

Then You'll Know What I Know

Dan Hardison

Photographer Anne Wetzel has said she is frequently asked by people “how do I see what I see” and “how do I know what to look for?” Her answer is simple, “I just do”.

We all know that an artist sees the world around us in a slightly different way, something Leonardo da Vinci described as “knowing how” to see. But how do you teach or even explain this way of seeing to others? This is something all art instructors must try to convey to their students.

One can possess great technical skills to create art, but still fail to capture a scene or a thought. The artist must learn to go beyond the technical aspect of creating art and develop a “feel” for creating art. The same can be said for music. There is more to being a musician or singer than just playing the notes or singing the words – one must also know how to bring “feeling” to the music.

There are many things in life that we must learn to do, but being able to perform the technical aspect of the task does not guarantee that we will be good at it or even enjoy doing it. Many people enjoy fishing because they find it relaxing. However, if you have ever tried casting, you know that it is not a simple task. It is one that requires practice to develop a “feel” for it. And if you learned to drive a manual shift car, you know that it is more than just a matter of knowing how, but also developing a “feel” for shifting the gears.

So, what is this “feel” for doing something? It is the mental state at which a person no longer consciously thinks about a task, but merely does it. Moreover, is this not true about everything we do as we go about our daily lives? What often seems a difficult task can be accomplished with a bit of practice and patience – and developing a “feel” for it. Our lives today have become so hectic, are we losing our ability for concentration, for contemplation, for developing a “feel” for how things are done?

When Scottish singer/songwriter Dougie MacLean wrote of his experience trying to learn to use a scythe – the age-old tool with a long handle and a curved blade for cutting grass and grain by hand – he captured his father’s instructions with these words:

*O this is not a thing to learn inside a day
Stand closely by me and I'll try to show the way
You've got to hold it right
feel the distance to the ground
Move with a touch so light
until it's rhythm you have found
Then you'll know what I know*

Still Water

Airlie Gardens - Wilmington, North Carolina
Photo by Dan Hardison

