

What does it mean to take a picture?

By David S. Cohen

What does it mean to take a picture? Or capture an image? Why do we use words like take, capture and shoot when it comes to photography?

Joe Dreher a.k.a. JoeKingATL is an artist with a camera around his neck, but he doesn't *take* pictures, nor does he *capture* images, at least not in the pejorative sense. Yes he points his lens at people and he presses the button and a picture is made, but it is not an act of taking anything. What he is doing is too guileless, too generous to fit that word. His pictures don't capture, they elevate. Joe sees a world where people are not flat. They are not obstacles, or heroes, or rogues, or saints. They are people – dimensional and deep.

Joe's lens assumes every person he brings into focus has something to say, a voice to add to a community of fellow souls. His eye is always scanning, looking for the entry point, the doorway through which he can make a person feel welcome and accepted. It might be the tilt of their hat, or the color of their suit. He has an instinct for finding little ways to slip into the conversation of strangers – a smile, a compliment, a laugh and he's there past the barriers and into the space where people talk to people. Maybe it's simply that he is made welcome because he is so welcoming. There are no strangers in your world when you meet people fully prepared to accept who they are.

However it happens, it happens, and with uncanny frequency – a person, now a friend, now a photo. And in that photo, that 2 dimensional representation, there is somehow a feeling that gets beyond the veneers we wear for each other. Look at a hundred photos of people that have found their way in front of Joe's camera. You will see something common in all of them – from hipster to homeless person, from socialite to skater – you will see the knowledge that through this lens they are acknowledged, they are accepted and welcome. Joe's camera doesn't subjugate or bend people to an aesthetic or political agenda, it simply introduces us to a fellow traveller on this Earth and says look, this is someone real, aren't they wonderful?

It is this appreciation for people, which informs so much of Joe's creative work – not just his photography, but the murals and installations too. He has an instinct for turning a personal project inside out, finding a way to make the work be integral to a community. He has collaborated with dancers bringing their images back to them - installed as part of the very environment for their dance. He took an opportunity to do his own mural for a middle school and changed it into an opportunity for multiple artists to make multiple murals, allowing them to connect with each other and the students.

No matter how his work may evolve, or into what media he may explore, you will always find Joe centers himself through his great affection for people. It is disarming how truly without affectation it is and that is what makes his art so refreshing and endearing.