



Contact Sheet, Bolivian Altiplano, 2009

# Voice

## visualisation is tightly coupled to style

A photograph often tells us more about how we saw the scene rather than how the scene actually was.

This is called your own style or 'voice'.

I've been shooting for a long time. When I look back at my earlier work, it is clear that I had a style and with hindsight it's easy for me to see that I was on a path. I had direction and I have been progressing with my own style all the time.

I bring this up, because style has a lot to do with how we visualise the final image.

You may feel you don't have a style yet. I only suggest this because I've met many participants on my workshops who claim not to have found their style or voice yet. This may be true, but often the truth is that you do have a style, but you just haven't acknowledged it yet.

If you have built up a collection of images, I would imagine like most beginners they are not collected into defined groups. I would suggest you get your best images together into one pile and study them. If all your images are on a computer, then collect all the best ones into one folder.

Begin by looking for images that have similar properties, that 'feel' as though they belong to each other. There will be good images that you feel don't fit with anything else. There will also be good images that are perhaps much better than the rest. Be hard on yourself. Whittle down the good images so you are left with the very best ones. What you are left with illustrates your style at this present moment in your photography. It should be noted that your style is always developing, changing.

A lot of photographers have never spent time looking at their own work. They do not understand why their best images work so well.

In my own case, it was only when I came to put my web site together that I had to go through my images deciding which ones I could face presenting to the public and which ones I could not. Once I had filtered down the images my

style became more evident. I hadn't been aware of it before this point. I'd just been haphazardly making images and storing them on a hard drive for years.

Being aware of your style has several benefits. It allows you to recognise your strengths and it also allows you to recognise where you want to develop as a photographer. That's why I think 'voice' is a good word for style, because it is calling, showing you the way forward.

Knowing your way forward fuels your own sense of vision. If you know what it is you want to do with your photography, then you have a better idea of how you want to convey that in the final scene at the point of capture.

I'm aware that through my own workshops, I have to explain myself all the time. I have to explain why I choose certain compositions over others and why I wanted to shoot a particular scene over another. This reflection has made me a stronger, better photographer. My sense of self has become more defined, and that in itself has fed back into how I visualise scenes.

Further to this, consider the contact sheet on the opposite page. I feel that the images conveyed in this contact sheet belong as a group. They sit well together. When I'm out making images, I'm aware that I am creating a body of work. It seems that style has breadth. It not only affects the vision I have for each image I produce, but it also affects the vision I have for the entire body of work I create of a particular location.

Visualisation it seems, is indeed tightly coupled to style.