

What is Your Unique Voice?

To stand out as a modern photographer, you must assert your unique voice.

You were born different

We are all born with a unique voice. Nobody sounds exactly like one another.

It is your duty as a photographer and visual artist to know what your unique voice is, and to assert it, and to share it with others.

What does your voice sound like? How do you talk?

When you speak, your style of talking and communication is different from others. The tonal range in which you talk is unique. The cadence at which you talk is unique. When you are having a conversation with someone else, the way you verbally dance in the conversation (when to talk, when to listen, when to interrupt) is unique.

The same goes with your photographic and artistic vision.

Aesthetics

On a very basic note, you have to choose the aesthetics of your pictures –how they look.

What do you want your pictures to look like?

For example,

- **Black and White:** High contrast, low contrast, sepia, gritty and grainy, or smooth.
- **Color:** High saturation, low saturation, high contrast, low contrast, more pastel colors, film or digital, grainy or no grain.

If you are working on a certain photography project – what aesthetic will you choose?

Or in general –do you see the world in color, black and white, or something else?

There is no better or worse –you just gotta figure out what kind of aesthetic you prefer.

What is your aesthetic ‘taste’?

For example, ask yourself the question: “Do I know what kind of food I like?” Or are you that guy who never knows what he likes to eat?

Do you know what kind of music you like to listen to? Do you know what kind of design aesthetics you like?

You first must discover your personal aesthetics – what you visually like, your personal philosophy of seeing and interpreting the world, and what kind of visual images you like.

ERIC KIM AESTHETICS

Like JAY Z says, you must learn how to 'master your aesthetics' (your own aesthetics).

For example, this is ERIC KIM's aesthetics:

- **All black everything:** I prefer to wear all black, and have a simple wardrobe. I wear the same thing everyday like a zen monk (black shirt, black pants, black shoes). This helps me focus less on my clothes, and more on my artwork.
- **Wide-angle, close, and aggressive:** I am a quite aggressive and assertive person in real life (yet I am friendly). Therefore, I want my aesthetics in photography to be the same. In street photography I either use a 28mm on RICOH GR II or 35mm on Leica MP.
- **Flash:** I like to use a flash to add the aesthetic of gritty, raw, and edgy.
- **Dynamic Compositions:** I like to shoot head-on, from a low angle, and to tilt my camera (Dutch angle). I like to make my compositions uneasy.
- **Black and White pictures:** Ultimately I prefer monochrome over color, for the simplicity and minimalism, and the darker mood. I'm using high contrast, gritty, ERIC KIM MOMOCHROME 1600 preset in Lightroom to apply to the RAW files of my RICOH GR II.

- **Color pictures:** Color photography is fun, and something I'm experimenting more about and learning about. I also prefer a high saturated and contrast look in color.

Why is your voice important?

Because you're a unique individual. There can only be one of you in the world, and you must share your unique vision and voice.

In your personal branding and marketing language, write in a simple, straightforward, and non-pretentious way. Write in a relaxed, conversational tone. Even when I'm streaming my thoughts with you, there is no filter. It is raw, unedited, authentic, and real.

Authenticity

Honestly I don't think there is such a thing as 'good' or 'bad' art.

To me, **there is only authentic and inauthentic art.**

What that means is this,

Don't try to make pictures that aren't you.

For example if you're shy and prefer it that way – don't make aggressive pictures.

If you grew up in privilege, don't make pictures of poor people in Africa – to me that is inauthentic. Don't feel bad or guilty about it. Rather, **make better social commentary by documenting the rich, and make a stronger social critique** this way

(there is an over surplus of pictures of poor people, but very few pictures of very rich people).

Be you. Photograph yourself, and how you see and perceive the world.

If you're a happy and joyful person, don't photograph gritty black and white photos of people addicted to drugs, at nightclubs, etc. No need for you to 'prove yourself' like you need to be more 'hardcore' with your photos. Let the punks and hipsters shoot their own lifestyle.

Which gives me another idea for you:

Photograph your own lifestyle; not the lifestyle of others.

Don't get suckered by the exotic

A lot of photographers are like safari hunters and colonialists: they want to document the strange, the exotic, and foreign.

This is why a lot of us want to travel to India, Tokyo, and Paris and other foreign places— to document the lives and customs of 'others' or the 'different'— because anything different and novel to us is interesting.

However, my humble suggestion is:

Don't get suckered by the exotic (as my teacher Constantine Manos taught me). Photograph your own life.

Travel for fun, to see the world, and open your eyes to other customs. But ultimately my suggestion is don't be a 'travel photographer'. **Rather than photograph the foreign and exotic and different, photograph what is familiar, close, and known to**

you. Nobody will photograph your own town, family, friends, and community as well as you.

What makes you, you?

What is your unique voice, what is your own unique vision?

What makes you *you*?

Do you, Be you, and Shoot you.

BE BOLD,

ERIC