



Be Great In Little Things

~ S. Francis Xavier

“*Globalization*” has become one of the accepted economic and cultural colloquialisms of our current era. It’s defined as “the operation or planning of economic and foreign policy on a global basis.”

A 2019 course offering by the Levin Institute at SUNY (Globalization 101), however, presented an intriguing observation: “While global economy is the most discussed and debated aspect of globalization, its cultural aspects are the least noticed and appreciated.”

Why intriguing? Current events have now brought an explosive awareness of not only the economic aspect but the previously *unnoticed and unappreciated* impact on health and social aspects of U.S. interests.

And again, the SUNY course offering goes on to state: “Observers of globalization are increasingly recognizing that globalization is having a significant impact on matters such as local cultures, matters which are less tangible and hard to quantify ...”

So what does this have to do with photography – with particular emphasis on nature and landscape specialties? Well, in order to illustrate my hypothesis as it pertains to photography, I'll again refer to a statement from the course: "In ... those wealthy nations (like the U.S.) that have embraced globalization and most fully lowered trade barriers to agricultural products--small farmers have found it increasingly difficult to compete with food imports."

Let me paraphrase the foregoing: "The largest international manufacturers of photo equipment – Canon, Nikon, Sony, Fuji – whose marketing departments inherently embrace globalization, have made it increasingly difficult for domestic photographers to compete in most photo competitions due to the apparent corporate preferential enthusiasm for international (that is, non-domestic) exotic and/or iconic images, in service of glamorizing the globalist zeitgeist."

In other words, globe-trotting and athletically gifted, hiking, mountain-climbing photographers with generous travel budgets, as well as the indigenous residents of those exotic and iconic locales are most compatible with and sought after by the globalist mindset. The domestic exceptions to the foregoing are those photographers similarly positioned to visit the national parks and picturesque coastal enclaves of the U.S.

But in the observable pecking order they are at best, second tier, with few exceptions.

It should be obvious that this is not an ad-hominem castigation of those individual photographers who are able to capitalize on the globalization zeitgeist, but rather a deep concern that the globalization phenomenon is having an intangible yet covertly deleterious impact on the perceived valuation of our cultural heritage in the U.S. and abroad.

The barrage of dramatic images featuring iconic rural European landscapes, vast alien mountain or coastal ranges, virtually inaccessible densely forested enclaves, as well as spectacular waterfalls, is indeed often breathtaking – albeit ephemeral. As aesthetically enticing subjects as they may be, they are most often pictures OF rather than ABOUT. Nonetheless, with each volley, the value of the less reflexively palpable artifacts of the domestic culture recede further into the shadows of these prodigious monoliths, if not gravestones to heritage.

And perhaps too often, as witnessed in the growing body of YouTube videos, they are touted as assumptive testaments to the international photographer's creative and compositional prowess.

Given that the foregoing rings true, the question begged is, "Where is the silver-lined cloud?" The answer is that there is a growing awareness that our investment in globalization is not returning rainbows and Unicorns. We are finding that the inexpensive light fixture at the big box store comes with a hidden, and potentially lethal, price tag. YouTube viewers are finding that the enchanting tutelage of the internationalist is unlikely to replicate the drama of the foreign visage when assiduously applied to captured images of their local landscape – furthering the mystique. As our awareness of the impact upon our financial and physical well-being grows, it is reasonable to expect that there will be a corresponding retreat from our previous infatuation with most things foreign into the more accessible allure of our domestic, cultural, comfort zone.

Can domestic photographers engender a rebirth of regionalism?

Instead of the heady wonders of exotic honeypots and nearby visitor/photographer-clogged monuments, might we grow more ready to revisit the hearty familiarity of our personal stories?

Will we come to find fascination in the creative energy invested in the modest cairns found at the edge of a cornfield?



Might we experience a little palpitation when viewing the intimate capture of an equestrian dad and daughter pausing to catch the sunset?



What story might unfold from an image of two country cowgirls cooling their horses while ambling down a gravel road in late summer?



Can an image of a modest roadside sale once again evoke a thousand words?



As we retreat from global views of the big blue marble generated from the orbiting International Space Station, can we zoom in on flyover country, rural communities, or urban parks?

Is it possible for us to celebrate and enjoy the capture of a rural sunset that we can physically experience at little or no expense, with the same enthusiasm as viewing an exotic image from an international locale that we are unlikely to ever visit?



As photographers standing in the shadows of regionalist canvas artists such as Norman Rockwell, Grant Wood, Andrew Wyeth, Claude Monet, and innovative photo artists such as Edward Weston, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Frank, Eliot Porter, and more recently Guy Tal, can we visualize how we might once again **Be Great In Little Things**?

Consider the possibilities: Claude Monet spent most of his last three decades painting images from his garden; Edward Weston gained world renown with *Pepper No. 30*; Guy Tal has enlightened us in word and photo that artful seeing is *about* experiencing *More Than A Rock*. Now, it's up to us to bring our world back home. Americana!

~ Gerald (Jerry) Rowles, Ph.D.

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