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Digital Chronicles

When I was a young teenager I picked up my first camera and since then, I have inevitably pointed the lens onto myself. Trying to see how the camera would document my appearance and the environment around me. As I was raised in a military family, we were constantly moving from state to state. Continuously adapting to new surroundings was my job and it seemed a part of me was not fully there, but instead was left behind. Snapshots were the only evidence of my previous surroundings. Looking at myself allowed me to see how others might perceive me. This theme continued and developed over time and more importantly it evolves.

An early sequence of images I shot was titled “168 Hours,” where I made a black and white photograph every hour on the hour for the last week of 1985. To me, this revealed just how uneventful the every day routines of life could be.

I followed this up with a series of self portraits that I took every day for a year, “A year in the life of Joe Z.” The challenge of this series was to make an interesting image every day and document the environment I lived and worked in.

The “self as subject” theme has continued with the series, Decade 90’ producing 240 self portraits generated on the first and the fifteenth of the month for the entire decade of 1990.

It was during this time that I started to build on my knowledge of the new medium of digital photography. Which developed into the series “Digital Chronicles.”

I find it interesting that the definition for the adjective “chronic,” (of an illness) persisting for a long time or constantly recurring, has a certain parallel to the medium of photography. Once involved with a project or theme, it become habitual until the next spin off or theme took hold.

The tens of thousands of digital files and panoramic images that I have been generating for several years, are meant to be shown collectively, whether in print or projected. The rapid fire of images, the patterns and rhythm that come from the exhibition is what thrills me about sharing collections versus individuals images.

In a conversation I had with a peer the remark was made, “make the extraordinary, out of the ordinary.” I have taken this to heart and this is what drives me to constantly photograph on a daily basis. Constantly being prepared for the random events, colors, quality of light and situations that happen at a moments notice.

Focusing on local and personal topics has allowed me to preserve a part of my community and immediate life as opposed to tracking global issues such as consumerism, political power and the increase divide between the rich and the poor.

Recently I have been challenged to look at my photographic and self-portrait portfolios in a different light. Questioning why I am playing for the camera and why I am using myself as the main subject of my work? Why do I feel compelled to leave a photographic wake behind me as I go through life, cataloguing everything I experience and do it to the point of hyper-documentation? I aim to ask those questions of myself and of all those who view my work.

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