

This is a great article that puts into perspective the current and future of the DSLR. The bold text is my emphasis not his.

Enjoy,

John

By Kirk Tuck – He was in the Samsung Booth at PhotoPlus Expo.

I can profile the average camera buyer in the U.S. right now without looking at the numbers. The people driving the market are predominately over 50 years old and at least 90% of them are men. We're the ones at whom the retro design of the OMD series camera are aimed. We're the ones who remember when battleship Nikons and Canons were actually needed to get great shots and we're the ones who believe in the primacy of the still image as a wonderful means of communication and even art. **But we're a small part of the consumer economy now** and we're walking one path while the generations that are coming behind us are walking another path. And it's one we're willfully trying not to understand because we never want to admit that what we thought of as the "golden age of photography" is coming to an end as surely as the kingdom of Middle Earth fades away in the last book of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

At this Expo we worshipped at the altar of the same basic roster of speakers and presenters who've been speaking and presenting for the last ten years. We've closed the loop and the choice offered to younger photographers is to sit and listen to people old enough to be their grandmothers or grandfathers wax on about how we used to do it in the old days or to not come at all.

When I listen to lectures about how the market has changed what I hear from my generation is how to take the tools we programmed ourselves to love and try to apply them to our ideas of what might be popular with end users today. So we buy D4's and 1DSmkIV's to shoot video on giant Red Rock Micro rigs and we rush to buy Zeiss cinema lenses because we want the control and the idea of ultimate quality in our offerings while the stuff that the current generation is thinking about is more concerned with intimacy, immediacy and verisimilitude rather than "production value." To the new generations the **idea of veracity and authenticity always trumps metrics of low noise or high resolution**. And that need for perfection is our disconnection from the creative process, not theirs.

Our generation's fight with digital, early on, was to tame the high noise, the weird colors, the slow buffers and the old technology which saddled us with wildly inaccurate and tiny viewfinders and batteries that barely lasted through a sneeze. We pride ourselves on the mastery but the market moved on and now those parameters are taken for granted. Like turning on a television and assuming it will work. We are still staring at the technical landscape which rigidly disconnects us from the emotional interface of the craft. If we don't jump that shark then we're relegated to being like the photographer who makes those precious black and white landscapes which utilize every ounce of his PhotoShop skills but which, in the end, become works that are **devoid of any emotional context**. In fact, they are just endless revisions of work that Ansel Adams did better, and with more soul, fifty years ago. Technique as

schtick. Mastery for mastery's sake with no hook to pull in a new generation. Of course we like technically difficult work. It was hard for us to master all the processes a decade ago. Now it's a canned commodity, a pervasive reality, and what the market of smart and wired in kids are looking for is an **emotional connection with their images** that goes beyond the mechanical construct.

It's no longer enough to get something in focus, well exposed and color correct. It's no longer good enough to fix all the "flaws" in Photoshop. **What the important audience wants now is the narrative, the story, the "why" and not the "how." The love, not the schematic.**

So, what does this mean for the camera industry? It means that incremental improvements in quality no longer mean shit to a huge and restless younger market. They don't care if the image is 99% perfect if the content is exhilarating and captivating. No one cared if the Hobbit was available at 48 fps as long as the story was strong in 24 fps. No one cares if a landscape is perfect if there's a reason for the image of a landscape to exist. No one cares if a model is perfect if the model is beguiling.

What it really means for the camera industry is that the tools they offer the new generation must be more intuitively integrated and less about "ultimate." In this world a powerful camera that's small enough and light enough to go with you anywhere (phone or small camera) trumps the huge camera that may generate better billboards but the quality of which is irrelevant for web use and social media. The accessible camera trumps the one that needs a sherpa for transport and a banker for acquisition.

I look at the video industry and I see our generation drawn toward the ultimate production cameras. Cameras like the Red Epic or the Alexa. But I see the next generation making more intimate and compelling work with GH3's and Canon 5D2's and 3's. Or even cameras with less pedigrees. The cheaper cameras mean that today's younger film makers can pull the trigger on projects now instead of waiting for all the right stuff to line up.

If I ran one of the big camera companies I would forget the traditional practitioners and rush headlong toward the youth culture with offerings that allowed them to get to work now with the budgets they have. Ready to go out and shoot landscapes? Will a Nikon D800 really knock everyone's socks off compared to an Olympus OMD when you look at the images side by side on the web? No? Well, that's the litmus test. It's no longer the 16x20 gallery print because we don't support physical galleries any more.

So, there we were at the trade show and the majority of the attendees were guys wearing their photo jackets with a camera bag over one shoulder and a big "iron" on a strap over the other shoulder. And they had their most impressive lenses attached. And they walked through the crowd with pride because they were packing cool gear. And the pecking order of the old-cognescenti was: film Leica's, then digital Leica M's, followed by Mamiya 6 or 7 rangefinders, followed by Fuji Pro-1's, followed by big, pro Nikons or Canons and so on. While the few young people there zipped through the exhibits and **took notes of interesting products with their phones.**

Yes, some people will still use "ultimate" cameras to create "ultimately sharp and detailed" landscapes, cityscapes and artsy assemblages but their audiences will be constrained to other groups of aging practitioners. Art is a moving target. To understand the target requires a constant re-computation of the factors involved.

Cameras are and will get smaller and lighter. The lenses will get smaller and lighter and easier to carry around. The gear will get easier and easier to use. **And why shouldn't it?** The gear will get more and more connected. Maybe the cameras don't need to master the entire internet on their own but it will get easier and easier to move images from camera to phone or camera to tablet. And why shouldn't it get easier?