone is fine, but consider enabling airplane mode so you don't get distracted.

Traveling to new places can awaken your senses and bring inspiration, but you can accomplish the same from home, without having to go to distant lands. Just go for a walk. Have no destination in mind, take streets or trails you don't usually take, try different times of the day or night.

If you have limited resources, always choose traveling over new gear.

Creating a portfolio from scratch can be a daunting task. Focus just on the next image and build it little by little. Photography is something that we should do everyday. If you do this, you'll end up having plenty of good images in your portfolio.

Once you get good images, share them with the world! Don't wait for people to come to you, go where they are. Embrace technology that empowers you and your work.

Gone are the days when only a handful of people could afford to shoot and share their work on a regular basis. Many don't like this, and they'll try to dismiss your art invoking one or several of these photography myths. Take that as a sign that you are doing the right thing.

Never forget that in this new world, all that's left to make a photographer stand out is *vision* and *passion*: how you see the world and how badly you want to make images.

That's it. It's up to you. Now, go out and shoot.