

## » Harold's Manifesto: Losing the Chains of Reality

Since the birth of photography in the early nineteenth-century, there has been a long standing debate about the relationship between reality and its depiction in photographic imagery.

Essentially, there have been two schools of thought. Journalistic photography should show the world as it is and when a photo of this sort is too obviously manipulated, it is considered fraudulent. On the other hand, it's always been realized that a photo that is art can do anything. With art it's not how you get there that matters, it's the final image. Another way of putting this: photos of reality go to heaven but unreal photos go everywhere. In the world of film photography, manipulations have always been slightly "naughty."

**Digital photography is untied to any conception of reality.**

The advent of digital photography has changed everything. It's no longer a question of whether photos have been manipulated, because all digital photos are inherently manipulated before they can be displayed or printed. A digital photo is one part photography and one part software. This has some drawbacks in terms of loss of immediacy to the photographer but it has great advantages in terms of the increased power of the new medium.

Digital photography is a new art form not tied to any conception of reality.

This new medium is in your hands and you can take it where you want it to go. The only limit is your vision and imagination! No digital photo is truly an objective representation of reality. Digital photos can be used to create almost any kind of scene whether or not the scene occurred naturally. Digital photography can also be used as a tool to create abstract imagery that has nothing whatsoever to do with the world at large. After all, it is all pixels.

With freedom comes responsibility. In the past it was possible to excuse a flaw in a photo by saying, "but it was really like that." Reality can no longer function as a viable excuse.

Digital photos are the primitives. What you take with your camera—or digital scanner—is the input to a new creative process. There's a universe of opportunity for new artistic expression in the Photoshop darkroom.

Take advantage of this great opportunity! This is your chance to make images that show things that no one has seen before—whether it is the world portrayed differently or exotic combinations of colors and shapes. Play! Experiment! Have fun! You have nothing to lose but the chains of reality.

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*Good photographers need to have hungry eyes. This composite image to the right—created from four photos—shows my eye isolated on a flower stalk: all-seeing, all-knowing, or maybe just an alien life form.*

