



Johnson, Vermont



Whitney Spur Rail Trail-1



Whitney Spur Rail Trail

JOHN GREINER-FERRIS

became compulsive and obsessive about shooting images like these. I thought I'd shoot a few more, then move on, but I continued shooting into the winter (and I continue to shoot them to this day.) The first thing I noticed was that, while New England is known for its brilliant fall colors, the woods also turn very silvery. And after much contemplation, I finally came to the conclusion that this project was my attempt to find beauty and order in chaos, which is what I'm seeing so much of in the world right now. These images are supposed to be pretty. In an ugly world, sometimes I feel all I can do is show some beauty that exists.

These images are completely unromanticized. They're not abstracted. They are what they are: color and line and shape and texture and tone and light and shadow. They are not intended for National Geographic or a calendar of images called Backroad Visions.

johngreinerferrisstudio.com

jgreinerferris@gmail.com

What do you think is your purpose in society as an artist?

I don't know if it's my purpose, some might argue differently, some might argue that I'm simply a contrarian, but this is what I do: In all of my work, visual or written, I try to raise more questions than I answer. I want people to be active participants in my art. Actually, I don't even try anymore; it's not conscious that that's what I do. Now, I intuitively raise questions and leave things unanswered. With my images, I don't care to answer question like, What did this particular place or person look like on this particular day? That's been done, and continues today. That's fine. Others can do that. All my life I've been the one who questions things, sometimes much to the chagrin of my teachers or others around me. Why can't you just accept things the way they are? they'd wondered. But I think the purpose of the artist is to continually push the boundaries of whatever it is they do. Some of us go to school to learn our craft—I did—and for certain people I think that's the right thing to do. Learn the rules, but I think where the majority of schools fail is they stop with learning the rules. I think they should teach the rules with the explicit understanding that we're learning them so we can break them.

Describe to us your work in three words.

Question. Seek. Show.

What inspired you to do what you are doing?

The fear of boredom. The intense desire not to be like everyone else. The intense fear that I'm "normal". The feeling that if I'm not constantly pushing the constraints of the art form, whether it's visually or written that I'm not utilizing my talents, that I'm wasting them.

I know I see and think differently from the mainstream, and I'm arrogant enough to believe that my unique perspective on life, on this thing we call reality, is valid and should be heard and seen. And I think my purpose in photography is to push continually against the accepted notion of what constitutes a "good" picture. Now with smart phones, anyone can take a "pretty" picture, a picture that is exposed properly and maybe is even interesting thanks to some presets. So my question is, what's next? What can we as image makers do to show the rest of the world what the world looks like visually. Right now I've gone completely back to basics. I do everything inside the camera, using Lightroom to very slightly tweak the exposure just a tiny bit. I know it's a response to the overly Photoshopped images we see so much of.

Would you agree to the typical thought of the majority that "artists are indecisive"? Why or why not?

I would definitely disagree with that. I think every artist I know or have met, of every stripe—painters, photographers, sculptors, writers, actors—are very focused.

Sometimes they might lose focus or change direction and then it may seem like they're indecisive, or that they don't know what they're doing. But once they settle on another story or play to write, another series of paintings to make, another series of photographs to shoot, another trajectory, they regain the focus. Artists are some of the most driven people I've ever met.

What do you think is the contribution of art to society? Would you say that it is essential? Why so?

I certainly do think it is essential, but being essential is not always the issue. I know artists who simply like making art and they do it because that's what they do. They're not trying to right a social injustice or even make money. They're only happy when they're mixing colors and spreading them out on paper or stacking stones on top of one another to bring something new into the world. But I think the answer to this question intersects with the other question below, asking what society would be like without art. At its very basic level, art simply gives another perspective, another viewpoint, something else to respond to. There was a newspaper report of the bombing of Guernica, and then there was Picasso's painting. There were stories about the AIDS epidemic, and then there was the play and later the film, *Angels in America*. I think it's ludicrous that the journalistic account of something is deemed more factual or reliable than an artistic approach to the same subject. News outlets have their agenda and reporters have their bias. I think it's neglectful when we exclude artists' responses to anything, whether it's the climate crisis or some singular human experience like birth of a child or the death of a parent is ignoring an integral side of life.



Black Pond Road

Have you ever felt that you have lost inspiration in creating? If you did, what did you do to get inspiration back?

It happens all of the time. It takes time to get it back and through experience you know that you'll eventually find your way back as any creative-minded person eventually will as long as you stay true to your own personal vision of the truth. You just have to have the confidence that your subconscious is working on the problem and it's going to take time. In the meantime, I take long walks on the beach or in the woods, take short and long trips just for a change of scenery, scour books, movies, museums, investigate my old work and make forays into new ground no matter how odd or stupid it seems, if it's the right season I work in the garden. But it's a miserable spot to be in if you're an artist and I hate to say it but generally when I'm going through it I make life miserable for my loved ones until I figure out what I'm doing.

What do you think would the world be if art did not exist?

I think it would be an ugly, dangerous place and unfortunately I think we're seeing just a bit of what it might be like today in our socio/political arena. It's the reason I've been making the images that you see here. I was looking for order in a scene that at first glance looks totally chaotic. But I think what we're seeing today, politically and socially, is partially a result of the arts getting pushed aside, not getting funded, being either ignored or even denigrated as something frivolous. Of course it's important to learn science, technology, mathematics, and business but I think in the Western world we have always neglected our more spiritual side and I think we're doing it even more and we're paying the price.

What is your favorite part of being an artist? And what do you hate the most (if there is)?

My favorite part is when I'm really working well, I'm just so happy. When I'm making headway with a project I'm happy because I'm being me and I'm doing what I feel I was put in the world to do, that I'm alive and living. There's a feeling, a rush, that can't be duplicated any other way. What I hate the most is the financial insecurity that comes with the artistic life, that so much of my family's livelihood is dependent on my wife going to a job that provides a steady income that doesn't fulfill her. I wish we valued and compensated artists better.

If you could live all over again, would you still choose to be an artist? Why do you think so?

I would still choose to be an artist but then again at least this time around I don't think I had much choice in the matter. It's what I am, it's how I was made; I don't feel I had a choice in the matter. I read a saying once, If you think being an artist is hard, try not being one. At least in this life, it's all I know and it's all I know how to do. I've had jobs where I had to wear a tie, cut my hair and cut off my beard, act a certain way to fit in for the money, and I was miserable. But as far as an actual choice goes, I recently was talking to a cousin who is just graduating high school and even though he has an interest in art, even though he has talent, even though his mother is encouraging him to pursue a career in art even for a little while to see what happens, he's choosing to study business—marketing!—because of the insecurity of an artist's life. It will be interesting to see how this plays out, if when he's in his forties he has regrets but has forged a life that won't allow for a serious pursuit of the arts and at best he'll be a dilettante. I would like to see a world where it is conceivable for people to actually choose a career in the arts and actually make a living.



Fort Hill 1