

# FREEDOM



*Some thoughts after reading  
The Gulag Archipelago  
by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J Brooks Jensen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

*A Brooks Jensen Arts Publication*



**Mixing art and politics** is dangerous business, but I would be foolish to ignore the connection between *freedom* and my creative life.

Western democracy is under attack — from outside, and from within. It has become fashionable in recent years for artists in certain circles to bash Western culture and even democracy itself. I cannot agree. As an artmaker, I value freedom too much to take it for granted. Freedom is the cornerstone of my art life. Any survey of the history of the planet, shows that the vast majority of those who have *ever* lived have done so under tyranny, oppression, domination, or even slavery. Without freedom, everything is lost.

**Because I am free,** I can create any artwork I chose.

**Because I am free,** I can distribute my artwork any way and anywhere I choose.

**Because I am free,** I can publish my artwork via a book, a website, or any medium I chose.

**Because I am free,** I can connect with people all over the world and both share my artwork, and enjoy theirs.

**Because I am free,** I can pursue my art life without the necessity of requiring permission from anyone or any authority.

**Because I am free,** I can travel and make photographs without restrictions. Well, *almost* without restrictions.

**Because I am free,** I can acquire any tools, relationships, or services I need to create my artwork without asking anyone for approval or a license to do so.

**Because I am free,** I can read anything, study anything, learn anything, and grow in any direction I choose.

**Because I am free,** I can create without fear that my artwork might offend some governmental restrictions that could land me in trouble or even imprisonment.

I celebrate Freedom,  
and am thankful to be an American,  
free to pursue my art without limits.







Let me be precise: I am not proud to be an American because of any blind *birth-place* fidelity; I am not proud to be an American because of some jingoistic, nationalist loyalty. I am proud to be an America because it is the greatest country in the history of the planet — the *freeist* country in the history of the planet — the only one founded on the idea of individual freedom and limited government. It is the only country in the history of the planet founded on liberty, freedom for each individual, and the rights of its citizens rather than its rulers. I celebrate the democracy of America and her principles. I simply cannot understand any artist who would not treasure the freedoms that make their art life possible.

The freedom of Western democracy is not perfect, but nothing — not even art — ever is. In the words of Winston Churchill, one of freedom's greatest defenders, "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the *worst* form of government — *except all those other forms* that have been tried from time to time." All of us who are blessed with Freedom would do well to remember that it makes our art life possible, wherever freedom reigns.









**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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