

Beyond Technique:

Artistry, Creativity, Meaning and Personal Style

Presentation by Kas Stone, 2018

Compelling Images

- Begin with visual inspiration and/or the desire to record & remember events, places and people.
- The photograph is enabled by camera gear and technique:
 - Exposure:** measuring and managing light with ISO, aperture, shutter speed, filters, flash, etc.
 - Clarity of Detail:** camera-lens focusing system, Depth of Field, Point of Focus, motion.
 - Field of View:** lens focal length, camera position → perspective
 - Composition:** guidelines for selecting and arranging visual elements in the frame.
 - Post-Processing:** raw conversion, image optimizing, enhancement & output.
- Two types of images:
 - 1) “Window” = documentary, assignment, copycat = external motivation & subject matter.
 - 2) “Mirror” = **expressive** images that interpret subject matter and reflect your personal response to it; these are potentially the most compelling images but require us to dig deeper and go farther with artistry, creativity, meaning and personal style.

Artistry → aesthetically compelling images

- Thoughtful application of visual design guidelines to give aesthetically compelling results that are *appropriate* for the image’s subject, mood and message.
- Knowing the “rules” of composition, using them effectively when they are appropriate, and confidently ignoring them when they are not.
- **Process** of Visual Design: **Combine** (visual elements & imaginative ideas) → **Simplify** (isolate 1-3 key elements, exclude distractions) → **Exaggerate** (elements that convey your intent).

Creativity → unique & imaginative images

- Skilfully and imaginatively producing something new; inventive, innovative, inspired, original, visionary; Camera Club definitions include abstract, impressionistic, surreal and experimental.
- Looking at the same thing as everyone else, and *seeing* something different.

Meaning → significant & eloquent images

- **Meaning** = importance, significance, essence, substance, value; Meaning is *not* intrinsic to a subject; meaning is perceived, attributed and expressed *by people*, and varies with a person’s cultural background, values, interests, experience, age, etc.
- **Photographic Meaning** = thoughtful perception of the visual content in a scene to assess its significance (to me), and eloquently expressing that significance (to a viewer) → forges an emotional, intellectual, aesthetic connection between maker and viewer.
- **Content** = what an image is **of** (1-3 key visual elements).
- **Meaning** = what a picture is **about** (what those elements represent); abstraction from the specific elements to ‘universal’ concepts (story, feeling, idea, question, mood, mystery, etc.).
- Meaningful images happen when you spend less time clicking (leave your camera in the bag), and more time looking, feeling and thinking; Meaning may be clear from the moment you see a subject, or may occur to you *later* when you are reviewing your image(s), or may come *first* (ie. when working on a project) with image-making afterwards to express it.

Personal Style → distinctive & expressive images

- An image, and ultimately a whole body of work, that is distinctively and recognizably *you*.
- Style is a unique collection of attributes that arises from your personality, experiences and interests, and is reflected in your images with preferences for particular subject matter, points of view (wide-angle vs intimate), brightness, colours, simplicity/minimalism vs richness/complexity, and even the methods and tools you use for post-processing.
- **How to Develop Personal Style:** let go of expectations, recipes, rules and other people's images; respond authentically to what is actually there; make photographs of things and places that interest *you*; make bodies of work (projects, series) that explore a theme in depth; don't be afraid to specialize. Caution: don't force it! Photographic style takes time to develop and is often more evident to other people than to yourself.

Putting it All Together

- Use your camera technique and post-processing methods in ways that are appropriate to the subject and reflect your feelings/ideas about it to create compelling, expressive images.

Recommended Reading & Websites

Guy Tal: *More Than a Rock*, Rocky Nook, 2015 (www.guytal.com).

Brooks Jensen: *Letting Go of the Camera*, LensWork Publishing, 2004 (www.lenswork.com).

Brooks Jensen: *The Creative Life in Photography*, LensWork Publishing, 2008 (www.lenswork.com).

Freeman Patterson: *Photography and the Art of Seeing*, Key Porter Books, 1979.

David duChemin: *Photographically Speaking*, Peachpit Press, 2012.

David duChemin: *The Visual Toolbox*, New Riders, 2015.

David duChemin: *The Soul of the Camera*, Rocky Nook, 2017.

David duChemin Craft & Vision books, blog & YouTube videos: www.craftandvision.com.

Chris Orwig: *The Creative Fight*, Peachpit Press, 2016.

Michael Freeman: *Fifty Paths to Creative Photography*, Ilex Press, 2016.

Bruce Barnbaum: *The Essence of Photography*, Rocky Nook, 2014.

Alain Briot: *Mastering Photographic Composition, Creativity & Personal Style*, Rocky Nook, 2009.

Barbara Bender: *Creativity and Playfulness*, Blurb Books, 2010 (www.barbarabenderphotoart.com).

Rafael Rojas: *The Photographic Message (e-book)*, Essential Seeing, 2017.

Erik Johansson: www.erikjohanssonphoto.com

John Paul Caponigro: www.johnpaulcaponigro.com

Valda Bailey: www.valdabailey.com

Larry Monczka & Kathleen Pickard: www.raraavisphotos.com

Mariëtte Roodenburg: www.marietteroodenburg.com

Katherine Keates: www.katherinekeatesphotography.com