

Aesthetic considerations are based on technical considerations

Geoffrey James – Clip 13

Photographers tend to talk about gear because all aesthetic considerations are based on technical considerations. So the tools that you use really inflect the work. And my history is pretty....it's a little bit eccentric in that, the first camera I used was a roll filled camera, Rolleiflex...a square camera with twin lenses. And then I bought a little 35mm reflex camera and then I bought a Leica and that was probably the first fifteen years, walked around with those cameras. And then at a certain point in the late seventies somebody gave me a camera that was ...it was problematical, it looked like a shoebox, it was from the 1920's, made by Kodak. And it was radically different from conventional photography in that the film is on a curve, on an arc and the image is formed by a slot moving past the film so that it approximates the turning of a head. And it was this camera that allowed me to, I think, find my voice in photography. It just seemed absolutely right. It really more closely approximates human vision and being in a place because you have 145 degrees, the kind of visual field that your eyes give you anyway. And so that's when I really started and decided to be a photographer. That was my sole camera.

The only problem was that nobody made film for it. So I had to cut film in the dark out of big sheets and put them in boxes and in order to make a picture I had to put the camera into a changing bag with the boxes and tape the film in place. And the camera had no exposure controls and no real view finder...this very, very primitive machine that taught me a lot about how to make a picture. And it taught me to be very slow. If I made ten pictures a day I was really sweating. So it was quite a strange way to work, completely anachronistic but it seemed to work in relation to the subject I was working on.