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Hints on Art. (Chapter IV.)
in: Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art
London 1889
S. 254-259

HINTS ON ART.

As practical hints for working cannot be woven into a continuous text, we will give them separately.

Never compete for prizes for “set subjects,” for work of this kind leads to working from preconceived ideas, and therefore to conventionality, false sentiment, and vulgarity.

Remember that the original state of the minds of uneducated men is vulgar, you now know why vulgar and commonplace works please the majority. Therefore, educate your mind, and fight the hydra-headed monster – vulgarity. Seize on any aspect of nature that pleases you and try and interpret it, and ignore – as nature ignores – all childish rules, such as that the lens should work only when the sun shines or when no wind blows.

Æolus is the breath of life of landscape.

The chief merit of most photographs is their diagrammatic [sic!] accuracy, as it is their chief vice.

Avoid the counsels of pseudo-scientific photographers in art matters, as they have avoided the study of art.

If you decide on taking a picture, let nothing stop you, even should you have to stand by your tripod for a day.

Do not climb a mast, or sit on the weathercock of a steeple, to photograph a landscape; remember no one will follow you up there to get your point of sight.

Do not talk of Rembrandt pictures, there was but one Rembrandt. Light your pictures as best you can and call them your own.

Do not call yourself an “artist-photographer” and make “artist-painters” and “artist-sculptors” laugh; call yourself a photographer and wait for artists to call you brother.

Remember why nearly all portrait photographs are so unlike the people they represent – because the portrait lens as often used gives false drawing of the planes and false tonality, and then, comes along the retoucher to put on the first part of the uniform, and he is followed by the vignetter and burnisher who complete the disguise.

The amount of a landscape to be included in a picture is far more difficult to determine than the amount of oxidizer or alkali to be used in the developer.

Pay no heed to the average photographer's remarks upon "flat" and "weak" negatives. Probably he is flat, weak, stale and unprofitable; your negative may be first-rate, and probably is if he does not approve of it.

Do not allow bad wood-cutters and second-rate processmongers to produce libels of your work.

Be broad and simple.

Work hard and have faith in nature's teachings.

Remember there is one moment in the year when each particular landscape looks at its best, try and secure it at that moment.

Do not put off doing a coveted picture until another year, for next year the scene will look very different. You will never be able twice to get exactly the same thing.

Vulgarity astonishes, produces a sensation; refinement attracts by delicacy and charm and must be sought out. Vulgarity obtrudes itself, refinement is unobtrusive and requires the introduction of education.

Art is not legerdemain; much "instantaneous" work is but jugglery.

Though many painters and sculptors talk glibly of "going in for photography," you will find that very few of them can ever make a picture by photography; they lack the science, technical knowledge, and above all, the practice. Most people think they can play tennis, shoot, write novels, and photograph as well as any other person – until they try.

Be true to yourself and individuality will show itself in your work.

Do not be caught by the sensational in nature, as coarse red-faced sunset, a garrulous waterfall, or a fifteen thousand foot mountain.

Avoid prettiness – the word looks much like pettiness – and there is but little difference between them.

No one should take up photography who is not content to work hard and study so that he can take pictures for his own eye only. The artist works to record the beauties of nature, the bagman works to please the public, or for filthy lucre, or for metal medals.

At the University of Cambridge, in our student days, it was considered "bad form" to give a testimonial to a tradesman for publication. This is still "bad form;" let the student, therefore, never let his name appear in the advertisement columns of photographic papers beneath a puff of some maker's plates or some printing papers. "Good wine needs no bush."

The value of a picture is not proportionate to the trouble and expense it costs to obtain it, but to the poetry that it contains.

Good art only appeals to the highly cultivated at the first glance, but it gradually grows on the

uncultivated or the half cultivated; with bad art the case is otherwise.

Give the *life* of the model in a portrait, not his bearing towards you during *a mauvais quart d'heure*.

Do not call reflections – shadows; learn to distinguish between the two.

Always be on the look-out for a graceful movement when you are conversing with a person, thus you will learn.

Keep rigidly within the limits of your medium, do not strive for the impossible, and so miss the possible.

Never judge of the merits of a painting or piece of sculpture from reproductions.

Every good work has “quality.”

Do not mistake sentimentality for sentiment, and sentiment for poetry.

Spontaneity is the life of a picture.

Continual failure is a road to success – if you have the strength to go on.

The color of a landscape viewed in the direction of the sun is almost unseen; therefore turn your back on the sun if you wish to see nature’s coloring, and you do!

Do not emulate the producers of photographic Christmas cards and “artistic” (?) opals; they are all worthy of the bagman.

Do not mistake sharpness for truth, and burnish for finish.

The charm of nature lies in her mystery and poetry, but no doubt she is never mysterious to a donkey.

It is not the apparatus that chooses the picture, but the *man* who wields it.

Say as much as you can, with as little material as you can.

Flatter no man, but spare not generous praise to really good work.

Lash the insincere and petty *homunculi* who are working for vanity.

Hold up to scorn every coxcomb who paints “artistphotographer” or “artist” on his door, or stamps it on his mounts.

Remember every photograph you publish goes out for better, for worse, to raise you up or pull you down; do not be in haste, therefore, to give yourself over to the enemy.

By the envy, lying and slandering of the weak, ignorant, and the vicious, shall you know you are succeeding, as well as by the sympathy and praise of the just, the generous, and the masters.

When a critic has nothing to tell you save that your pictures are not sharp, be certain he is not very sharp and knows nothing at all about it.

Don't be led away to photograph *bourgeois* furnished interiors, they are not worth the silver on the plate for the pleasure they will give when done.

The greater the work the simpler it looks and the easier it seems to do or to imitate, but it is not so.

Photographic pictures may have one merit which no other pictures can ever have, they can be relied upon as historical records.

Art is not to be found by touring to Egypt, China, or Peru; if you cannot find it at your own door, you will never find it.

People are educated to admire nature through pictures.

Science destroys or builds up, and seeks only for bald truth. Art seeks to give a truthful impression of some beautiful phenomenon or poetic fact, and destroys all that interferes with her purpose.

Topography is the registration of bald facts about a place; it is sometimes confounded with art.

The artistic faculty develops only with culture. A man may be a Newton and at the same time never get beyond the chromographic stage in art.

Without individuality there can be no individual art, but remember that the value of the individuality depends on the man, for all the poetry is in nature, but different individuals see different amounts of it.

Had Constable listened to rules we might have had "fiddle-brown" trees in our pictures to-day [sic!].

Nature is full of surprises and subtleties, which give quality to a work, thus a truthful impression of her is never to be found in any but naturalistic works.

The undeveloped artistic faculty delights in glossy and showy objects and in brightly colored things. The appreciation of delicate tonality in monochrome or color is the result of high development. The frugivorous ape loves bright color, and so does the young person of "culture," and the negress of the West Indies, but Corot delighted only in true and harmonious coloring.

Nature whispers all her great secrets to the sane in mind, just as she delights in giving her best physical prizes to the sane in body. Nature abhors busy insanity.

Do not be surprised if you find "stolen bits" of your photographs in the works of inferior etchers,

aquarellists, and black and white draughtsmen; it pays them to steal, while it does not hurt you, for they cannot steal your “quality.”

Many photographers think they are photographing nature when they are only caricaturing her.

The sun when near the horizon gives longer shadows than when near the zenith.

When writers tell you photography is one thing and art another, find out who they are, and you shall find their opinion on art-matters is contemptible, and it is only their omniscient impudence and fanaticism that allow them to contradict a sculptor like Adam Salomon, and a painter like T. F. Goodall, to say nothing of others.

The shallow public like “clearness,” they like to see the veins in the grass-blade and the scales on the butterfly's wing, for does it not remind them of the powerful vision of their periscopic ancestors – the Saurians.

When the vulgar herd jape at photography, stand firm and ask them if their long-eared ancestors did not jape at water-color painting and at etching.

Ask of critics only “fair play.” Much of the criticism of to-day [sic!] consists in the suppression of the truth of the author and the advocacy of the falsity of the critic. Criticism is as yet in the metaphysical stage, but it will one day become rational and of some worth. Then, critics will not attempt the huge joke of “placing” people in order like a pedagogue, e.g. Matthew Arnold between Gray and Wordsworth, as some wonderful person did not long ago in one of the reviews; but criticism will show us how works of art may serve to illustrate the life-history of different epochs. The huge farce of “placing” criticism will be one of the stock jokes of the twentieth century.