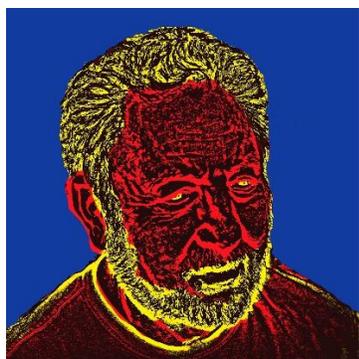


Meaning in Art - Aram Terzian response

First, I would like to thank David for writing such a thought-provoking essay. It is helping me get in better contact with my feelings as I engage in the art of amateur photography. I have taken many pictures over my lifetime, most of which were representations of what I was observing. However, as I dug deeper into photography, I started searching for a way to articulate a deeper narrative within the frame of a photograph. Sometimes the feelings emerged as I worked on the photographs in Photoshop. The self-portrait below started as an effort to put emotion in the self-portrait. As I went along with the effort, it occurred to me that I was engaging in a sociological commentary related to my feelings about branding skin color and the consequences for so doing. As I manipulated the unfinished product on the screen my objective was to meet a camera club requirement. But as I continued on the task, I pulled myself almost magically into an emotional experience of what I was viewing.



What I suddenly realized was that I created a composite man whose identity could not be insinuated by the color of his skin. He is every man; a black man, a brown man, a gay man, a transgender person, or any other type of man you wish him to be. I transformed my own image as I was working with it in Photoshop. I didn't invent it, I experienced it.

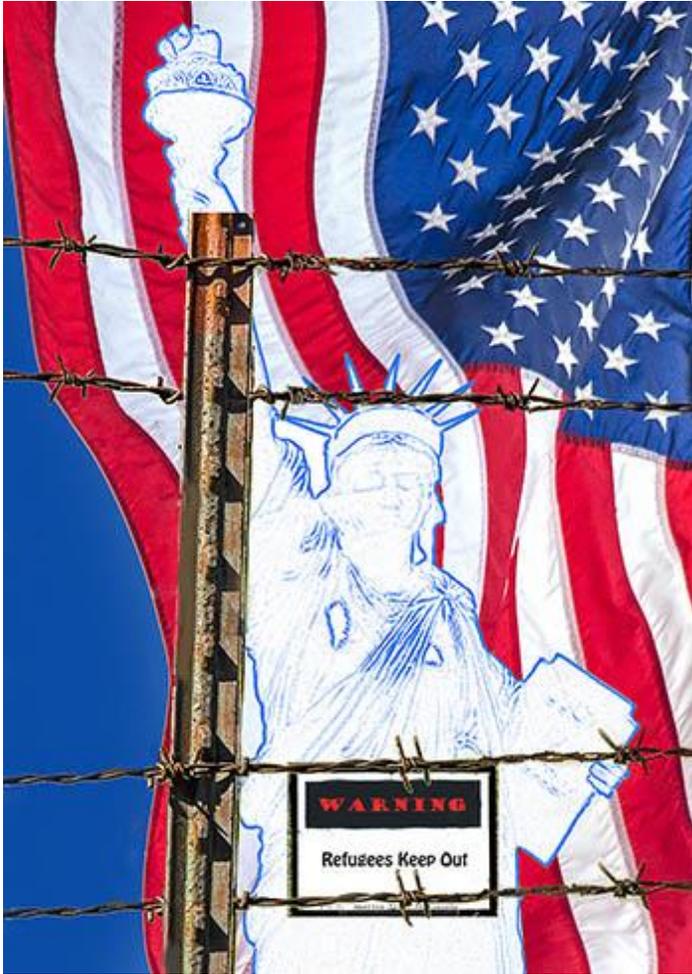
Moving away from the serendipitous experience emanating from the self-portrait, in another photograph I was trying to engage in abstract Expressionism to tell the emotional story of runners while watching the New York Marathon from a street corner in Brooklyn. My attempt to do so required that I move the camera in ways that set the runners in motion while keeping the background stable. This required taking a series of photographs. I was struck by David's words "So, in telling the story using musical devices in this way, Lloyd Webber and Rice are exploring the story by manipulating both the expressive intent of their characters and also the emotional response of the listener in a fundamental and very powerful way. This goes far beyond an expository telling of the story and gets into the visceral, very dynamic and, yes, subjective element of the affective." I, in fact, did intentionally manipulate the expressive intent of the runners as they struggled on their 26 mile journey. I was also seeking an emotional response from the viewer of my photograph. The expressiveness lies in the flow of bodies blurred by the movement of the camera with the fixed building in the background grounding the scene. Your eyes move from right to left with the runners.



Both in the photographs above, as in a drawing or work of art, much of the effort was the result of my using Photoshop as a medium to get to the emotional experience. Many times, the photographer can capture scenes that dig down into feelings without any manipulation. We all know famous photographs that do this.

David recommends that “we need to get beyond emotion. We need to delve more fundamentally into the idea of feelings.” To better understand the difference between emotions and feelings, I found a counseling website that help me. “Emotions mostly originate in the limbic system and the most primitive part of the brain. On the other hand, feelings come from the frontal lobe. In other words, feelings result from abstract thinking. But emotions are innate and genetically determined as a result of evolution. Likewise, although it seems weird, there is a maximum number of emotions we can have. However, there is no maximum number of feelings we can have.” (<https://exploringyourmind.com/three-differences-emotions-and-feelings/>)

David goes on to assert “a work of art potentially ha a great deal of power on many levels. The better the work is, the more carefully and skillfully crafted it is, the more power it has.... The power lies in the work itself as it interacts with the artist and, ultimately, with the individual consumer in real time.” As I reflect on what he is proposing, I thought about a composite photograph I have created (see below) that proved to be very controversial, eliciting a series of political feelings and presented to the camera club membership for review. My whole purpose in creating the photograph was to express my feelings about immigration policy. It was clear that each person viewing the photograph had a visceral emotional response. The piece then generated conversations involving the feelings of those viewers. David’s paper has enabled me to better understand the dynamics of what I was trying to accomplish and the depth of a piece of art and digging down to the feelings of the viewer.



One final observation. Quoting from David’s paper “Expository language, perhaps the single most important creation in all of human history, conveys information from one person to another in very effective and efficient ways. But it falls well short of being effective in adequately expressing the nuance and power of complex and dynamic feelings, which are the truly life-affirming aspect of the human experience. The information we may convey to another in an expository manner, as it is static and limited, falls short of the profundity of the associated feelings. In the view of artistry, expository language falls short of expressing dynamic truth or, frankly, of actually being true.”

I hope that others may address this assertion, especially those among you who are avid readers of fiction. Thanks again David for such a great job.