

Route 4, Box 33
Santa Fe, N. M.

2 November 1966

Mr. Norman Shapiro
17½ Hanlin Avenue
Athens, Ohio

Dear Mr. Shapiro:

The queries in your recent letter are quite an order. I think they reflect a contemporary trend in art, and particularly in photography, in which it is an implicit assumption that a creative activity in one field should be explicable and justifiable in the terms of another. Because the medium of photography has most recently received qualified acceptance as an art, written and verbal approbation is sought. In the ancient art of painting one finds that painters indulge in a lot of talk (but less writing) about their work. But here the purpose is not to justify painting; it is rather to support a school or an idiosyncrasy. The talk, however, has never been an effective factor in establishing merit, and this is also true in photography. You cannot talk a photograph into greatness.

In the light of these remarks you will understand that I do not hold with the point of view that talking about my photography has value. All I truthfully can say is that I do not know why I photograph what I do, or why I photograph in one medium rather than in another. I might say that I photograph in a particular way out of habit, and that I use color because it makes for more spectacular publications.

I do not believe, as some photographers do, that color photography is more literal than black and therefore a lesser art, nor do I believe that one medium can per se be used more creatively than another, for creativeness is an attribute of the artist, not the medium.

Yours sincerely,

Eliot Porter

17¹/₂ Hanlin Avenue
Athens, Ohio 45701
October 17, 1966

Mr. Eliot Porter
Route 1, Box 33
Sante Fe, New Mexico

Dear Mr. Porter,

I am doing a master's thesis at Ohio University on color and black and white images in creative photography. By creative photography is meant those photographs which are made for themselves. They are not intended to be used in any commercial, industrial, or advertising production. They are made for the sole reason that the photographer sees something and wishes to recreate that which he has seen through the medium of photography.

My reason for writing you is that I wish to include the opinions of some photographers that are working in this field today. It would be a help to me if you could send me your comments on the following: Rarely have I seen photographs by one person, working in the creative vein in both color and black and white. I would like you to answer this question: why, from your experience, does a photographer tend to work primarily in either color or black and white images? Is it the fact of production problems such as the processing of the film or the cost? If the reason is a personal decision, then will you state it in writing and give me permission to quote you? If you use both color and black and white interchangeably will you say why? If you have, through your own work, evolved rules or criteria which may influence your using either black and white or color film for any particular situations I would appreciate your writing them down for me.

If you feel that I have not stated or asked something in this letter which you feel is important either to my study or your own feelings on this matter I would greatly appreciate your advising me of this. My thesis will not, I believe, conclude that there are any valid reasons or rules that can be generally applied to creative photography concerning black and white and color images other than that it is up to the individual making the photograph and that the subject has a great bearing on this. Any help that you can give me in this study will be greatly appreciated.

Very truly yours,

Norman Shapiro
Norman Shapiro

NS:jc