

ENSŌ



Brooks Jensen

A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication

Funny thing about art — how we connect so deeply with things that others pass by without noticing. I've watched people in museums stare at a painting for the longest time, and I have no idea what fascinates them so much. Try as I might, I just can't form a connection. Art, like beauty I suppose, is in the eye of the beholder.

As an artmaker, the inverse of this is also true. Sometimes I'm completely captivated by some photograph I've made that others find totally uninteresting. In my youth, I was bothered that the connection I sought with them had failed so completely. But, when I started making folios — sets of a dozen or so prints exploring a theme — I would hear back from people about which image of the set they liked best. There was never a consensus — and *never* an image *unselected*.

It's almost as if *people are different* — not surprising, but a liberating revelation.

This image (on the next page) from my abstract work is one of my personal favorites. Most people don't connect to it like I do. Such is life. In thinking about this more, however, I've come to realize that my love of Zen art is influencing me in ways that it simply won't influence others without that experience. In Zen art, there is a character that is drawn by many called an *ensō*. It's a simple circle that demonstrates, in ink, the Master's enlightenment. It is the manifestation of power, confidence, understanding, unhesitating engagement with life. In a simple circle, we can see the movement of the Master's arm, hand, and brush. *Ensō* are treasured almost above all other Zen paintings. I have no doubt that my love of *ensō* influences how I responded to that bit of graffiti when producing my photograph.



Enso, Zen Master Bankei (1622-1693)



In photography, we cannot see the arm, hand, or brush as we can in a Zen painting. Nonetheless, the mark of the photographer is there. Photographers make choices; they manipulate machines and materials to create an image that may deviate considerably from the original. To photographers, this is obvious and simply the “tools of the trade;” to non-photographers, such dancing with materials may be perfectly invisible — in fact, it’s *supposed* to be.

Nonetheless, just for fun (and to illustrate the point), here is the original of the above image, captured by my digital camera, in color, in its correct orientation. Below is a wider view of the WWI cement bunker at Fort Worden where I found this marvelous bit of potential. In fact, in this room can be found the original of 22 of my abstracts photographs from this project.





Brooks Jensen is a fine-art photographer, publisher, workshop teacher, and writer. In his personal work he specializes in small prints, hand-made artist's books, and digital media publications.

He and his wife (Maureen Gallagher) are the owners, co-founders, editors, and publishers of the award winning *LensWork*, one of today's most respected and important periodicals in fine art photography. With subscribers in 73 countries, Brooks' impact on fine art photography is truly world-wide. His long-running podcasts on art and photography are heard over the Internet by thousands every day. All 900+ podcasts are available at [LensWork Online](#), the LensWork membership website. LensWork Publishing is also at the leading edge in multimedia and digital media publishing with *LensWork Extended* — a PDF based, media-rich expanded version of the magazine.

Brooks is the author of seven best-selling books about photography and creativity: *Letting Go of the Camera* (2004); *The Creative Life in Photography* (2013); *Single Exposures* (4 books in a series, random observations on art, photography and creativity); and *Looking at Images* (2014); as well as a photography monograph, *Made of Steel* (2012). His next book will be *Those Who Inspire Me (And Why)*. A free monthly compilation of of this image journal, [Kokoro](#), is available for download.

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