The Battle of the Brains: Right vs Left

Every spring my wife asks me if I want to return to Kalamoir Regional Park to photograph the Arrowleaf Balsamroot flowers in full bloom. Too often I quietly think to myself “Same old, same old” but in fact each time I go back, there is always a new perspective that seems to present itself and I am never, ever disappointed."

This year I began shooting only yards from the parking lot on one of the winding lower trails that parallels the shoreline of Okanagan Lake here in the interior of British Columbia. As I looked through the camera’s viewfinder, thoughts such as: Do I need to darken the shot a bit with some under-exposure? What White Balance would make the shot look more appealing? Is my ISO set nice and low? Should I use manual focus or just let the AF mechanism focus for me? came to mind. The list was long and with each question I quietly arrived at a setup solution that seemed to fit.

After I had answered this necessary half dozen or so questions, I peeked through the viewfinder anew and my mind seemed to wander away into thoughts of what it was that engaged me about what I was seeing. Something inside me clicked and I snapped a frame and then moved on to a second subtle variation... and so on and so on, clicking off frames in the belief that each unique composition had somehow resonated in its own uniquely creative way.

As so often happens, a nagging feeling that I hadn’t set something (in this case it was my AF mode) compelled me to stop in my tracks and confirm it. AF-S set? Good!

I then moved on and began to look for new subjects, new compositions and new adventures in creativity.
This left brain right brain flip-flopping was something I had not previously consciously thought about. It was indeed curious how the mind could go back and forth seamlessly between the two hemispheres of the brain.

*Get as much of your left brain work out of the way early in the game.*

Do as much of your camera setup as you can early on in a session. Read my blog on working like a pilot and scanning your settings on your LCD or Control Panel and making sure to also set longer-term items through the menus*. Establishing most of the baseline settings will free up your creative side to then take over without worry that you’ve not addressed something technical.

*Believe 100% that you too have a creative side.*

While I can’t guarantee that we can all move into right brain mode just at a click of the fingers, my personal experience, drawn from years of teaching portrait drawing, tells me that with sufficient effort and the right attitude, everyone has the capacity to develop their creative, right-brain skills.

*Understand what both left and right brain modes bring to the overall creative process.*

Let's face it there are quite a few variables that will affect how successfully you capture what you intended to. Some are left-brain (technical) and some are right brain (creative) and you absolutely need each in equal measures. Both modes are needed but they rarely work at the same time, at least not in my experience.
Unfortunately (or fortunately) when you switch from one mode to the other it can be without warning and without any conscious thought or effort on your part. My best suggestion is to work alone and without time constraints. While it’s easy to get into left brain mode (let's face it, we spend most of our waking hours in it) it isn't that easy to get into right brain mode so give yourself some help by following my suggestions.

Don't worry, you won't suddenly wake up at midnight in the middle of the forest! At least I never have.

* I'm referring here to my blog *Think and Work Like a Pilot: The Need to Scan Your Settings*

Tom Cooper is a member in good standing of Professional Photographers of Canada. For a decade he taught digital cameras, digital photography, digital photo-editing and digital file management at Okanagan College's Kelowna, BC campus. He currently teaches the Digital Photography Certificate Program at Red Deer College, Red Deer, Alberta. Tom and his wife reside in Kelowna, BC, Canada

© 2018 by T. W. Cooper All images and blog content are the property of the author. All rights reserved.