

The Delight of SURPRISE

Sur-prise: to strike or occur to with a sudden feeling of wonder or astonishment, as through unexpectedness... pleasant surprise - nasty surprise.

I don't like nasty surprises and I don't go out of my way to look for them. They show up when they chose to anyway.

I much prefer pleasant surprises, so that during the past decade I have been searching for them with increasing dedication. It's a Pleasant Surprise Hunt: my game preserves are museums and art galleries, my weapon is my camera, the prey is an image.

This might appear to be a contradiction--if you know where and how to find something, there would not seem to be any surprises. That's not the case for me: I don't search for something, I look for Surprises.

Two elements are essential on my safari--works of art and visitors. These elements are necessary but not usually sufficient. What I'm looking for is their encounter. Even that is not enough. It must be a sudden, unforeseen, surprising encounter. I spend long hours, sometimes whole days, in a museum, patiently standing by a promising work of art. I wait with keen anticipation for someone to appear who, even for a short instant, will surprise me with their position, their pose, the color or texture of their clothes, for that something that my imagination could never conceive but that only chance proffers to a patient, trained, attentive eye. Sometimes it's the opposite--a visitor draws my attention and I follow them, almost stalking them, hoping that, passing in front of a painting, for some unforeseeable reason they might trigger the shutter of Surprise. For some years, I was aware of having veered in a promising, stimulating direction. Not knowing where it would lead, I was content to see my efforts, both physical and emotional, rewarded by an image that I considered successful. But only when I had discovered the Surprise factor did I truly understand what I was achieving. My goal was to employ the works of renowned artists as a vehicle to create a new and surprising art--surprising because it is completely unpredictable up to the moment of its creation!

Yet, even then that sense of surprise was limited to my personal experience, based mainly on the pleasant Surprise that I sensed in producing and seeing the images that I considered successful. I still needed a more universal and objective measure of evaluation. I only discovered my real accomplishment when observing the glances of individuals who happen upon my works for the first time--if I catch an expression of surprise, I am pleased to have aroused some interest. If the surprise is coupled with a smile, then I have truly succeeded. And that is my thrill.

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