

Artist's Statement

Joseph Gascho

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Part of my job as a cardiologist is interpreting echocardiograms, or sonograms, of the heart. I never tire of watching, on the monitor screen, the rhythmic cycle of the heart: relaxing and dilating to receive blood (during diastole) and then contracting, during systole, to eject the received blood.

I am intrigued with diastole—the “taking in “ part of the endless cycle of the heart, and of life. Too often in life systole, or action, is emphasized. But diastole is equally important. If blood does not enter the heart during diastole, the heart will not eject blood in systole. Without diastole there is no systole.

I find that the diastole metaphor, derived from the “taking in “ portion of the heart’s cycle, is a helpful one for my occupation as a physician and for my avocation as a photographer.

During “diastole” I open my ears and mind to hear what a patient tells me, not just about her symptoms but about other important aspects of her life that impact upon her health. What I take in during this diastole helps me determine what treatment to offer her.

As I photographer, my eyes are open in “diastole” to the “taking in” of images. I push the shutter button to open the lens to let the image I see to “fill” the film during diastole.

This exhibit is about diastole. Some of the images are of the heart; they are echocardiograms (sonograms) that have been manipulated in Photoshop. Other images are photographs of a wide variety of objects. All of the images focus on the diastoles of life which are all around us—if we are open to seeing them!

Joseph Gascho is a cardiologist at Penn State Hershey College of Medicine. One of his avocations is photography. He has published images in national medical journals. He has a special interest in portrait photography, and has on permanent display at Hershey Medical Center some forty portraits of his patients. These patients were photographed at their homes or places of business. At the bottom of each portrait there is a tersely scripted phrase that describes the patient’s medical condition. The purpose of the images is to show that the patients, often characterized in a narrow fashion on the basis of their illnesses (as typified by the terse phrase), are persons as well, not just a medical conditions. Gascho is also a poet; he has published material containing echocardiography images with accompanying poems written about the images as well as poetry without accompanying images.