

Assembled by Moonlight

How I came to the photo essay



Very early one morning in early March of 2020, I was awakened by the light of a full moon on snow. Outside, I swam in the odd/beautiful/spooky sensation of believing one sees everything in the pale light, but not really. Mystery made visible. I took pictures, that night and others, until I was too cold or the big moon had waned.

Looking over the images, what seemed really important (why not before?) was the way that various pictures, alone or severally, gestured beyond their immediate subjects. For examples, German paintings and wolves were at issue, along, more understandably, with the possibility of freezing to death, and hope that one wouldn't. Even more important was the realization that the images could be sequenced, suggesting a story, even an argument, but by traces, hints, on the edge of consciousness, in contrast to the jejune assertiveness of so much scholarship.

For the first time, photography seemed to offer me, a word guy, some of the possibilities of the essay, or even the poem. Conversely, a few well chosen (!) words helped to slow the eye down, to pick this or that from the sea of images and offer it for contemplation. A digital image is

endlessly reproducible, but can also present an opportunity to appreciate the acute singularity of experience. Right here, now, and never again precisely the same. So, in the enforced space of the pandemic, I started composing photo essays, or, more loosely still, assemblages, and have more in the works.

A few of these images have been republished, which is likely unimportant except to my vanity. That confessed, the ego needs occasional feeding, too, if one is to keep going, and I suppose much the same could be said of my writing. (Tolstoy said much the same of *his* writing, but he was wrong.) At any rate, I am by no means a professional photographer. Indeed, my friend Schlegel recently diagnosed: for years you've been trying to blur the line between the professional [authorized by the guild, who works for money] and the amateur [not actually authorized by talent, reputation, sheer chutzpah, or what have you, who works for love]. He's probably right. Be that as it may, I hope you enjoy.