



Style, Vision, and Dynamic Forms

"The camera should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh."

Some things said are only true for as long as it takes to say them - or for as long as they take to contemplate. The quote above can not be the last word on photographic purpose. It is no less useful all the same. The key here is Weston's insistence that the camera records life. In reading his day books it is certain that the life he records is his own. His approach is to seek some connection with his subject that channels his energies. His subjects seem twisted into the most amazing spring-like shapes.

Each image presented here is highly distinctive, and yet clearly from the same eye. In the first (Excusado, 1925) the challenge to capture his "enamelled receptacle of extra-ordinary beauty" could so easily have been a simple, gross, exercise. Weston's treatment though is sublime. He returns to this image when examining his response to the Chambered Nautilus (1927) - stating in consideration of his response to the nautilus that "I was sure to have done my toilet, suggestion from outside or no!". By the time of this Nude (1936) Weston had stopped publishing his day books so his thought processes are not known in the same way. The folding of the limbs however is clearly reminiscent of the coiled nautilus. More importantly though, the obscured face helps enormously in transfiguring the image from a portrait to a study of form.

Weston's work is much broader than this discussion suggests, but the through-line expressed in these images – separated by some 11 years in execution – is undeniable. Certainly the same style and vision is evident in the treatments of the man-made, found organic, and human forms. The style is executed in its isolation of line and curve forms and in its luminescent quality. The vision is expressed in stark and clear representation as opposed to pictorial-esque, potentially 'tricksy', treatments.

My own selection learns equally from the aesthetic response to the environment, found object, or decisive moment. Here line and form and precise rendition coupled with careful tonal treatment are the order of the day. Not all images must follow this stricture, but it is an approach that helps the discovery process in the field. By seeking out an aesthetic response the whole 'visualisation' process inherits a guiding framework – a thing to look for, a very reason for seeing...

As one of the true masters of photography who had the courtesy to record the minutia of his thinking, it is perhaps only fair to let the last word here go to Edward Weston himself; albeit with the same caution given at the opening:



"I want the stark beauty that a lens can so exactly render presented without interference of artistic effect."