

BONUS CONTENT

Visual Poetry

*A Creative Guide for Making
Engaging Digital Photographs*

CHRIS ORWIG

**New
Riders**

VOICES THAT MATTER™

Guest Speaker



Hillman Curtis

In my photography classes at Brooks Institute, I occasionally invite guest speakers from other genres of art. There is so much to be learned from this cross-disciplinary approach. Hillman Curtis is one of my favorite interactive designers and filmmakers. His work is clean, simple, authentic, and profound. And Hillman is a kind and thoughtful soul. For more information visit: www.hillmancurtis.com.

What inspires you?

It often starts with a still photograph. I own dozens of monographs and flip through them almost nightly. Usually an image will catch my eye and a script idea or an interesting way to approach a short documentary will materialize. For the short I did on Stefan Sagmeister, “Sagmeister 08,” I had been going over the work of Gregory Crewdson and revisiting some of P.L. diCorcia’s work, and the feeling of disconnectedness you sometimes get with their work found its way into the film.

But inspiration comes from anywhere. The short film “Bridge” was inspired by a book someone brought over to our house. It was about a western physician who went to the Amazon and studied with a shaman and wrote a book about the experience. The shaman’s name was Don Antonio, which for some reason immediately made me cynical about the book, and that became the basis for the cynical male lead in the film.

What makes a film good?

Is the question what makes one of my films good? I think most of them are good and a few are great. And a couple of them are misses. I think the great ones are: “Bridge,” “Embrace,” “Table,” “Sagmeister 08,” and “Milton Glaser.”

Good films have a consistent focus and pace. The edit is done with care and restraint. The script—in the case of short films—is super minimal and simple, yet house multiple layers. I especially like the script for “Embrace.” It’s just a couple of pages long and the dialogue serves the theme perfectly. They’re remembering a beautiful desert storm while a seemingly more malevolent one approaches.

In the case of the short documentaries, the really good ones are the ones where the story is clearly revealed through the words of the subject. The Milton Glaser film is especially profound. Not because it’s an unbelievable example of filmmaking—it’s actually a very traditional cut—but because during the interview I was able to connect with Milton and get unguarded answers. I do this by having a conversation with the subject and never reading off a list of questions. And in the case of Milton, I realized very early during the shoot that he wasn’t comfortable sitting down to talk and being filmed. It wasn’t until I asked him for a tour of his brownstone and his work—camera running—that the interview came alive. Once he was around his work things started happening.

What character qualities should the artist nurture?

Curiosity. I think this is key... at least for me. I go into every shoot open eyed, expecting to be challenged, and expecting to be surprised. I fully expect that whatever preconceptions I might have about the shoot will get blown out of the water and something far cooler will replace it.

What is your advice for the aspiring artist?

Well... first maybe lose the “aspiring” part. Be an artist. Period. I also think that this year could hold some real opportunities for the person who has neglected their desire to do art. Some will be confronted with less work and more free time. Embrace it. Embrace your ideas.