

# On Being Creative

T&DCC PRESENTATION – 2 NOVEMBER 2017

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# My start point – last slide from 2 February: Parting thought

2

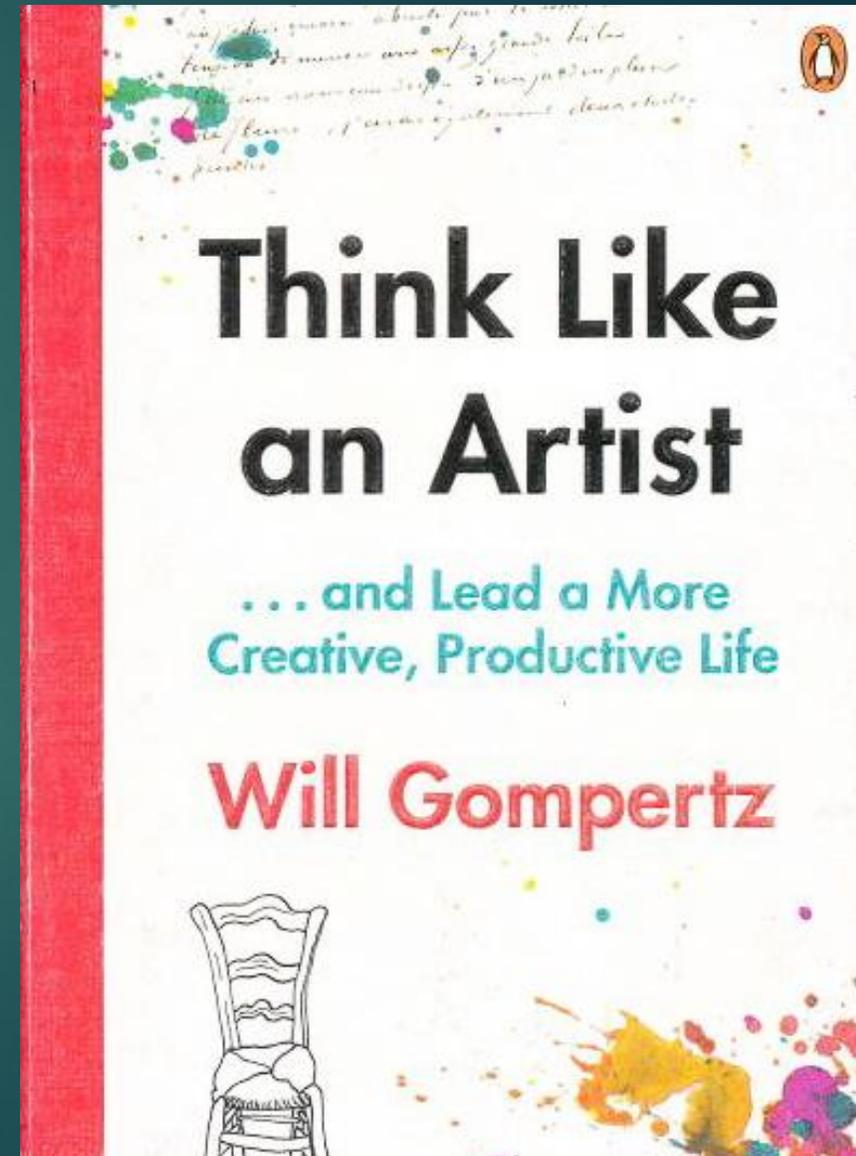
We are a Camera Club  
dedicated to creative  
photography ...

Thank you

# T&DCC is a creative photography club – so what is creativity...?

- ▶ Aim of this presentation:
  - ▶ Summarise underlying principles of being creative
  - ▶ Highlight we are all capable of being creative
  - ▶ Signpost applying principles to creative photography
- ▶ In this presentation there is little, if any on the specifics of creative photography
- ▶ My guess is the content will be:
  - ▶ Radically engaging, potentially changing how we approach our subject, or...
  - ▶ Tediously disengaging, a quickly forgotten footnote to this season's program
  - ▶ You are the collective judge...

My source material - have  
drawn widely from:



# So, how does it work...?

- ▶ Humans are uniquely imaginative – we can conceive and realise complex ideas
- ▶ This is beyond other life forms and – to date – machines
- ▶ We all recognise creative types:
  - ▶ Deeply engaged in their chosen subject
  - ▶ Endlessly curious
  - ▶ Energy and enthusiasm
  - ▶ Willingness to innovate
- ▶ Can we all be creative - take our creativity off autopilot?

# Why does creativity matter

- ▶ What follows describes different facets of the creative process
- ▶ Do not look at technical specifics, but ways of working or thinking
- ▶ Principles apply to all creativity – including creative photography
- ▶ Creativity is deeply satisfying and rewarding:
  - ▶ The path can be challenging and disheartening
  - ▶ But huge sense of achievement when 'on-song'
- ▶ There must be something to these arguments – why do dictators lock-up artists who oppose their ideas?
- ▶ Creativity matters!

# There is no 'failure' in being creative – success often down to Plan B...

7

- ▶ Being creative (inevitably) brings 'failure'...
- ▶ Many seeking to be creative experience disappointment and think to give-up - this is not the moment!
- ▶ If at first you do not succeed, do not try the same thing again...
- ▶ Think, evaluate, correct and modify and try again – creativity is an iterative process

# No 'failure' in being creative...

- ▶ Creating something of worth requires time – great scope for wrong turns
- ▶ While successful creative types (musicians, artists, scientists...) appear glamorous – the reality is they work tenaciously with self belief
- ▶ For many success is down to the second option – Plan B:
  - ▶ Shakespeare was an actor
  - ▶ Rolling Stones were a covers band
  - ▶ Leonardo marketed himself as an armaments designer

# No 'failure' in being creative...

- ▶ Pursuing a creative goal needs experimentation – treat 'life as a lab'
- ▶ Critical path: 'You've got to be in it to win it' – participation is vital
- ▶ Many of us can feel intimidated, possibly giving up too quickly – a failure of spirit
- ▶ Can be difficult to get started – sensing we do not have permission to test our talents; a failure of spirit
- ▶ Artists do not fail – they prevail

# Creativity requires curiosity: If necessity is mother of invention, curiosity is the father

10

- ▶ It is not possible to create something interesting unless you are interested in it – this can be seen clearly in photographic images
- ▶ Artists of all types are deeply engaged in their subjects – focused
- ▶ Passion, or enthusiasm, is the spur to curiosity – driving experiments and leading to realised concepts
- ▶ Achieving a concept is challenging but can chose this path at any stage of life
- ▶ Flippant ideas often weak – those conceived of knowledge and passion far more likely to have substance

# Creativity requires curiosity...

11

- ▶ Our imaginations produce concrete concepts when tasked to do so
- ▶ Creative integrity: if you do not take yourself seriously you cannot expect anyone else too!
  
- ▶ The seven elements of creativity:
  1. **Passion:** To be passionate about our creativity find a focus
  2. **Interest:** Have interest, eg achieving particular effects such as lighting
  3. **Curiosity:** Be driven by curiosity, eg understand how techniques & technology can be used to achieve different effects
  4. **Inspiration:** Find inspiration – a subject, an artist, a theme...
  5. **Experiment:** Play with techniques & technology
  6. **Innovation:** Using this understanding, find new applications
  7. **Realise the concept:** Applying all you have learned to deliver your concept – the challenging part...

# Artists Steal: 'There is nothing new under the sun'

12

- ▶ Creativity is disruptive, requiring new ideas
- ▶ Brainwaves happen - only when we prime our subconscious mind
- ▶ Creative ideas happen when we encourage the brain to combine at least two different ideas
- ▶ Unusual ideas come from mixing old & new to stimulate original ideas
- ▶ What is exciting: WE CAN ALL MAKE THESE CONNECTIONS

# Artists Steal...

- ▶ Some quotes:
  - ▶ Picasso – ‘Good artists copy, great artists steal’
  - ▶ Voltaire – ‘Originality is nothing but judicious imitation’
  - ▶ Newton – ‘If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’
- ▶ Copying requires no imagination
- ▶ Stealing is radically different: it is to possess and control development of the concept
- ▶ Picasso has often been stolen from, eg:
  - ▶ Henry Moore
  - ▶ Steve Jobs – ‘We have always been shameless about stealing good ideas’

# Artists Steal...

- ▶ Creativity is not about making additions, but about making reductions
- ▶ There is no such thing as a wholly original idea, but there are unique combinations
- ▶ The conscious & unconscious processes of being creative – editing, connecting and combining – takes time and cannot be forced
- ▶ Creative ideas feel like divine inspiration but come from instinct
- ▶ Creativity enforces destruction – unique combinations bring together two or more unconnected concepts; the rest is hard work

# Scepticism: Creativity isn't about what somebody else thinks; it's about what you think

15

- ▶ Scepticism is about asking questions to bring insight; this is not the same as cynicism which is destructive and premeditated
- ▶ Creativity starts with questioning – initial questions lead to more questions
- ▶ Final output often result of many questions – an iterative process
- ▶ Creativity is a call & response process in our heads
- ▶ Questions are often parked in our unconscious, and triggered by a random event delivering a fully formed answer

# Scepticism...

- ▶ To get technical for a moment: this form of open-enquiry is the Socratic method – assume nothing and question everything
- ▶ Having an idea is easy, having a good idea is challenging
- ▶ To paraphrase Socrates: 'The unexamined idea is not worth realising'
- ▶ Outcome of the Q&A process is a decision, requiring personal judgement – this can reveal there are no certain answers
- ▶ Hence apprehensions about publicly presenting new concepts – a sea of ambiguity

# Scepticism...

- ▶ There are gains as outcomes to the efforts invested – validated as conscious choices from Q&A investigations
- ▶ This gives substance to the concepts – thoughtfulness transmits
- ▶ Again the concept of less is more applies: Testing through Q&A allows the concept to be stripped back to the core elements, eliminating clutter
- ▶ Applying the Q&A process makes creativity manageable, bringing clarity and reducing complexity

# Think big and fine detail: 'There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept'

18

- ▶ Invest too much time in fine detail and you get lost; thinking only 'big picture' will not create or connect anything – the two have to work in tandem
- ▶ Very small details can radically change interpretation of an image
- ▶ The structure of the image should be made for the viewer - what is your message or storyline for them?
- ▶ Effective images are created around a preconceived plan – sometimes pondered for long periods

# Think big and fine detail...

19

- ▶ Process your images to support delivery of your planned concept, eg cropping... etc
- ▶ Your images should fit your style, the big picture with fine detail fitted to the framework
- ▶ Every image should have an entry point – a small, preconceived detail that catches the viewers eye, leading them into the wider image
- ▶ Any shift in the image's point of entry changes the viewer's reading of the image

# Think big and fine detail...

20

- ▶ Allow your thinking through the view finder – merge with the image you are trying to create
- ▶ The output image depends greatly on the thought given to the context and content before you lift the camera
- ▶ Creativity is like a game of chess: The best players can think several moves ahead while retaining sight of the immediate situation

# Creativity requires having a point of view: 'One eye sees, the other feels'

- ▶ Ask ten people to describe the same view; result: ten different descriptions
- ▶ Our judgements are formed from our experiences – our point of view is our signature
- ▶ Our idiosyncrasies are widely seen as weak points – when being creative our idiosyncrasies are our strength
- ▶ Point of view is not style – it is what you say; in creativity you're not a player unless you have something to say

# Creativity requires having a point of view...

22

- ▶ The key point is having something original to express – where many of us are challenged
- ▶ A proven method to overcome this creative block is to move – disruption activates the senses; hence why we're often more creative on holiday
- ▶ Once the block is lifted we discover new ways to express things – mundane aspects of life become potential sources of creative stimuli
- ▶ Being creative requires attention to prompts and placing trust in feelings and instincts – follow your instincts

# Creativity requires having a point of view...

23

- ▶ Opinion is what drives any of us to creativity – to make something exceptional and different
- ▶ If we want to be seen or heard we must have a point of view and something to say
- ▶ We're not robots – life is more exciting when you have an opinion

# Creativity needs courage: 'To create one's world in any of the arts takes courage'

24

- ▶ Creative courage is needed to express your ideas publicly, potentially to a hostile audience
- ▶ 'The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud'. (Coco Chanel)
- ▶ No one is keen on being seen as a fool in public – doubt is an instinctive reaction
- ▶ In creativity, succumbing to doubt can be a big sofa to hide behind – humility is a handbrake on our creativity, justifying chickening out

# Creativity needs courage...

25

- ▶ To create you have to take a leap of faith – place trust in your fellow man to judge you fairly
- ▶ Anyone seeking to explore new ideas must undertake to be daring
- ▶ The status quo is constantly shifting – the only constant is change! Seeking these changes creates creative opportunities
- ▶ ‘What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?’:  
Boring verging on pointless

# Pause for thought

- ▶ When artists finish they reflect on their work; turn from creator to critic
- ▶ Critically assess your images – small changes have a large impact on the viewers' interpretation
- ▶ Anyone can be creative – spend more time thinking than doing
- ▶ 'Art is not about itself but the attention we bring to it'

# So, the outcomes...

## ▶ 1. Creativity and 'failure'

- ▶ Being creative involves failing – this is needed to learn
- ▶ If at first you do not succeed, do not try the same thing again...
- ▶ Think, evaluate, correct and modify and try again – creativity is an iterative process

## ▶ 2. Curiosity

- ▶ It is not possible to create something interesting unless you are interested in it – this can be seen clearly in photographic images
- ▶ The seven core drivers:
  - ▶ Passion
  - ▶ Interest
  - ▶ Curiosity
  - ▶ Inspiration
  - ▶ Experimentation
  - ▶ Innovation
  - ▶ Realising the concept

# The outcomes...

## ▶ 3. Build on what is there – steal

- ▶ Creativity is disruptive, requiring new ideas
- ▶ ‘Good artists copy, great artists steal’ – take ownership of the concept and develop it for your own purposes

## ▶ 4. Be sceptical – not cynical

- ▶ Creativity starts with questioning – initial questions lead to more questions
- ▶ The Q&A process makes creativity manageable, bringing clarity and reducing complexity

## ▶ 5. Think **big** and **fine detail**

- ▶ Invest too much time in fine detail and you get lost; thinking only ‘big picture’ will not create or connect anything – the two have to work in tandem
- ▶ Final image depends greatly on the thought given to the context and content before you lift the camera

# The outcomes...

## ▶ 6. Have a point of view

- ▶ We all have different points of view, the foundation of our individual creativity
- ▶ Point of view is not style – it is what you say; in creativity you're not a player unless you have something to say

## ▶ 7. Take courage

- ▶ Creative courage is needed to express your ideas publicly
- ▶ 'What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?': Boring verging on pointless

## ▶ 8. Reflect on your images

- ▶ Critically assess your images – small changes have a large impact on the viewers' interpretation
- ▶ Anyone can be creative – spend more time thinking than doing