

## #1 October 2012 *Cameraderie* Edward Weston (1886-1958)

"To clearly express my feeling for life with photographic beauty, present objectively the texture, rhythm, form in nature, without subterfuge or evasion in technique or spirit, to record the quintessence of the object or element before my lens, rather than an interpretation, a superficial phase, or passing mood--this is my way in photography. It is not an easy way."  
--Edward Weston

Of all the great photographers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Edward Weston resonates the most strongly with me. As I re-read his ubiquitously quoted photographic creed, I understand that it is also my own. Hence my fondness for his work.

Weston covered a wide range of photographic subjects. He was a successful studio portrait photographer as a young man. He photographed natural subjects, nudes, landscapes. He used large format cameras and natural lighting. In 1932 Weston joined other prominent photographers to found *Group f/64* together with Ansel Adams, Imogen Cunningham, and others.

Perhaps his most famous single image was his *Green Pepper No. 30*, often simply referred to as *Green Pepper*. You can view it on the Weston Family Website at this link:

<http://www.edward-weston.com/>

Weston made this shot, after many other pepper shots, by placing the pepper in a tin funnel that reflected the available light to illuminate the shape of the pepper. His exposure time was six minutes. I cannot express what is special about this iconic image, except to re-quote Weston: "record the quintessence of the object." With this and other still life studies, Weston created an entire genre of vegetable photographs, lasting until today. Photographers (including Weston) even took photographs of nudes that resemble green peppers—such is the impact of this one image.

First of all, there is the *roundness*! The foreparts are near, the back lobes are far, every bulbous shape enters into a spiral dance of ins and outs and curves.

Weston uses the full range of tones from pure white highlights to pure black. He is not afraid for his pepper to emerge from inky black (thank you, Rembrandt).

The large-format camera notes the imperfections of the pepper. It is a living thing, and it will soon rot and disintegrate.

The pepper is, of course, very carefully chosen to suggest universal shapes: a human body, a fist, the dynamism of slow or even explosive growth.

The frame is full of the pepper. Weston leaves no room for context. We see only the "quintessential" pepper.

According to Weston, all of this is seen in the eye of the photographer, because as he says, the camera only records what the photographer sees. I am a little skeptical of this particular claim (not original to me), but nevertheless, his eye and camera produce more than just a record of vegetable.

Weston makes clear in many of his writings that he seeks to go beyond the image, to convey his own excitement at what he is seeing, and to express a deeper sense within the image. Look at this image, however long you choose, and you will keep on seeing more and more in it, until at last you may even glimpse the infinite or the divine.