

# The NEW MANIFESTO

Alex Bildsoe

## Interview:

### Douglas Beasley

Douglas Beasley's personal vision explores the spiritual aspects of people and place and is concerned with how the sacred is recognized and expressed in everyday life. As founder and director of *Vision Quest Photo Workshops*, Doug provides workshops around the world that emphasize personal expression and creative vision over the mechanics of camera use. He has recently become the owner and publisher of *Shots Magazine*, a printed quarterly of eclectic B&W photography. Personal heroes include Jimi Hendrix, the Dalai Lama and whoever invented the espresso machine.

What did you eat for breakfast today?

Greek yogurt with flax seed, walnuts and banana. And a yummy soy latte with maple syrup!

What is your living space like? Describe it.

An eclectic mix of Japanese and Native American. Zen simplicity mixed with too much accumulated crap and lots of art and music.

What do you do at home to relax?

Listen to loud music with Julia and go for walks around the neighborhood together.

Is there any food you end up eating in front of an open cabinet or fridge?

It varies by what's available. Lately it's mixed nuts. I crave salt at night!

What do you think creativity means?

Responding to the world, both outer and inner dimensions, emotionally and spiritually, then

manifesting that response into a form that others may recognize.

If you could bring a value or practice into the modern day that existed in the past, what would it be?

Not being expected to respond to the callings of the outer world so immediately.

What do you believe happens to us after death?

To our souls, if we have them?

I think we merge with the infinite. I heard a great Zen story about a wave that thought it was unique and individual. Then it crashed into the shore, returning to the sea from where it originated. I think that's what happens to us. The real answer is 'I don't know'.

If you could be an animal, which animal would you be?

A river otter. They play and slide on the ice! Or a dolphin. Just please don't let me come back as a squirrel. They are way too busy!

Have you ever used a mantra? If so, what?

When I first learned to meditate, back in my high school and college days, we used the Hindu mantra Bavanam Kevalam. I don't remember what it means. Maybe I never knew. But it sounded cool and like I was part of a great new cult of consciousness. I think not knowing the meaning was good in that it forced me to concentrate on something beyond comprehension.

What is the biggest favour someone has done for you?

Not giving me what I thought I wanted.

Do you think humans are here for a divine purpose, or are we just an interesting chance happening?

Yes. (both)

What is our purpose?

To find our purpose. To experience life as fully as possible. To become self-actualized.

What is your greatest fear?

Bad health in old age.

What is your favorite sandwich?

Turkey, onions and avocado on French bread.

Alternate answer: the one someone else makes for you!

How does nature feel to you?

Good. Sometimes dirty (if I'm in bare feet).

When do you feel the most peaceful?

When I'm amongst my trees at the cabin.

Have you had an event in your life that felt like a turning point? What?

Hmmmm...so many... Certainly ending up in a hospital after a bad rock climbing injury and not going back to climbing after, which had been such a focus of my life-force/energy.

If you could move your soul into a different body, what would that body be like?

Lighter and more nimble.

What are you having for dinner tonight?

Julia's carrot ginger soup with crackers. Last night I made pesto pasta with mushrooms and garlic.

What is your favorite piece of clothing?

A well-worn t-shirt, one wash away from it disintegrating...

Describe a romantic gesture you performed.

Making time to do just listen and do nothing together. Or cleaning the gutters...

What book are you reading at the moment?

The Hidden Life of Trees

Is there anything that you would never do?

Never say never...I never thought I would like beets after eating canned beets as a child but now I am learning to love them.

When do you like to be naked and why?

At Breitenbush Hot Springs in Oregon under a canopy of stars or with snow lightly falling. It makes me feel very connected with the infinite.

What is currently on your nightstand?

I don't have a nightstand. Too much clutter makes me crazy!

What food do you always make sure you have enough of at home?

That's easy- coffee beans, soy milk and maple sugar!

Where does your mind wander to most? To Julia's return home and out next visit to the cabin...

Do you remember the first photograph you took? What was it?

Yes, I remember as a kid of about 8 being at the New York World's Fair with my family and using a Kodak Brownie camera. A few years ago I was in a group exhibit called "Early Works" of photographers first photos. I put in a portrait of my now deceased sister little with a short statement about her succumbing to alcoholism. The show started on the West Coast and travelled around the country for a couple years so that early photo got a lot of attention!

What is a soul?

That thing that exists inside you that isn't tangible or definable but helps you go beyond the sense of 'I'.

What is the relationship between spirituality and the soul?

They are completely intertwined. Spirituality is the physical manifestation of the souls longing to express itself.

Do you think a photograph can capture a person's soul? Not steal it, but document it?

Nope. I don't even like the phrase 'capturing' in photography. The language of photography can be very troublesome. I would rather practice 'catch and release' photography. I think at best photography can only hint at the souls' existence but capturing it would be quite presumptuous.

When taking a portrait, the physical camera draws attention to the act of being observed and

documented, altering the interaction between photographer and subject. How do you work with this challenge? If the objective to capture an essence of this person or people, how do you work to achieve this?

First of all, not to get too into semantics, but I prefer the term 'making' a photo over 'taking' a photo. Taking implies removing something and making implies collaboration with your subject, even if it's inanimate but especially if its human. I don't think essence can, or should be, captured. It should be left wild and free. If all the essence is captured there will be no free-range essence left! I think at best, if we are skilled or lucky, or both, we can touch that essence, maybe even taste it.

Quantum physics has shown us that the very act of observing something changes it, and that is certainly true of portraits. The best we can do is acknowledge and work with that energy to go deeper into the process...

When your intention is to take a photograph, what elements or qualities in the scene/subject are you looking for?

Resonance within the frame. Vibration of all it's elements. A relationship between the foreground, subject and background.

Do photographs tell the truth?

No, they are opinion not fact. At best they tell 'a' truth. But many lie beautifully. There is a big difference between photojournalism and art. Photojournalism photos should strive for an objective truth (which is by nature subjective) but fine art photography only owes its allegiance to the expression of its maker.

Why are photographs important in the exploration of spirituality?

The photos themselves are not important. They are just more 'stuff'. But our longing for the

soul's expression is something we should pay very close attention to.

Are there things you consider too sacred to photograph?

Yes, when they are another culture's expression it can feel like appropriation.

You not only are a photographer, but a teacher of photography as well, leading multi-day workshops around the world. What has teaching photography taught you about taking photos? Sometimes in our haste to photograph we miss actually experiencing the moment. The experience of being present to the world and to the ourselves is more important than the resulting photograph.

How do you feel about the proliferation of photographic images in our society? With the vast amount of images in existence and growing steadily every moment, how does this change the gravity or importance of individual photographs?

The world doesn't need my photographs or any more photographs at all. It is more about our need to express ourselves and connect more fully to our experiences, then share those experiences with others.

Is there anything you haven't photographed yet that you would be delighted to?

Not another place or thing to photograph but I would like to hone the ability to go deeper and cut through the layers of clutter surrounding our perception.