Resources for Metaphors in Photography

The dictionary definition of a metaphor is:

: a word or phrase for one thing that is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar, or

: an object, activity, or idea that is used as a symbol of something else.

Metaphors create a scene that describes how we feel. They use the imagination and the senses.

Examples – drowning in a sea of grief, a broken heart, you're the apple of my eye, she has a bubbly personality. Still waters run deep.

Metaphors almost always say something that isn't literally true, i.e. There's an elephant in the room.

Metaphors that use the words “like” or “as” are similes. They make comparisons, i.e. Strong as a tree. Similes make you think more than feel.

**Photographers**

[Alfred Stieglitz](#) – Cloud Equivalents (short video)

[Minor White](#) on Equivalence

[Aaron Siskind](#) – Abstract Photographer
Quotes

“A metaphor is not language, it is an idea expressed by language, an idea that in its turn functions as a symbol to express something.” – Susanne Langer, The Difference between Metaphors and Symbols

“A metaphor is an image that suggests something else. For instance, if I say to a person, "You are a nut," I'm not suggesting that I think the person is literally a nut. "Nut" is a metaphor.” ~ Joseph Campbell, in conversation with Bill Moyers, What is Metaphor?

“Your psychological vision or “mind’s eye” (symbolic and metaphorical vision) is your ability to reinterpret, de-literalize and reframe the world around you in the most imaginatively meaningful, mindful, and autobiographical ways possible.” ~ John Kosmopoulos, Silver Zen Photography, The 5 C's of Photographic Vision

“Visual metaphors are rarely as direct as verbal metaphors. Visual metaphors may be recognized consciously, but if they’re present, they are always felt.” ~ John Paul Caponigro, Visual Metaphors

Links

What is Metaphor? - Joseph Campbell

The Art of the Metaphor – a TED Ed video with Jane Hirshfield

A Guide to Using Photography as Metaphor in Graphic Design – The Creative Edge

The Structure of Photographic Metaphor – Met Museum

Phil Dougis gives examples of writing about your photographs as metaphors or symbols.

Visual Metaphors – John Paul Caponigro

Thoughts on Equivalence and Contemplative Photography – Kim Manley Ort

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