

The following essay was written in May 2000. It was written an introduction to a show I curated about Emmet Gowin, and his joint roll as photographer and educator. The show was exhibited in the Fosdick-Nelson Gallery at the School of Art and Design, NYSCC at Alfred University. This essay was used in the catalog printed by the school.

It wasn't long after I discovered photography myself that I found one of Emmet Gowin's books. Photography was still new to me, and full of all the pleasure and magic a new love always holds. Looking at Emmet's pictures, I saw them to be full of beauty and fear, peace and confusion, pictures that represented something of the incredible mystery of life. In his pictures, I found that all of the thrill and mystery I first found in photography – the mechanical wonder of making images – replicated the mystery of the world, and I had just tapped a way of experiencing them. Since that first time with Emmet's images, I've repeatedly returned to them over the past years for inspiration.

When Alfred first approached me with the opportunity to curate a show for the Fosdick-Nelson Gallery, I thought of trying to do something to pay homage to images that have always meant so much to me, so I immediately thought of Emmet. While studying from my M.F.A. at the Massachusetts College of Art, I worked with many people – both classmates and teachers – who at one time studied under Emmet. Each of them spoke as highly of his presence as a teacher as they did of his photographs. So, as I thought of ways to honor and show Emmet's work, I thought perhaps it would be best to make a tribute to his influence, and gather a group of photographs whom at one time were students of his. By doing so, I hoped to show something of an influence and interest of my own, but also to learn something of how Emmet influenced others. As I approached photographers with this show, each of them responded with incredible enthusiasm, and was eager to participate in a show that honored Emmet's influence on their work. Each of the photographers repeated some of the things I learned from my classmates and teachers; that Emmet's presence as a teacher held the same charisma and power as his photographs.

As a young teacher, this project has proven to be an incredible learning experience. By contacting a fairly large group of artists, representing an equally broad range of experience and maturity, I've learned much about the craft of teaching, and how I would like to be regarded as a teacher myself. The photographers here all told me stories of Emmet's craft of teaching, and many of the things they spoke of are now things that I try to consider as I start fostering my own relationships with my students. I've learned that being a teacher and being an artist are in many ways on in the same; both are about an acute desire to learn, and to understand and appreciate the world. As a teacher, I'm privileged to be with other young artists eager to find a new way of discovering and recording their own experiences, and I hope to forever remain a student of the energy they bring to their pursuits.

The exchanges I've had with Emmet in staging this project have remained true to the stories some of the contributing photographers have related to me. Emmet has always seemed open to all my ideas, and ready to engage in a meaningful discussion of them.

He has always received me with good nature, good humor and a certain wisdom that has encouraged me in many ways, both in the classroom and in the studio.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the people who made this show possible. First, thanks to The New York State College of Ceramics for giving me the opportunity to work on this project, and to Sharon McConnell for all her help. Also, thanks to all the contributing photographers, without whom there would be no show. A special thanks to Laura McPhee for encouraging this project from the beginning, and also to Virginia Beahan and Andrew Moore for their help in tracking down many of these photographers. Lastly, a thanks to Emmet for making so many inspiration pictures, and also for giving me a small introduction to the favors he has shared with so many of his students.

Brian Arnold
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