What We’re Looking For: Photography

The vast majority of the art submissions that VOICES Magazine receives each year are photographs. Even though we strongly encourage submissions of paintings, drawings, and sculpture, most people find that photography is more accessible and easier to create. With this ease of use and access comes the difficult proposition of determining which of these submissions are art or are merely documentaries. Photography as art must meet the aesthetic requirements of form and content the same as paintings or sculptures. Technicalities such as lighting, framing, and focus matter; interesting and intriguing subjects are important.

Good photography is more than good subject matter. When someone takes a photograph of a flower, what is the photographer trying to communicate? Has the flower been framed in such a way to expose a particular detail or perspective, utilizing a certain lighting or background focus, that conveys an argument or message, or has the point simply been to document nature? There is nothing wrong with a pretty picture, but a good photograph shows what the photographer was thinking about when he or she took the picture or leads the audience to explore individual reactions to the photograph. The photographer wants the audience to feel something as a result of the photo; he or she wants more than just, “Okay, that’s pretty.” Photography art is not mere documentation; it must be expressive, and it must move the reader to a meaningful reaction. Photographs are texts communicating messages just as surely as poetry and fiction.

Art is not routine; art is frequently the exception to the routine. We encourage you to plan photographs rather than just take them. There should be a reason you created the photograph, and that reason should be readily available in the photo for the reader to discover. This is where photographs become art.