

“Amazing Aspens”

By Alan Sisen

Quaking Aspens (*Populus Tremuloides*) are among the most amazing trees on earth. Aspens’ unique, shallow root system can extend laterally, typically 12” below ground, for long distances, often covering an area much larger than the stand of aspens above ground. The root system can sprout new trees even if the original tree is cut down, dies or is damaged by fire, insect infestation or by animals.

Aspens reproduce identical clones from this single root system, which means an aspen grove can consist of hundreds, or even thousands of genetically identical trees. Aspens are normally found at altitudes of 5,000 to 12,000 feet, throughout North America, from Alaska to Mexico.

I have always been fascinated by the beauty of these unusual trees; the beautiful white trunks and the small leaves that flutter and tremble in the slightest breeze and the often endless aspens that are identical clones of each other. In the Fall the colors are spectacular! Aspens in a grove or “stand” will all have the exact same colors if they are clones from the same root system. When you see different colors, this is a stand of aspens from a different root system.

As the photographer of this exhibit, I believe that viewers should interpret the photographs any way they like. Or not interpret them at all! Just look at the photographs and if it is the beauty of the quaking aspens that moves you, enjoy the beauty! If a metaphor about trees comes to mind (“tree of life,” “trees as a symbol of wisdom and knowledge,” “trees representing strength and endurance,” go with it! If you feel a connection with a particular photograph, think about why it resonates with you.

If you’re reading this because you assumed that it was an “artist statement,” it is not! I won’t apologize for not explaining these photographs. I don’t believe photographers need to explain their work. In fact, I prefer that they don’t. But instead, I asked the widely publicized *chatGPT* to write a short statement about - “Why Photographs Should Speak for Themselves.”

Here’s what my AI friend “wrote” (edited for length):

“Photographs capture a moment in time and convey a message without the need for words. Photography is a universal language that can be understood by people from all cultures and backgrounds.”

“Photographs, without the need for words, can convey feelings of happiness, mystery, sadness, nostalgia, beauty or even surprise. viewers should interpret a photograph in their own way.”

“Photographs should be open to interpretation. Explanations can be misleading or give a biased view of the photograph and can limit the viewer’s understanding. By allowing the photograph to speak for itself, each viewer can form their own thoughts without being influenced by the photographer’s perspective.”

All the photographs in this exhibit were made in northern New Mexico and southern and Central Colorado.

Alan Sisen (and chatGPT)

