

## *A Rose by Any Other Name...*

*In which the author proves the mind of the engineer can coexist  
with the heart and soul of an artist...*

I look like a good photographer. With my large format camera, heavy wooden tripod and stylish multi-pocketed khaki photo vest I project the aura of competence. Looks are not deceiving. I can *photograph* like a good photographer. Exposure? I can place the correct Zone at ten paces. I can make filter corrections and account for reciprocity effects without counting on my fingers. Development? I am a wizard in the darkroom. N plus or N minus? Not a problem. I have tray developed 20 sheets of film without a scratch. Printing? Bring it on! Give me your worst negative. I can make a great print from it. Do you want a traditional or a digital print? I cherish the past, I embrace the future. I can print in platinum, silver or one of those fancy photo printers. Matting, Mounting? The nuns taught me fractions so well that I never mis-measure a window mat. My cuts are square, straight and true. I will even sign my name on the overmat (neatly, of course) with my trusty .5 mm HB pencil. I say this not to brag (well, OK, maybe a little) but only to establish my photographic skills and to contrast them with my, complete, total and absolute artistic failings.

I can make a beautiful photograph. Creating a beautiful title to accompany this photograph should be part of the process. If I had to create a good title to save my immortal soul, I would wind up with the "Go to hell. Go straight to hell. Do not Pass Go, do not collect \$200" card. This is my biggest photographic shortcoming. My titles are absolutely the worst. If I had to grade my photographic product on a scale of one to ten, it would be image nine, title minus three. It is this very flaw that keeps me from being represented by multiple galleries, having a huge show at MOMA and clean, fresh breath.

Seek out the great photographs. Their titles are worthy of the image. Frederick Evans had some incredibly beautiful titles to go with his platinum prints. "In Sure and Certain Hope" is a beautiful photograph with an inspiring title. You don't even have to look at the image to know how great it is because it has a great title. Creating a great title is an art that great photographers have managed to master. An exception to this might be Edward Weston. Shell #27, Pepper #30 and Nude #227 in no way convey the beauty of his photographs. He may be the greatest photographer of all time that could not title a photograph. We can say that great photographs have great titles. That is, until it comes to mine.

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Here is what I have to offer in terms of titles: "Door of the Guess House", "Church and Shadows", "White Fence" and of course there is the entire "Untitled" series. The last is my most popular genre, the latest image being "Untitled Series; #622." As you might infer, these less than inspiring titles don't have the cachet to make my works of art complete. How can a skilled photographer fail so miserably in naming his works? I am not prepared for a Faustian bargain, but it would make me very happy to be able to create a title that is worthy of the photograph.

In this quest for better titles, I have asked many colleagues for their opinions and advice on this subject. Most just shrugged their shoulders and smiled. One friend suggested that I just listen to the photograph tell me its name. Evidently, the photos I consulted were either named Harpo Marx or Marcel Marceau. Another respected fellow photographer told me to set up a display of my photos, sit down with a cup of tea, relax, and let the photograph describe itself to me. I did this one evening. Got a fresh pad of paper, sharpened up some pencils and put the photos across from the couch. Brewed myself a fresh, hot cup of tea, and sat down to let my artwork speak to me. I listened carefully. When I woke up the next morning, my wife had used my paper for the grocery list, the cat was drinking my tea and the photos were still untitled. In retrospect, I should have brewed the Earl Grey instead of "Nighty Night" herbal tea, but still, the photos did not jump up and tell me about themselves. It appears that the touchy feely, artistic, sensitive method of titling my photographs might not be "my cup of tea." What to do?

Even though I like to think I have the heart and soul of an artist, it is obvious (especially those that know me) that I have the mind (and education) of an engineer. My shirts are sorted and hang on appropriately colored plastic hangars. My black socks are folded differently than my blue socks. I approach life as a series of problems to be solved in some elegant fashion. Can you imagine the frustration visited upon my psyche by this insurmountable problem? Wait. Did I say insurmountable problem? Engineers live to solve such problems. I am now in familiar territory. The more sensitive of you may now tremble in terror, knowing that an engineer is running amok in the world of art.

Welcome to my world. Where the artist fails, the engineer prevails! We can now apply engineering methods to this artistic conundrum. The path to the solution is to gather data, analyze the results and determine the best solution to the problem. My photos will have great titles. Fame and fortune will soon follow. That's the theory anyway. My wife and I set off on a tour of art galleries, museums and festivals in search of artistic titles. We scoured the photographic books and magazines at home, copying titles of photographs into our master data repository. (Well, actually it was a pile of 3 x 5 index cards, but doesn't master data repository sound more high tech?) These title notes were then, analyzed relentlessly, studied assiduously and then categorized carefully.

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Our research and analysis led us to the conclusion that there are several basic types of titles. According to me, the types are Literal, Numeric, Horrible Pun/Wordplay, Quotation/Poetic, Adjectival/Allegorical and Suggestible/Metaphorical. Feel free to disagree with me when you write your own article, if you wish, but since this is my article, it would be nice if you would continue reading.

**Literal** – This is a common title category, and it merely states in words what the image looks like. Unless you have a very special image such as, “Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico” the photograph is not well served by this type of title. Descriptive titles can be a bit more obscure, such as when a picture of a flower, tree or animal is given its scientific name. Sometimes a date or a location can be added to the descriptive title to provide both a temporal as well as geographic location. This is the type of title you give your work when you are in a hurry, and need to put something on an entry form.

**Numeric** – This is the Edward Weston numbered image in a series title. This type of title serves to differentiate among similar photographs. Again, for the image to triumph over a lame title, the image must be heroic. Edward Weston could do it. I, and most likely you, (no offense meant) cannot do it.

**Horrible Pun/Wordplay** – A despicable method found only in the most desperate amateur efforts. I once saw a still life painting of a bowl of cherries, entitled “Life is...” Another example is four cats crossing a familiar street named “Tabby Road.” The most egregious example of this genre is a photograph of an agricultural processing facility, entitled, “Soy to the World.” Photographers that foist such horrible word play upon an unsuspecting public should have their artistic licenses revoked.

**Quotation/Poetic** – These types of titles are very similar. A famous quotation (are there any other kind?) is used as the title to the image. It is possible to use one or two words from the quote or have the rest of the quote inscribed on the overmat. Shakespeare is a popular source for this type of title.

**Adjectival/Allegorical** – This is the penultimate title category which includes most “collectible art.” This title uses a single word to tell the “story” of the art. Titles such as “Patience”, “Jubilation”, or “Deliberation” would be typical. They do not directly refer to the cat crouched by a mouse hole, dancing bunnies, or an old man thoughtfully smoking a pipe. *The key characteristic of this title is that the title provides a reference to what the work is about, but says nothing about what it looks like.* References to cultural or ancient traditions can also be included in this category. Titles such as “Princess of the Waters”, “Guardian of the Fire” or “Goddess of (fill in the blank) usually grace stylized nude figurines or collectible plates displayed in every well decorated double wide. While I may gently poke fun at such titles, they are very close to the perfect titles that I covet.

**Suggestible/Metaphorical** – The Holy Grail of artistic titles. One of these little jewels is a worthy title for any great photograph. The Suggestible/Metaphorical title improves upon the Allegorical Title in that it may only be related to the image at most in a tangential manner, *if at all*. It is an advantage if the title has no apparent relation to the work! The title may only hint at the emotions that the artist wishes to have the viewer experience. It may even go as far as doing this in some metaphorical way. My very first exposure to this type of title was a few years ago. I didn't understand its importance immediately, but with the passing of time, I can say this is the first perfect title I have experienced.

The title was "Truth without Regret." The title connects qualities and emotions in the presence of a work of art. Do they relate to one another? Yes. Can we articulate the relationship between the two? Possibly. Are you left pondering the connection between the two? Yes. Eureka! A perfect title! Based on our research, the perfect title seems to hinge on the use of two or three words. In a three-word title the first word is a quality or emotion, or possibly a description of another type of non-visual art. The second word connects the first and third word by establishing a relationship between them. The relationship does not have to be causal. It merely establishes that these two words are related. The third word is also a quality or emotion or a word that relates metaphorically to the first word in the title. It must be universally felt, but equally indescribable. It may also provide a contrast to the first word. Most importantly, the viewer's reaction must be, "Wow, I can't understand how the title relates to the photograph. That is so artistic."

The Metaphorical title is usually a two-word title. The first word is a universally known place or time. The second word is an activity relating to the first. "Winter Idyll" comes to mind. It also comes to mind that it was a late career image for Edward Weston. "Pure succotash. They will go to the Museum of Modern Art Show" (Daybook, March 3, 1945). By that time, Weston figured out that a snazzy title helps the photograph. "Winter Idyll" went to MOMA. We should all be so lucky. But I digress. "Sunset Wanderings", "Winter Journey", "Autumn Repose" are other examples of metaphorical titles.

Having established the parameters of artistic titles, we must ask the question, "How to create such titles?" The masters of photography were learned in the arts, classically educated and inspired by music, literature, poetry and drama. Because they did not have the cultural advantages of Reality Television Shows, Talk Radio and the Internet they actually performed music, wrote poetry and acted in plays as forms of recreation. What do we have today that these great artists of the past did not have? The answer, my friends, is very simple. We have technology. Advanced technology. The same technology that created video games, instant messaging and search engines can create artistic titles for photographs. Rather than spend the time studying the photographs and contemplating the appropriate word combinations to create titles technology can automate this function through a simple computer program. We can do this because we discovered suggestible/metaphorical titles have little relationship with the subject of the photograph. By selecting an appropriate assortment of words, this simple computer program can quickly

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generate a dazzling array of artistic titles. The photographer can then pick titles for the photographs without regard of when the images were (or even will be) made. Separating the creation and the naming of the photograph is a more efficient method of completing artwork. We engineers call this a process improvement.

Through a combination of dedicated, thorough research, ingenious programming techniques and blind luck I was able to categorize, synthesize and simulate artistic words to title photographic masterpieces. The demon spawn from this shotgun wedding of art and technology is the BrainStorm Titler (affectionately named the BS Titler by our crack development staff). Employing the methods and components of successful art titles discovered by the author, the BS Titler creates artistic titles that will astound your fellow photographers, amaze your friends and win your photographs "best in show" ribbons at prestigious local art fairs. (Results may vary based on the quality of your photographs.)

I can share with you some of the first fruits of the BS Titler. Among the first titles created are: "Meditation on Light", "Peaceful First Light", and "Someplace to be Welcome." Compare these efforts, to "Door of the Guess House", "Church and Shadows" and "White Fence". Titles created using the *ART-O-MATIC* technology are artistically superior to the titles created without the technology. Now "Door of the Guess House" has been re-christened "Meditation on Light", "Church and Shadows" is now "Peaceful First Light" and "White Fence" is now "Memories of Forgotten Years." I am moved to tears by the beauty of these photographs. Changing the titles of these photographs does make them more beautiful. The artistic application of technology solves the seemingly insurmountable problem of creatively naming photographs. Photographers worldwide will benefit from this advance.

While I am nearly delirious about the introduction of the BS Titler, the ultimate field test still awaits. I would love to hear a real honest to goodness ultra hip, dressed all-in-black, tiny (fake) eyeglassed Post Modern Art Critic from New York City deconstruct my photographic titles. These people know exactly what to say when they see a great photograph. I do not. Is not being able to critique a photograph a personal failing, or is this a common problem among my fellow photographers? Compare your ten most likely critiques I would make about your photograph.

1. How did you keep the dew on that spider web?
2. Wow. What lens/camera/film/tripod/cable release/developer/paper did you use?
3. Where did you get that pink pebbled surface mat board?
4. Whoa. What a bod! How did you get him/her to do that in public?
5. When did you photograph Yosemite/Point Lobos/Bodie/Slot Canyons?
6. Oh my, a classic Zone VIII building photograph.
7. If that photograph were bigger and in color, it would really look nice in our family room.

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8. I like that photograph. Do you photograph weddings/children/pets?
9. Do they still make black and white film?
10. What type of Photo printer do you make that picture with?

My critiques are very bad. Worse than the titles that I used to give my photographs before I invented the BS Titler. My critiques are so bad, that to avoid the public embarrassment of spouting some banal drivel I fold my arms across my chest nod, and quietly say “Hmmm, hmmm.” Unfortunately, this has given me a reputation as a thoughtful, insightful critic. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am nowhere near that good. As far as critique goes, I am of the Brett Weston School of critique. I look at the photos and make two piles. One is good. The other is crap. Most photos fall in the latter category, few in the former. I do this quickly, too. Maybe it is because I am an engineer. Maybe it is because I am a visual snob. I have yet to come to a definitive answer on this topic. I know my technique needs improvement.

“How can I improve my critique?” is a common question among photographers I know. One of the best tools for critical commentary came from a LensWork Workshop where a document entitled; “The Instant Art Critique Generator” (IACG) was distributed to the participants. The alleged source of this clever concept was Jerry Uelsmann. The IACG supplied a selection of phrases that could be combined to create a “Critical Response to the Art Product”, or CRAP for short. We amused ourselves at the workshop with a number of CRAPs that we created from this paper. Like most workshop materials, this information was stored and almost forgotten. While testing the BS Titler, I uncovered the IACG under a pile of paper. Here, I thought, was an absolutely can’t miss extension of the BS Titler technology. This inspiration came from the old engineering rule, “If your only tool is a hammer, everything you build will be nailed together.”

Our crack software development staff went back to work immediately to create this millennium’s version of The Instant Art Critique Generator. Inspired by the chance discovery of the IACG they worked right through the morning’s first coffee break. During performance testing of the IACG the pretentiousness ratio (measured by dividing the number of syllables per CRAP by the clarity of thought index) was positively astronomical. Not only was the quality evident in the CRAP we found, but the amount of CRAP produced was equally astounding. Calculations indicate that 100,000 (no mistake there, friends, one hundred thousand) individual CRAPs can be created. This is a load of CRAP, probably enough to write at least one MFA thesis on photography. This tool is so powerful we may have to restrict the distribution of this software to Fine Art Photographers (an “academic version” for MFA candidates is currently under development).

Let me illustrate the power of the IACG using the recently renamed photograph, “Peaceful First Light.” This is a quality image because the BS Titler created the title. Without the IACG, your first comment on this image would be, “That’s a nice photograph. What lens did you use?” Then you slink away, knowing

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that your critique was no match for such an artistically rich image. If you had the IACG at your disposal, how your life would change. You could fold your arms across your chest, nod several times and then look the photographer in the eye and solemnly say, "It's difficult to enter into this work because the disjunctive perturbation of the biomorphic form seems very disturbing in light of a participation in the critical dialogue of the next millennium". Then you can slowly walk away, knowing that the photographer will spend at least half an hour trying to figure out if he has been either grossly insulted or if he is the artistic successor to Ansel Adams. With the IACG at your command, you will never be at a loss for words during a critique. Does this CRAP work? It has been successfully field tested at the University Level. If it can baffle Professors of Art, think what it can do to the common photographer.

I am now a triple threat photographer. I can make a great photograph, create an artistic title, and explain the significance of the photograph with mind numbing pretentious verbosity. Now, not only do I look like a good photographer, I can sound like a Fine Art Photography Critic. The photographer part of me is now happy. The engineer part of me is happy, too. Using art and technology, elegant pain free solutions to two unsolvable problems are now available to photographers. The world is now a better place for photographers, I can still hope to exhibit photographs at MOMA, be represented by multiple galleries, and have clean, fresh breath.