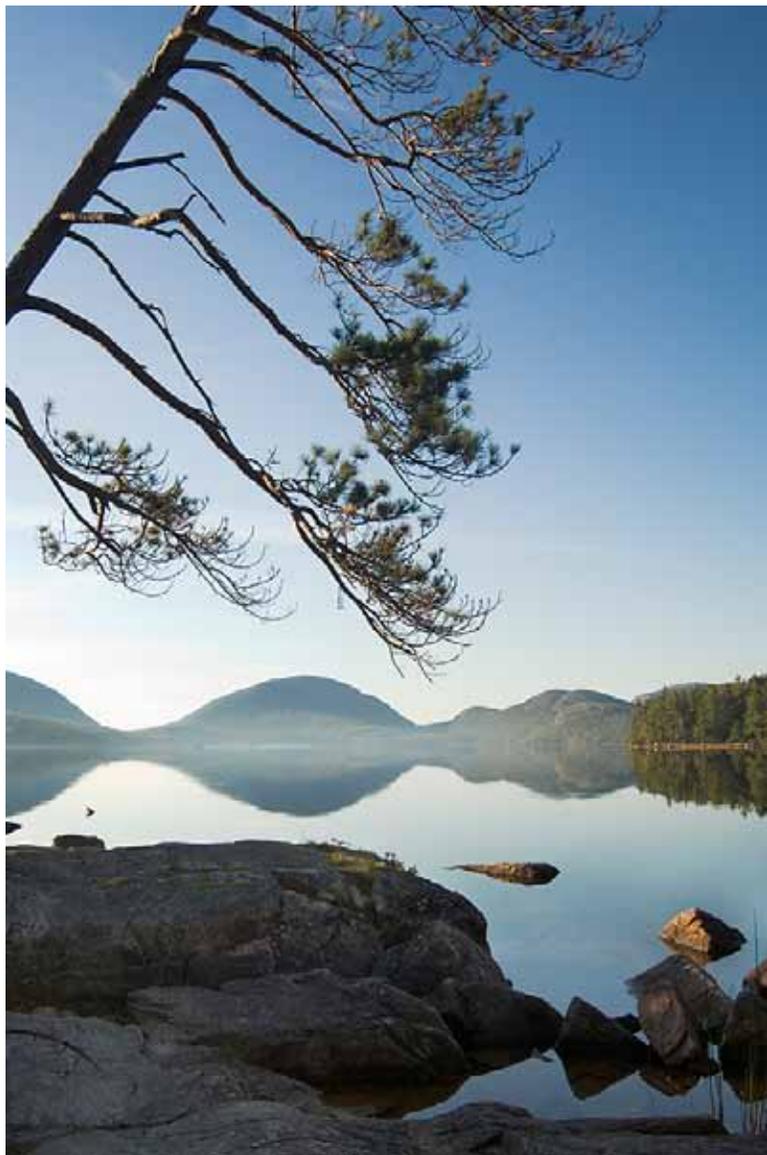


Capturing Yourself in Your Photography

by Photographer Raymond Klass



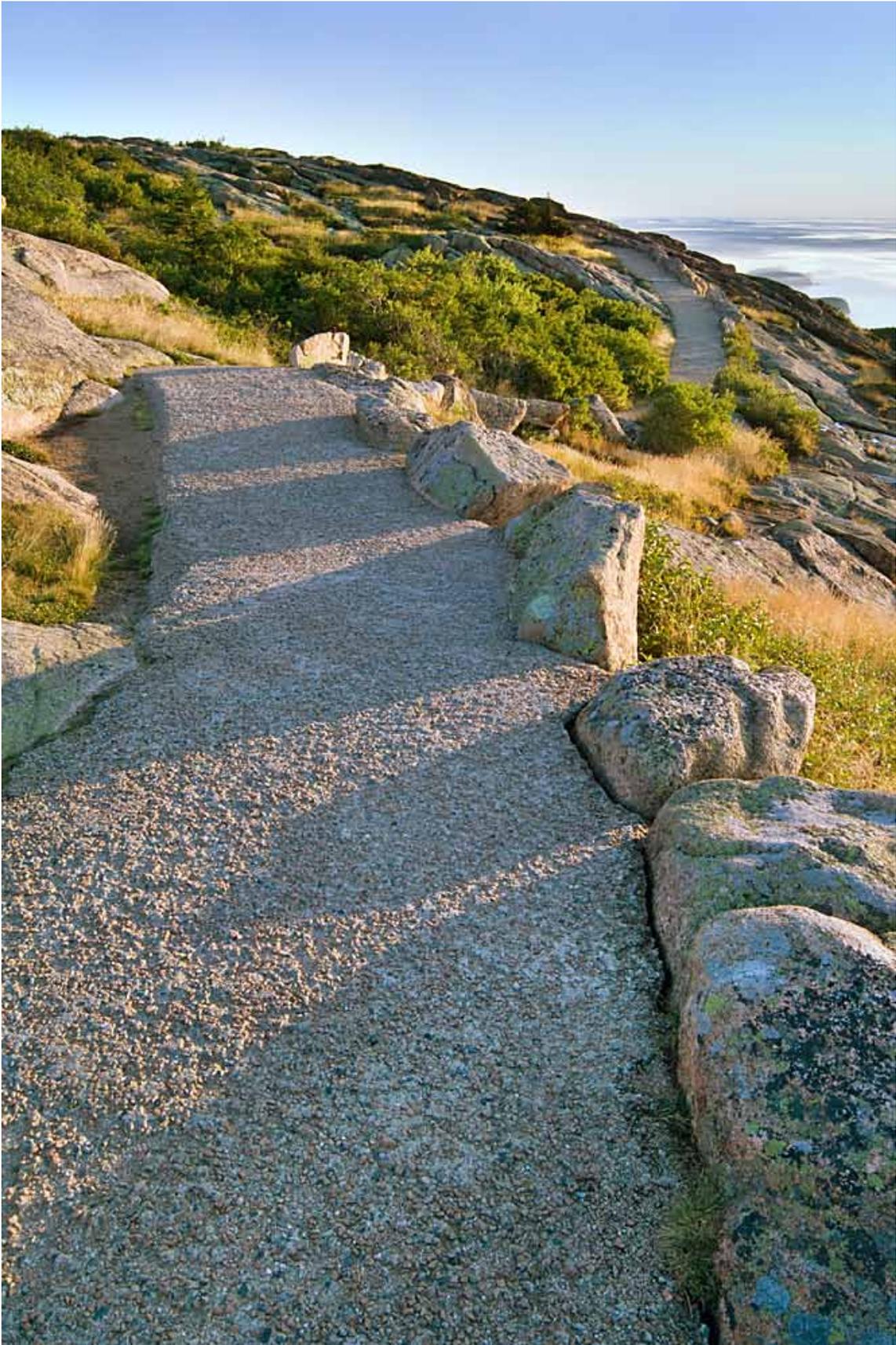
Ansel Adams once said, "There are always two people in every picture: the photographer and the viewer." We as photographers often concentrate on how our image will be perceived, whether our composition is pleasing, or if the subject fits the particular guidelines of a publication or contest, but rarely do we give thought to whether the subject and theme of the photograph speaks to our individual experience. We need to remember that be it intentional or not, every image makes a statement both about the subject in front of the lens and the photographer behind it.

Often what first attracts us to begin photographing a particular scene is a certain aesthetic or characteristic of the subject. Though one could argue whether the decision to stop is a conscious or sub-conscious one, there's something in that very decision that brings the photographer into the image. After all, it is what motivates one photographer to choose one subject, while another might choose something entirely different. Just think about how ridiculous it would be to just photograph anything – to point the camera and click without composing, without choosing.

In every image we produce there is a part of us, of our values, beliefs, and life experience. It is in the subjects we choose to photograph, the way

we choose to represent them, and in those we choose to leave out. If you're thinking that embracing this idea means the task of creating an image becomes absolutely monumental – you're wrong. It might seem at first that I'm advocating you ponder the meaning of life itself before you click the shutter. I'm proposing just the opposite – that many of the beliefs and values influential in your photography are ingrained in your subconscious.







Often when I'm walking down a trail with my camera, I'll feel a certain attraction to one subject or another. It's as if that beautiful tree or blanket of bright green moss is pulling me towards it. If you stop and think about the situation, it almost seems ridiculous to pass by what is such an obvious subject – but it's only an obvious subject because its aesthetics align with my beliefs, values, and experience. For another photographer, that tree or moss might be the furthest thing from attractive. There's nothing inherently beautiful or interesting about any subject, rather it's our job as artists to share with others the aspects of our own beliefs, values, and life-experience that make the subject so obviously attractive to us. We do this by utilizing our photographic tools to create an image that speaks both about the subject, and about our connection to it.

The truly wonderful part of being a photographer is that it provides the opportunity to embrace a uniquely individual approach and aesthetic. The greatest thing you can do as an artist is to truly represent yourself – to bring your personal beliefs, values, and past experiences into the art you create.

All too often success is measured based on abstract guidelines set by others. This can be good – we all expect our car to pass the crash test standards, and we all expect our homes are built to withstand heavy storms. The problem with this standards approach in the creative arena is that it often can be stifling to one's personal expression. Just think what would happen if every photograph had to follow the rule of thirds or include subjects in sets of 3. When these compositional concepts become standards, photography becomes more about conforming to abstract rules and less about representing your personal vision.

It has become all too common for photographers to repress their personal aesthetic for what they view as more acceptable. After all, the “safe image” is the one you’ve already seen published in a magazine – the one that you know will be received well. Fellow photographer Nancy Rotenberg often uses a quote by Helen Keller to represent just this point, “Life is either a daring adventure, or it is nothing”. That “safe image” is far from safe – it is in fact, the furthest from bringing your personal beliefs, values, and experiences into your image.

As actress Eliza Dushku first said, “Go big or go home. Because it’s true. What do you have to lose?”. The key here is that while the risk for being an individual is far greater, so is the reward. Truly successful images say something both about the subject in front of the lens and the photographer behind it. This can only happen when you embrace your unique perspective, for in art the only truth is that every individual has a valid and valuable message to share. You can only share your message by allowing your art to truly represent yourself.

