

CAMERA TALK

by Karin Smith

People frequently ask —
“Is Photography art?”

This question has been debated since the creation of the first camera, and is still at times contested today. There is no generally agreed definition of what constitutes art, and its interpretation has varied greatly throughout history and across cultures.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines art as: “the conscious use of skill and creative imagination especially in the production of aesthetic objects.”

Probably the simplest way to describe Photography as Art is to define it as an image that is created, not just captured, to express the artist’s perception of the world. Photography captures the vision of an artist. Just as a painter uses paint, brush, and a canvas, the photographer uses a camera and film as their tools.



Ansel Adams once described his own work in the following quote:

“The negative is the score, the print is the performance, and as a photographer and artist, you have the opportunity to use a variety of tools at every step to create a print that achieves your vision.”

Painting with a Camera, as I think of Fine Art Photography - has to do with making choices; taking into consideration not only subject, lighting, technique, camera framing, lens choice, technical settings, post processing, but many other considerations, such as the intention behind each capture, for instance, that makes a photograph stand out.

Today’s photographers owe a great debt to many of the iconic photographers, past and present, and most especially to Alfred Stieglitz, who, after returning from Europe in 1890 determined to prove that photography was a medium as capable of artistic expression as painting or sculpture. Stieglitz is perhaps the most important figure in the history of the visual arts in America. Through his many roles - as photographer, as discoverer and promotor of photographers and of artists in other media, and as a publisher, patron, and collector - he had a great impact on American art. (Excerpted from Wikipedia)

When we study the works of iconic photographers we begin to gain insight in what makes a photograph great. There is a deeper meaning in many of history’s great images, and we should make time to look at them a bit closer.

Whenever possible, visit art shows, photographic exhibits, and museums, or go online and research the works of important artists in history. As photographers, as painters, we often look to other artists for inspiration. Perhaps you will recognize your own artistic expression in some of their work.

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