

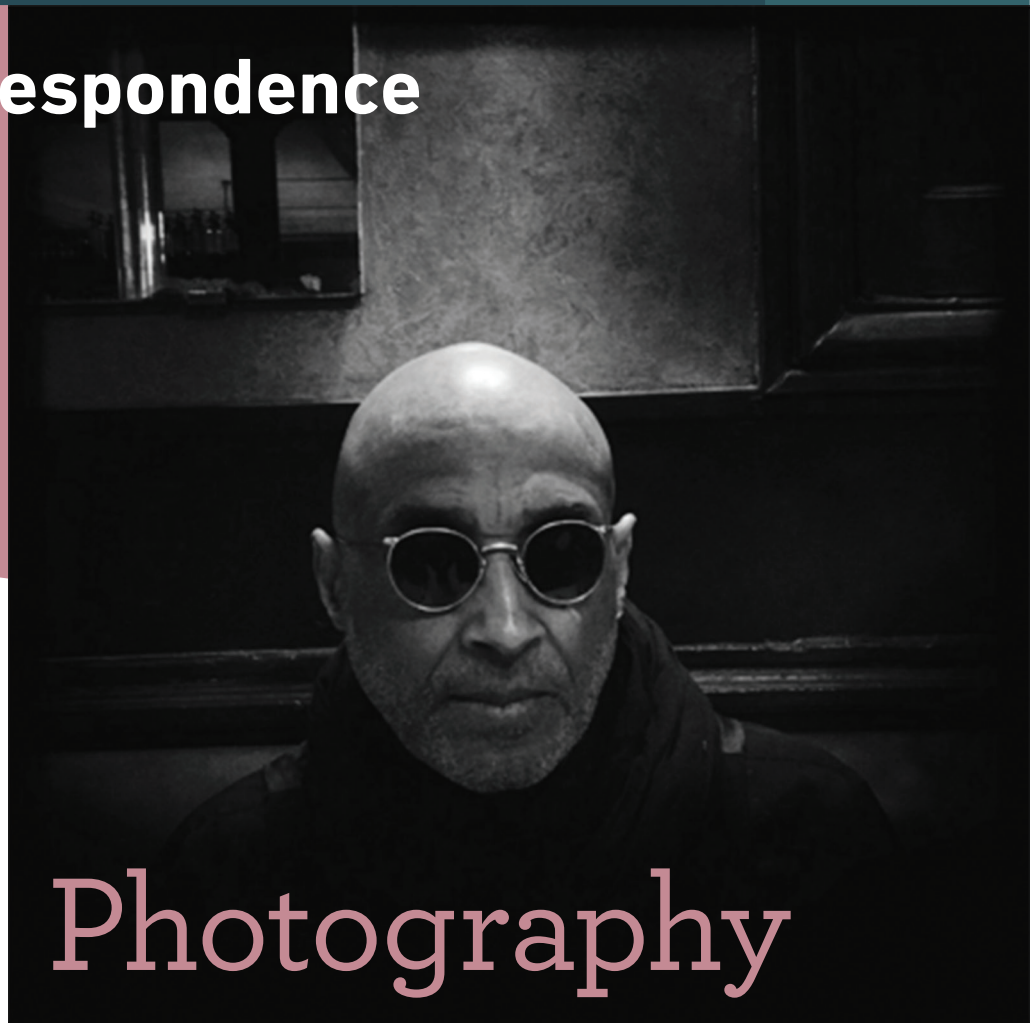


# Stanley Greene

Extracts from his last public intervention  
at the Word Press Photo

## Correspondence

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Photography  
is not an  
intention.

# It's a moment It's a visual Thought.



It's a lighting bug trapped in celluloid through a lens, a black camera box, to imagine what is being captured inside.

A sentence asking a question and the image is the answer.

Sometimes it's something you forgot to mention from a dream that you kept tucked away.

**Photography is not  
an intent, it is a moment  
captured in time.**

Not about a trip, or what you see or saw.

**It's a click, tick, a crack in  
time, a thought. A scheme  
in a dream that became a  
revelation.**

Looking backwards while still looking forward, I have always seen myself in the tradition of the concerned photographer, from the first moment I picked up a newspaper and saw my pictures in the morning edition, knowing that people over their blue berry muffins would be looking at my pictures from the events the days before on this slow going town in northern California. One day, after so many bad editorial opinions of the usage of my images, I packed up my cameras and moved to Paris, via New York, for some fine tuning of my vision. Very quickly I got caught up in the moveable feast of the Café society of Paris. It was like walking through a Hemingway Novel, then for no explainable reason after years of banging around as a fashion photographer, documenting "Heroin chic" in the back streets of Paris like some night crawler with a camera, shooting impressionist pictures, of timeless dialog in the style of poets of photography, the French romanticism of the fifties. Using fashion as my back drop I became one of them: a poet of photography. But one day it all blurred and became a meat market. So in a radical but shaking upheaval inside of me, after reading *Ten Days that shook the World*, by John Reed, reading it as a romantic adventure. John reed who wrote about injustices in the World against the common man, the worker and the Russian Revolution, John Reed was a favourite author of my father, who in his own way way fought for the common man. I decided to devote my life and photographic work to witnessing, denouncing the numerous and seemingly never ending horrors which our times are constantly producing.

Now, I believe that the only thing that makes sense is to continue in the tradition of the concern photographer, stating it in the first person, reporting and offering it as unpaid information.

Being honest and exaggeratedly sincere is the antithesis of politically correctness, standing up, documenting injustices where ever they may lurk and exposing them to the light.

Coming from a generation of Freelance Photographers who are disappearing, but have lived a mystical life, the only thing I can do today is to share my personal vision.

After the thirty years of shooting, I am adjusting myself to the realities of today, a digital warriors world, but the photography still deals with the same concerns, especially in Photojournalism.

Today we must analyse the importance of covering the untold stories, the realities of getting into places that viewers do not even know about. That is our mission, even getting to the marrow of the back story, the true meat the heart of it.

Looking at stories, the moving images that are after the big story, has died down looking backwards to the forgotten stories.

I would call this the purest way of taking pictures.

When a photographer shoots film, he has a life time of living. With the photos, the memories keep coming back; you can touch them and feel them even when you sleep.

Even editing becomes an act of "Blood on the Floor": you have to learn to kill the darling like when editors cut words from long winded texts in Magazines and newspapers, making a string of images like a visual written narrative, finding the syntax or order or string that pulls it all together. When one is shooting, we are not thinking like this; we are not arranging pictures like editing film shooters, shooting like film makers that are constantly editing in their minds, who keep trying to imagine what it will look like when you have it in your hands.

When I photograph it is if I am shooting a movie.



Most of my life I have used my cameras as weapons, I have always seen myself as being clandestine, gathering information in secret, stealing images with my Leica camera.

Trying to show the invisible, the unseen of life, the good the bad the ugly, the tragedies.

Photographs should be beyond politics. There is no such thing as taking photographs from a place of safety.

Our cameras, notebooks, often voices, make us the unwelcome pests of aggressors around the world.

In the world of spot news, publications don't want to pay for long engagements in complicated zones, because it's getting much harder to afford it. Authorities block access. And the lack of access, infrastructure and personal safety makes logistics a nightmare.

Despite the odds, sometimes the effort can make a difference, and those rare moments never cease to satisfy in a profession that is otherwise lonely, demanding and thankless. Journalism rewards you with long days and even longer nights. You often pack your feelings in a suitcase until you can return to 'reality'.



Some colleagues, living in this perpetual emotional yo-yo, are able to maintain a relationship, money in the bank, and perhaps even their sanity. If you're like the rest of us, not born under that star, you never stop trying to find it. For the last 30 years I have born witness to long histories of yesterday's and tomorrow's changing realities, births of new dawns, rising, falling empires, invasions of countries, liberation of others, mass migrations, deportations, displacements, famines and the harvest of humanity, conflicts, wars and destruction.

Being a  
photographer  
for me is to be  
a story teller  
and auteur.

These thoughts are important,  
you must follow your heart  
and instincts.

Photographers, picture makers that are passionate, go to far off horizons, seek out stories that capture them, drive them to completion headline stories are not their goal, deadlines do not exist time stops. All that matters are the photo essays, ones that have never been told, shining the light on what is the fuel that pushes them further than the rest. They gave up chasing the news a long time ago.

More and more I have started to look deeper into the idea of creating stories that practice this principle using all of my visual senses, emotional feelings, causing me look deeper into myself. In the past, I was part of this legion of Journalists that were like disaster tourists going from one hot place to the next.

Now I have no intention to be such a photographer.

I think it is better to build a full body of work which demonstrates the longevity of time.

Photography possesses a remarkable ability to cut through facts and figures and show us the human impact behind them.

I read something that Alexis Brodovich wrote and what he said still stays with me in the present. He said the life of an artist is like a butterfly, and if they're lucky they can last for eight months. And I say the life of a war photographer; if they're lucky it can last for eight years. So in some senses of the word, because if you are reading the Tarot and you look at the death card, you can have a physical death but you can also have a spiritual death.

And I think that the comparison to eight years is like that, I think you can only do this for eight years. It doesn't mean you can't continue to do it longer.



I think for eight years you can fly but then you change.

But not into a beautiful butterfly, but a moth flying straight into the flame.

I saw it in myself, and now I see it in all my friends and colleagues. I mean they are all victims of post trauma. They all have become crazy but deal with it in different ways. And they are not beautiful butterflies anymore.

The shadows, memories  
of what I witnessed,  
photographers who live and  
sleep with their pictures that  
always stay inside of you.

I always came back changed, pieces of myself left behind wherever I had been, continually feeling guilty that I had left the story too soon, feeling that the friends that were strangers when we met but had become my best friends, trusted more than those who I was going back to. I would feel incomplete, that I let the people I had been photographing down, I had not done enough to flesh out their story, not done enough with my pictures to be their visual voice. Most of the time, I was not just the photographer, but like them under the same guns, sharing what was happening to them, the lack of food and shelter, but in the end I could leave, but they were trapped with no hope of leaving. This made me feel very guilty, even when it was a really tough and deadly assignment, even when back home safe in the World I would stand at windows looking backwards wishing I was there and not here.

I started acting when I was eight years old, because my parents were actors.

If you had asked me at twelve what my career was I would have told you: actor, because that's where it was heading to become a star.

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Unfortunately the sixties fell upon me.

Drugs, the anti war movement, the civil rights movement, the black Panthers, the rebellion.

I started questioning all their values, you know, everything came under the gun, I would shoot it all down, I questioned everything around myself including myself as a person.



In the real World I finally discovered photography.

My parents used to do what they called winter stock. We wended up living in Colorado. And I was bored out of my skull. My father gave me a Brownie. A Kodak Brownie. And I took a bunch of these pictures. But, you know, it was a toy. And then my parents moved to New Rochelle when I was eleven or twelve. My father was really interested in photography. He did photography and developed his own films. But he didn't like making contact sheets. So, he taught me how to do it and in those days it was like paper under negatives, you know. And I thought it was magic and all fun and games so in all those interviews I always said it was in the genes, you know, but I had a smattering understanding of photography plus the first book I ever looked at, a photo book is *Family of Man*. And, of course, because my parents were so media conscious. I grew up on *Life* magazine. So I really had all that built in.

When I was still young and naïve I ran away to Paris to find myself. I lived in the hotel Saint-André-des-Arts, which was interesting collection of characters. The hotel was a resident hotel for artists, musicians and models.



So now I'm living this World, a World of fashion.

The life style of being a American in Paris, it was home. I was always writing a novel in my head, life with all these models, the beautiful people, the parties, shows, the roller coaster ride.

The days spent at the Saint-André-des-Arts were the best, the ones you keep when the curtain comes down in the final act.

Living in this hotel. In a word, it was as paradise. You go into somebody's room, cooking on a hot plate, gumbo you know, and it's a Jazz musician with his trumpet lying on the bed and his wrinkled suit hanging on the door, waiting for his tasty treat. There was an old jelly jar with coins sitting outside the door for donations, spare change for the clients of the hotel.

**It was like that, every day living there helping each other out. Those were the days when Paris was really cool.**

Shooting in Paris, walking the streets in the city of lights.

I went to Morocco during this time, so this was a great time to be in the World.

This was a time of development.



But before all of this I shot the San Francisco Punk rock scene in 1975.

I started shooting music in 1975. What happened was that my roommates were musicians and so they would ask me to take some pictures.

The Punk movement was emerging.

Well, the funny thing is I use to wear these long coats with a black beret and a long scarf. When I actually seriously started to shoot Punk I did it as a documentary photographer. My roommates and friends were musicians. I started hanging out with them at the clubs they played at. Some had great names like Deaf Club, Fab Mab, the Stone, I-Beam, but it was the music that hooked me and I started hanging out at these clubs, even when my friends were not playing. I was totally fascinated by the scene.

**And the other thing I noticed was that it was a big white phenomena, and I liked the idea of being black and excepted into this Punk World, without judgement.**

So, I was captured by it.

I wanted to document the Punk movement. I said I want to capture this new music on film, like Robert Frank did with the jazz scene and Roy DeCarva did with the sound he saw of the jazz World he lived in. It was his canvas I can't remember. It felt like I became part of this Punk movement. I started to work for the music magazines and group shots for the bands I saw, but in San Francisco it was really 'Art and Music'. And all these guys in my group, they were all going to the San Francisco Institute. They were artists. And I started to document it, and a lot of the pictures that I have from that period are backstage in their homes on the streets, drinking, doing drugs. And then later, making money it became like shooting in the pits of the stage...



Working as a news photographer, I learned to photograph very quickly, to make quick judgement edits. They gave me cameras like a Nikon. I'm shooting with these Nikons doing everything from cheer leaders to car wrecks. I was learning how to be a photographer. But it didn't last, because I was fired. The paper was owned, I think, by Gannet or whoever they were. And someone came into the newsroom one day and discovered that there was a black photographer working there and he didn't like: Pittsburgh, Cal. It was a very racist town. 60 miles away from San Francisco.

Truth of the matter is, I was so naïve. Some days I thought it was great, others okay. I would think on other days how bad it was, it wasn't me I kept thinking anyone could have done it. After that VU started to get me assignments to cover one story was in Bosnia, in Mostar. Afterwards I went to Bhopal, Calcutta, Bombay and Kashmir. to do a photo essay on India for *Globe Magazine* but focusing on Bhopal. Bhopal was a disaster. I photographed Union Carbide. I wanted do a story on Union Carbide for the anniversary of the Bhopal disaster and the victims, but I could not find a way into the story.

The war in Chechnya started in 1995. And I had a connection with that area.

I had gone there in February 1994 while doing the Caspian project, the pipeline project, so I knew about Chechnya, so it wasn't like new. And uh, the Chechnya thing happened and the French journal *Liberation* called me up and asked me if I want to do the story. And we think it's like gonna be slam bam, thank you mam! Very quick, just to go there and see the situation the next thing I know I got caught up in a war.

Because of Chechnya you became known as a war photographer. But I hate the term. It's more we who do this are crisis photographers. I'm married to crisis. There is a quote from André Bertand which is 'to do things that you've done you have to have a reason to justify why' in other words you have to, everything that I've done, it'll be tragic if I can't justify the why.





Since Chechnya I have covered many crises, but the one that stays with me is Syria. I went for the simple reason. My second wife had fallen in love someone. I was too much of a coward to witness the affair, so I went to the furthest place I could find, the nastiest war that I could hide in.

**A bullet, a bomb or a missile cannot, will not, destroy us, this will not end.**

Nothing left but a soul of dust, that twist and turn amid the destroyed buildings, that were homes, shops, markets, mosques, schools, hospitals, hotels and food places, that became places to escape to from the never ending snipers, bombs and rockets. How long does it take? To kill someone, to break them down to nothingness like dust itself, as a photographer walking these streets, this would be something growing inside you, whether you will be the same coming back to the World. As you press the shutter on your camera you ask yourself this question, and at the same time your nerves start crumbling, asking yourself how these people here in Aleppo continue to survive, how long can they hang on for. Now, back in the comfort zone, you watch it all unfold on the news the final days of Aleppo. You cannot believe what you are seeing, is this it? The end. Only now you understand this war; when, there is nothing left, only the dying are here, the living are trying not to join the legions of the dead, and become souls of dust. You who know Aleppo, by now, you know: underneath, lay human remains.

The regime has decided from these streets of Aleppo, it's a matter of method, nobody must surface alive.

The walls are defaced by artillery fire, are covered in blood and dust.

The war of Aleppo has been trench warfare of rifle shots: rebels and loyalists are so close that they scream at each other while they shoot each other. On the front-line, the first time you cannot believe it: with these bayonets that you have seen only in history books, and that you thought hadn't been used any longer since Napoleon's time. Today, this war is a war of drones: and here, instead, they fight metre by metre, with that blade tied to the barrel, and decayed with blood, and it's really a war street by street, with hand-to-hand combat. Even though they are only Praetorian guards of an empire of death, under the sun and fire a fighter shows the V of the victory sign as he stands in front of the Colosseum, like posing for a photo souvenir.

Even the muezzin, now, no longer call others to prayer: he calls for blood donors for the wounded of the last missile, dropped an hour ago. And only a rain of Kalashnikov fire, suddenly, wakes you up out there: shooting starts again. It is the only sign of life, the killing, the act of taking life, somebody dies. Somebody always dies in this city of dust, which this week itself died; now there is no life.

I think the only thing that keeps me really going is that I honestly think that my pictures on some days make a difference. That could be ego but you have to believe in something.

I don't have a house, a car, a wife, I don't have any of that. The only thing that I can stand back to justify the why is the pictures, now the books, and the exhibitions and NOOR, but I do have a soul mate who believes in me and the roads to travel down ahead. Those are the things, I feel the best things in the world, to have a reason to continue.

And therefore it means a lot more.

Lee Miller wrote, and I think it is the best way to end:

**“Of my dark and supposedly lurid past, I will say almost nothing  
I will content myself this time in saying  
That anything you hear about me is probably true  
True to my life, to my life“**

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