

Mark Coggins

Artist Statement

Although my serious interest in photography began with a multi-year immersion in large format film photography where I took mostly landscapes and still lifes with a heavy 4×5 view camera, I have evolved into a street photographer who relies on a lightweight digital rangefinder. In spite of the near 180-degree reversal in equipment, medium and subject, I believe the training in large format has given me a deeper appreciation of composition, depth of field and exposure that is quite beneficial in making my images.

In deciding where to aim my camera, I look for groups of people interacting or engaged in a common activity, rather than individual subjects. As a photographer who has also published seven novels, I am perhaps drawn to tableaux that hint at a story.

The desire to tell a story may also influence my style: I like sharply focused images with a full tonal range pulling detail into the shadows. Almost all my work is black and white with a colder toning. These choices echo the approach of documentary filmmakers and photojournalists looking to capture a scene in detail without the distraction of color.

Both the desire to tell a story and the urge to tell it with a clean, crisp image might be best summed up in the quote “f/8 and be there,” attributed to famous New York photojournalist and street photographer Arthur “Weegee” Fellig. f/8 as a f-stop setting suggests good depth of field and sufficient exposure for a sharp image, and “being there” implies putting oneself in the right place at the right time to capture a compelling interaction.

Whatever my subject and style choices, I hope my photographs convey the energy, communal bonds, and in some cases, inherent mystery and alienation of urban life.